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Two held under ISA over rumours (HL)

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. - Police today detained two people under the Internal Security Act on suspicion of spreading rumours through the Internet, of disturbances in the city, particularly in the Chow Kit area, on Friday.

They were picked up from two undisclosed locations by officers from the Federal police headquarters in Bukit Aman.

Inspector-General of Police Tan Sri Abdul Rahim Noor said a man and a woman, both Malaysians in their 20s, were held under section 73(1) of the Act which allows police to detain them for 60 days to assist in investigations.

He said they were detained after police tracked their activities in the Internet with the assistance of Internet service provider Mimos Berhad, reports Bernama.

"We have identified several other people suspected to be involved and will soon make more arrests to end the rumour-mongering once and for all," he said when approached by reporters at his house.

Abdul Rahim also denied that the rumours originated from outside the country.

"So far, our investigations did not show any indications that the rumours originated from outside (the country) and it is proper that I make this denial so as to avoid any misunderstanding."

He said the police took a serious view of such rumours which grew in intensity on Friday.

"They picked up the rumours which spread like wildfire throughout the country."

Abdul Rahim said the tracking was done by studying, reviewing and investigating e-mail or electronic mail messages with the co-operation of information technology experts.

He said police were still investigating the motive of the two suspects in spreading the rumours.

After investigations on the two were completed, he said, the report would be sent to the Home Ministry which would decide whether or not they would be further detained under the ISA.

Meanwhile in Penang today, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said it was good that those responsible had been detained.

Commenting on the detention, he said the culprits would be punished.

Dr Mahathir said although it could not be determined if this was an act of sabotage, it had weakened efforts to revive the economy and instil confidence in the nation.

He was speaking to reporters after a closed-door meeting with the Penang Umno liaison committee at the new 21-storey Menara Umno which he had earlier opened.

The rumours of riots in Chow Kit and of impending trouble involving illegal immigrants were first circulated through the Internet.

On Saturday, Rahim had announced that a team comprising officers from the Federal police headquarters had been set up to investigate and trace the culprits.

He said they were checking various e-mail addresses and numbers to identify the source.

Meanwhile, Indonesian Ambassador Muhammad Yacob Dasto advised his countrymen working in Malaysia not to be influenced by the rumours as they were spread by irresponsible people.

He said Indonesians working in this country must respect Malaysian laws at all times and continue working peacefully.

"The Indonesians are here just to work and not to incite trouble or develop any form of animosity towards Malaysians," Muhammad Yacob said, adding that rumours of Indonesians planning to create disturbances were false.

He said the riots which broke out in Indonesia recently were not in anyway linked to Indonesians working here.

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