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Call to practise self-censorship to discern truth

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ONCE again rumour-mongering has proven how destructive it can be when it caused panic among the people, especially in Kuala Lumpur, on Aug 7.

Many people rushed to supermarkets to hoard essential foodstuff in the wake of a vicious rumour that a riot had started involving illegal foreigners armed with parangs and knives in the Chow Kit area.

Unlike in the past where rumours were spread by word of mouth, this time around e-mail messages through the Internet have been circulated claiming that illegals were stocking up weapons in case the authorities went after them.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad was quick to respond by telling Malaysians not to believe in unfounded and baseless rumours, describing those responsible as "traitors" wanting to create chaos in the country.

The police must be commended for acting quickly to quash the rumours.

I was among the many who was inundated with telephone calls on Aug 7 and I contacted the Chief Police Officer of Kuala Lumpur who assured me that there was no truth in the rumour.

I subsequently informed my callers about the CPO's response and told them not to believe in the rumour.

My advice to the public is to verify from the police if they come across such rumours instead of passing them on to others.

I support the police efforts to act against those who use the Internet to create mischief and chaos.

The special team set up by the police to track down those responsible for rumour-mongering should be given professional expertise to help them deal with "Internet-mongers" and charge them under the relevant laws.

With the advent of IT and the Internet, we must prevent abuse and practise self-censorship to discern truth and lies.

The people must verify their facts first before believing whatever is posted on the Internet.

In all fairness, it has to be pointed out that it is not the service that should be blamed but those who abuse the Internet to spread lies and create panic. These irresponsible users must be dealt with seriously.

Perhaps it is time for the authorities to set up an IT team to monitor and counter whatever rumours on the Internet.

Malaysians should remain united to thwart attempts by unscrupulous people out to create chaos.

They should learn to be less gullible. In the days to come there will be more rumour-mongering and poison-pen letters to create more confusion.

Faced with a grave situation like this, the people should unite by rallying behind all positive efforts to help in our economic recovery. Rumour-mongering is certainly not the answer.

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