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## Stop the rumours

SOME say it as it is. Some who pick it up and relate it to others love to embellish it for want of something interesting. If it is unverified information, or worse, a lie, there is a tendency for people to believe it if it is repeated often enough.

If rumour-mongering is meant to scare, it sometimes achieves its intent especially among the gullible and faint-hearted. The problem is, people have a tendency to fall for rumours on the premise that there is no smoke without fire. But what is the fire that produced the smoke in the first place?

The rumour a few days ago that Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had fallen off a horse while vacationing in Argentina and that he was ill was dismissed by the Prime Minister himself. Well aware of the rumours in Malaysia, he said these were lies spread by people with "evil motives" to sabotage and make the country suffer economically.

The rumour affected the Kuala Lumpur stock market that afternoon, causing panic among some market players who dumped their shares. Not that this is the first time the market gets the jitters on hearsay.

Trading rumours seems to be a pastime to some people. With gullible citizens who thrive on swallowing any information that comes their way, it is no wonder how fast such news spreads.

Close on the heels of such general talk is the poison-pen letter which smacks of an intent to hurt with its scrawled or expertly printed tirade. Whether these letters or rumours are written or spread because of greed, envy or sheer nastiness is anybody's guess since the nom de plume is used. These are tools for embittered ones to tittle-tattle, create rifts among people or tarnish the character of certain individuals.

If it is the season for politicking, cowards and those who fear victimisation run for cover under poison-pen letters, using the written word like a stiletto to the hilt. It is an art really, turning seemingly harmless trivia into scandalous rumour.

And the use of pseudonyms allow the pusillanimous to vilify whoever they want and sow seeds of discord. Access to the Internet and fax facilities enables rumours to reverberate across these channels of information quickly and widely, causing unnecessary panic.

More often than not, such information is unsubstantiated and should rightly belong to the trash can. As the sender's or writer's name is often left out, no investigation can be carried out and no action taken as there are no grounds or evidence.

If there is any element of truth to the accusations and vilification, a certain pattern can perhaps be discerned if similar news is sent by different people. These remain baseless allegations as long as they cannot be proven and the sender or writer cannot be identified.

The Internet is a wonderful thing and is going to be the channel of communication and more. It is already making our work and our lives easier. It transcends borders and therefore will help bring the various communities closer, thereby realising the dreams of many of turning the international community into a global village.

Spreading malicious rumours through the worldwide Web is something reprehensible and should be reviled as it undermines the very basis for which the Internet has been conceived and allowed to develop. Stern action, therefore, should be taken against the liars. The vicious rumour-

mongering must stop.

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