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Rumours: Stern, swift action urged

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SUNGAI SIPUT, Sun. - MIC president Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu said swift and stern action has to be taken against those responsible for spreading "hate messages" and rumours on the Internet to protect the country's stability.

"We will not allow anyone to destroy the solidarity, unity and stability in the country which the Government has built over the years."

Malaysia had been enjoying strong unity among the various ethnic groups, he said.

He was commenting on the arrest of a 20-year-old college student by the Penang police on Aug 8 on suspicion of using the Internet to disseminate "hate messages" pertaining to a certain group to the public.

It was reported that investigations were being carried out by police to determine whether the student was part of a group which had been sending hate messages via e-mail recently.

To stop the act of spreading these messages and rumours, Samy Vellu said: "The relevant laws need to be amended to ensure that stern action is taken against the culprits.

"Malaysians must realise that listening to such rumours and messages will create problems," he told reporters after the opening of a kindergarten at Sekolah Rendah Jenis Kebangsaan (T) Changkat Salak, near here, yesterday.

In Grik, Deputy Home Minister Datuk Tajol Rosli Ghazali said the Government would not hesitate to use the Internal Security Act against individuals who used the Internet to spread rumours, raise racial issues or invoke religious controversies.

He said the ISA would be used as these actions were considered a threat to national security and must be taken seriously.

He said as Malaysia was a multi-racial country with diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds, such actions could cause unnecessary panic and unpleasant repercussions.

Tajol Rosli said this in response to a query on how the Government planned to deal with individuals who used the e-mail to forward articles or views on racial and religious issues.

He was also asked whether individuals who criticised or condemned the Government openly on the Internet would be charged under the ISA.

Police have detained three people under the Act on the suspicion of spreading rumours of disturbances particularly in the Chow Kit area through the Internet early last week.

They were detained after police tracked their activities on the Internet with the assistance of Mimos Bhd.

Tajol Rosli said using the ISA against suspects was the fastest action to stop any situation from getting out of hand.

He also said the country's prosperity depended on political stability and support from the people and the Government must ensure that nothing jeopardised this.

"Using the ISA is just the initial action. After investigations, police could change their stand and detain the wrongdoers under the Sedition Act or charge them in open court.

"What is important is to first get the situation under control, and detaining them under the ISA is the fastest and most effective method," he said.

On how to monitor such activities on the Internet, Tajol Rosli said with

the help of Mimos, police could easily detect the activities and take the appropriate action.

He, however, gave the assurance that only articles and information which were a threat to national security would be monitored and scrutinised.

Tajol Rosli also said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had directed the police to beef up their information technology capabilities to help them counter such problems on the Internet.

On the arrest of a retired Royal Malaysian Air Force brigadier-general who was found in possession of a rocket launcher and a pistol, Tajol Rosli said the issue should not be blown out of proportion.

He also said police were investigating the matter and that the people should not jump to conclusions before the investigations were completed. Earlier, Tajol Rosli opened a seminar on Islamic Family Laws held in conjunction with the Hulu Perak district-level Hari Wanita.

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