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Keeping tabs on society activities

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KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi today told the Registrar of Societies to consistently monitor the activities of societies to detect signs of deviation from their original objectives.

He said the best way to do this was to ensure that the societies submitted their annual reports for scrutiny.

"Although most societies kept to their original purposes in the early stages of formation, we fear that their leaders or `gurus' might get other ideas later on," he told reporters after presenting excellent service awards to Home Ministry staff at the Tunku Abdul Rahman Memorial auditorium.

Abdullah, who is also Home Minister, said leaders who took over the societies later might have their personal agenda.

He said the ROS was empowered to issue show cause letters to societies which failed to submit their annual reports.

The ROS could deregister a society if it failed to receive a reasonable reply.

It was earlier reported that only about half of the 57,126 societies had submitted their annual reports last year while more than 1,200 were deregistered (last year) compared to 462 in 1995.

Besides failure to submit annual reports, other reasons for being deregistered included breaching constitutions and being inactive.

Also present at today's presentation ceremony were deputy Home Ministers Datuk Zainal Abidin Zin, Datuk Chor Chee Heung and Home Ministry secretary-general Datuk Jamaluddin Ahmad Damanhuri.

Asked if existing laws in the country were sufficient to control deviant teachings, the deputy Prime Minister said there were adequate laws prohibiting anyone or any quarter from spreading such teachings.

"However, the Government is prepared to review these laws and tighten possible loopholes if necessary," he said.

On action that could be initiated against civil servants involved in deviationist groups, he said there were several options which the civil service disciplinary committee could consider.

Since most incidents of involvement in deviationist groups occurred when the person was influenced or pressured, the best option would be to offer those involved proper guidance and counselling.

"This would make them realise the truth and help them return to the right path," he said.

Commenting on a statement by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday that there might be attempts by certain groups to justify the actions of the Al-Ma'unah group, Abdullah said there was a strong possibility of this and urged the people not to be deceived.

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