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Rumour mongers to be traced and punished (HL)

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KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - The Government will come down hard on rumour mongers who have resorted to spreading baseless reports of riots in the Federal capital through the Internet.

Police are now checking various E-mail addresses and numbers in an effort to trace the sources of the rumours.

Home Ministry secretary-general Datuk Samsudin Osman said the authorities would trace these culprits, including those who used E-mail services to spread rumours, and stern action would be taken against them.

Without giving details of the punishment for such offences, Samsudin said the Government viewed seriously the mischievous acts of those who spread the rumours over the Internet yesterday.

"Police hope to identify those responsible for the mischievous act as they are already checking through several E-mail numbers to trace them," he told a Press conference in Bukit Aman.

Also present were Immigration director-general Datuk Aseh Che Mat and Federal Police Internal Security and Public Order director Datuk Ghazali Yaacob.

"Police will track down these rumour mongers soon as they had succeeded in identifying another group believed to be locals who had resorted to similar tactics recently."

He said there were baseless reports of riots by Indonesian illegal immigrants in the city and that this was the work of those he described as "people who do not love their country".

Last night, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad advised Malaysians to remain united and thwart attempts by unscrupulous people who spread rumours over the Internet to create chaos.

"These people are traitors," Dr Mahathir, who is Umno president, had said after chairing the party's supreme council meeting.

The Prime Minister said this when asked to comment on rumours that immigrants had taken up arms against the authorities, reportedly in the Chow Kit area.

The rumours were rife yesterday afternoon and last night.

Samsudin also urged E-mail users to stop forwarding such messages to their friends without verifying their authenticity.

"The public should not listen to rumours and when in doubt of any unconfirmed reports should contact the nearest police station or the Malaysian Control Centre at Bukit Aman (Tel: 03-2020999, 03-2020199, 03-2029999).

Ghazali said there were many inquiries from the public wanting to find out whether trouble had broken out between Indonesian immigrants and the police when in actual fact there was no such incident.

"There is no fight or riot anywhere in the country. This is the truth and police have nothing to hide.

"The public will be informed immediately if any such incident had occurred as this is part of our security measures," said Ghazali.

In Kajang, Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Rahim Noor today warned that police would not hesitate to recommend that the Home Ministry use the Internal Security Act against rumour mongers.

Similarly describing them as "traitors" who had tarnished the image of the nation and put the people in fear, Rahim said: "We don't care who is responsible for this. We will take action against them."

He said a team comprising officers from the federal police headquarters in Bukit Aman has been set up to tackle the menace of spreading vicious rumours via the Internet.

Speaking to reporters at the Kajang Hill Golf Club, he said the team would investigate and trace the culprits.

Police have to take drastic measures "as what happened yesterday (the spreading of rumours of riots) was for real. It caused panic among the public.

"I was flooded with calls, especially towards the later part of the evening, even from as far as East Malaysia, enquiring if there were also riots involving foreigners in Tambunan, Sabah," said Rahim.

He said police believed the rumours spread through the Internet were the work of teenagers or youths out to create mischief.

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