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Baseless assumptions, mischievous reports

MALAYSIA and Singapore are close neighbours but a minor newspaper in the republic, Berita Harian, has carried a mischievous report which does not make for good relations. Unfortunately the news was also carried by the august Straits Times. The newspapers may think that it is all right to quote the Jane's Intelligence Review allegation that Malaysia could have prevented the Sept 11 attacks if it had arrested two of the terrorists here. Well, it is not all right. It is a preposterous report that harms our image and questions the efficiency of our police and anti-terrorism efforts. Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, has rightly said that those who make such allegations are only trying to "find trouble with others." Rumour mongering is not helpful, especially among friends.

How can it simply assume that if Malaysia had arrested the two suspected terrorists - Khalid Al-Midhar and Nawaf Al-Azmi - the attacks would not have taken place? Could there not have been other suicidal terrorists ready to take their place, assuming the two had been arrested?

The attacks would have gone ahead just the same, but with new faces. We can easily say that if the planes had been grounded on Sept 11, the terrorists would have been unable to launch their attacks. One wonders at Jane's motives for these absurd allegations and the Singapore media for picking them up.

When the two arrived in Malaysia, the police informed the US authorities about their presence and their movements. Thus, Malaysia did its part in the matter. It should have been up to the US authorities to pursue the matter from there.

Even though we do not hesitate to take action against anyone, whether Malaysians or foreigners, if they pose a threat to national security, we are not in the habit of pouncing on someone at the first hint of suspicion, abusing our powers in the process.

It is not customary for Malaysia to detain foreigners who come here as tourists. But our police are alert to the presence of trouble makers and will act promptly if the need arises.

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