

# Aggressive use of ISA worries Suhakam

SUN 21 DEC 2002

**KUALA LUMPUR:** The Internal Security Act (ISA) is being used too aggressively since the Sept 11 attacks on the United States.

While the US has gone on a warpath with total disregard for the international community, the ISA is being used too liberally in the war on terror in this country, the Human Rights Commission of Malaysia (Suhakam) said.

Suhakam chairman Tan Sri Abdul Talib Othman said the commission urged the government to create a balance between national security and the human rights of ISA detainees.

He said Suhakam will send two reports to the Home Ministry urging the government to be more sensitive towards the rights of ISA detainees.

The commission would send these reports to the ministry on the first week of next month, Abdul Talib said.

"One report is based on

memorandums and input from current and former ISA detainees while the other is Suhakam's investigations and views on the condition of detainees," he said after tabling a working paper on "Human Rights After Sept 11" at a Suhakam forum yesterday.

Although the government needed the power to apprehend, detainees must have a chance to challenge the charges against them, Abdul Talib said.

ISA detainees are currently held for two years without trial.

Suhakam is concerned over plans to expand the ISA's powers, to detain those deemed as threats to national security, Abdul Talib said.

He hoped the government would consider Suhakam's suggestions so that the ISA could become more conducive as a channel for "preventive detention".

Abu Talib said he would

also meet with Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who is also home minister, over the matter.

Meanwhile, the government defended its tough stand on rumour-mongers.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said there is no need to respect the human rights of those who violated the rights of others.

"If someone does something which threatens the human rights of majority, it shows that he has no respect for human rights, therefore, we do not need to respect his human rights," he said after chairing the Umno supreme council meeting.

In Ipoh, Deputy Home Minister Datuk Zainal Abidin Zin said those who spread rumours of imminent terrorist attacks in Kuala Lumpur via e-mail are considered to have attempted to sabotage national security.

He said baseless rumours and claims by these irresponsible groups had caused unnecessary fear among locals and foreigners.

"We are still investigating as to whether the act was done by a local or a foreigner. Even if it was (committed) by a foreigner, our own people had conspired by spreading the e-mail," he said after closing a national-level Drug Prevention Education Seminar for Parent-Teacher Associations.

"Police have already set up a special task force to investigate where the e-mail came from. They have expertise, including IT experts, to investigate the case."

Asked whether similar action could be taken against those who spread rumours through the short messaging system (SMS), Zainal said it may be difficult as such messages could not be printed out and could be easily erased.