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PM: AWSJ stupid to link us to Indon terror

KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad considers the Asian Wall Street Journal (AWSJ) stupid if it wants to link Malaysia with terrorism in Indonesia.

"We can only say it (AWSJ) is just plain stupid," he said after closing a two-day seminar on the gold dinar, here, today.

The Prime Minister was commenting on a mistake by the Asian Wall Street Journal in its edition today in using a portrait of Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputeri over an illustration of the Malaysian flag for an article concerning Indonesia and Pakistan.

"I don't know why the people bother to read the newspaper (AWSJ). It knows nothing but to sell newspapers," he said when asked to comment on the AWSJ report.

On Indonesia's anti-terrorism decree, Dr Mahathir said Indonesia had to announce the decree following an explosion from a car bomb destroying and killing 187 people at Sari Club in Kuta, Bali on Oct 13.

"I think because of the Bali explosion, it strengthens Megawati's hand to handle this terrorism issue.

"If she had done it before, it might have led to an accusation that the Indonesian Government wants to suppress Muslims.

"Now that this (Bali bomb blast) happened, Indonesians, by and large, agree and support the view that there are terrorists in Indonesia and this must be handled," Dr Mahathir said.

The AWSJ's article headlined Megawati Dilemma Mirrors Pakistan's was about the challenges Megawati faced in siding with the United States-led war against terrorism while dealing with rising anti-American sentiments at home.

The newspaper apologised for the mistake in a statement faxed to the Prime Minister's Department, said its editor Reginald Chua.

The statement was also faxed to the New Straits Times later in the day.

Chua, said the error was unintentional with the article and illustration not intended to make any implications concerning Malaysia.

"The error was entirely unintentional and a correction of the mistake will appear in tomorrow's edition of the paper."

On how the error occurred, Chua said mistakes happened in the newspaper industry where in the process of printing a paper, the wrong picture was used or a typographical mistake let through.

Meanwhile, Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the Government wanted AWSJ to explain how the mistake occurred.

"The entire issue is completely unacceptable and the excuse that it had been a mistake is hard to believe because the Asian Wall Street Journal is printed in Malaysia," he said after a dinner organised by the National Press Club.