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Khalil-Restructure/BM

INFO DEPT'S SPECIAL DIVISION TO BE REVAMPED TO COUNTER LIES, RUMOURS

BANGI, Jan 29 (Bernama) -- The Information Department's Special Division will be revamped to turn it into a division responsible for countering lies, slanders and rumours, Information Minister Tan Sri Khalil Yaakob said today.

He said the division would also be entrusted with the task of explaining government policies, current issues and religious matters raised by the people.

At present, the department had divisions and information officers to explain government policies and gather feedback from the people but it had no division or officers to reply and refute issues brought up by the masses.

"That's the section we want to create. If one side gathers feedback, the other can refute or explain the issues and distorted news," he told reporters after opening a seminar for public relations students at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), here.

He said the restructured division would comprise existing special information officers as well as those trained in countering and explaining the issues raised.

"We want a group of officers trained in various fields to respond to issues on the ground," he said.

As an example, Khalil cited the circulation of leaflets during the November general election that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had written a letter to Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak that Malaysia wanted to establish diplomatic and trade ties.

He said the department was able to gather the information but information officers did not know how to counter and explain the issue to the people.

"Our action was late and the way we countered the issue was not very effective," he said.

Therefore, the ministry needed a division with officers able to "read and gather information" to refute baseless allegations and reply to issues in the right perspective.

Khalil said creation of the division was not linked to politics but more towards disseminating information on government policies and on religious issues frequently raised nowadays.

Khalil said he would announce later the restructuring set-up and who would head the division.

He said the restructuring exercise had started and the division would operational soon.

"The division will still be part of the Information Department, we're just separating it to make some adjustments to suit present requirements," he said.

Asked whether the explanations and information given by the leadership and members of the government administration were not adequate, he said all sorts of stories and distorted information spread by word of mouth and posted on the Internet to the people could not be countered effectively.

"All sorts of things told to the people like in coffeeshops need to be corrected. We do not want the people to have the perception that what they hear is the truth as sometimes they are merely concocted stories," he added.

-- BERNAMA

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