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Special unit to monitor information on the Net

KLANG, Wed. - The National Unity Department has set up a special unit to monitor information posted through the Internet in an effort to ensure that the public is not fed with misleading and mischievous information that can undermine the country's unity and stability.

National Unity and Social Development Minister Datin Paduka Zaleha Ismail said for the time being the unit, which was set up this week, would monitor several websites identified as popular among local users.

She said due to the current limited manpower, the exercise would only confine to sites popular for chatting.

"Once information which can cause public anxiety is detected, the department will take immediate action to verify its accuracy and if it is found to be untrue, correct information will be posted to counter it.

"At the same time, if the information can cause a panic like rumours about riots in a specific area, Rukun Tetangga leaders in the area will be notified to carry out damage control exercise," she said after closing a mediation skill course for RT leaders in Selangor and Kuala Lumpur at a hotel here today.

She said among the latest incorrect information detected by the monitoring unit on the Internet, which could cause public anxiety, was the resignation of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and several Cabinet Ministers.

Another, she said, was about an impending riot in Sabah which had caused the public to panic, leading them to buy food in great quantities.

Zaleha urged the public to be more responsible and not use the Internet to spread unfounded rumours and sensitive statements that could create tension, public anxiety and disharmony.

She said users should verify information which they received through the Internet and not be easily duped by those who were out to create trouble.

On preparations for the La Nina weather phenomenon expected to cause flooding in several parts of the country, Zaleha said the Welfare Services Department operations and rations room had already been activated since the start of the 16th Commonwealth Games.

She said all the preparations had been completed, including identifying temporary shelters for flood victims which could accommodate up to one million people throughout the country.

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