

# Government mulls crisis 'point man'

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**KUALA LUMPUR:** The government wants an official spokesman to issue statements during crises, like the bird flu or the SARS epidemic, to avoid any confusion or rumour-mongering.

Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said the government would issue guidelines on the steps to be taken in disseminating information, and this included the appointment of a point man or spokesman.

"The appointment of a point man will help in the dissemination of correct information and prevent the spread of rumours," he said yesterday, after delivering the keynote address at the Interna-

tional Conference on Management of Information Pertaining to Health Crisis.

"We believe that such guidelines will prevent those who don't know what's actually happening from making statements which can create confusion among the people."

Najib urged the media to refer to the appointed point man to get correct information.

He said the attempt to get the media to seek information from the point man was not aimed at controlling information or stifling the media.

"We won't stop information from reaching the public.

"It's not our intention to cover things up. We'll disclose information in full to prevent rumours from spreading. This can prevent confusion among the people," Najib said.

Earlier, in his keynote address, Najib said the government welcomed the move to come up with a guide, or a list of best practices, for media practitioners and other communicators to use in the event of a health crisis.

"Such a guide would specify the role of the mass media and communicators in bridging the link between the authorities tasked with stamping out the disease and the public.

"We can't deny the urgent need to reassure the people by providing accurate and credible information during a state of uncertainty."

In this respect, Najib proposed that all telcos operating in the country be roped in to help during a disease outbreak, such as the bird flu.

"The authorities could request the telcos to send SMS alerts and updates to their subscribers.

"All they need to do is work out the mechanism and identify the people who are entrusted with that responsibility, so that the chain of command can be established."