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Bali blasts, Aussie troops and BN

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THE recent bomb blasts in Bali has created a new set of dynamics in South East Asia with countries in the region taken aback by Australia's proposal to send troops to monitor the security situation.

Fearing an attempt by the West to extend its hegemony to the region, several Bahasa Malaysia newspapers echoed Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's stand on the matter in coming out strongly against the Australian suggestion.

The Berita Harian, in an editorial yesterday, sent home the message that it was totally unnecessary for Aussie troops to be present in the region and that Prime Minister John Howard's proposal should not be entertained.

It is difficult not to feel that its statement that Australia should be thanked for considering the security of countries in the region was tongue in cheek in the light of diplomatic altercations between Malaysia and the country in the recent past.

For the record, Australian and New Zealand troops had rendered sterling service to Malaya during the Second World War when they helped British soldiers engage the Japanese in the peninsular and Sabah, Sarawak and Brunei.

"..there is no excuse for Australia to want to help countries in the region, save for the possibility that it had hidden motives," the newspaper said.

The newspaper opined that foreign military interference in the region was unacceptable and not restricted to Australia but also applicable to the United States and its allies.

Dr Mahathir, in a report in the Berita Harian and Utusan Malaysia on Friday, was quoted as saying that the presence of Australian troops anywhere in the region may make them targets for terrorists.

Alluding to this, the Berita Harian said the fight against terrorism could not be carried in the conventional military manner as terrorists were not visible and, as such, an elusive target.

The Berita Harian also felt that the argument against a foreign military present was stronger as nations in the region had managed to thwart terrorists using their own resources.

It pointed to Malaysia as a prime example in crippling would-be terrorists even before they began their activities, an act which came under fire from some parties who now stand wiser.

Another point of contention for the newspaper last week was the report in the Far Eastern Economic Review that identified Malaysia as a country where bombings connected to the Jemaah Islamiah (JI) had taken place.

Despite the quick apology from the publisher, the erroneous reporting left a bad taste in the mouth for most Malaysians.

The Berita Harian saw merit in the Singapore Government's move in the past to prosecute the FEER, and other publications, for similar journalistic "misconduct".

The Chinese newspapers last week delved into the issue of Chinese component parties in the Barisan Nasional asking the coalition for a week to come back with a decision on the teaching of science and mathematics in English.

The Nanyang Siang Pau, the China Press dan the Sin Chew Jit Poh last Wednesday also reported that Chinese primary schools had been exempted from the consensus achieved at the Barisan Nasional supreme council

meeting convened to discuss the matter.

The Guang Ming Daily reflected the general concern among Chinese over the matter in its letters page.

Somepeople felt rightly that MCA's ability to win a week-long reprieve was a temporary victory.

A Sin Chew Jit Poh,news analysis on Thursday felt that the grace period was a wise way of handling the matter through negotiation.

The newspaper felt that the Chinese primary schools were not the same as other national schools, with the fate of the former determined by the community itself.

Meanwhile, the Federation of Malaysian Chinese Asociations was quoted by the Sin Chew Jit Poh as being in favour of special classes being started to teach the two subjects in English.

The Federation, however, was not in favour of a proposal to use English and Bahasa Malaysia to teach the subjects, the newspaper added.