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## Media seen as part of smart partnership

WHETHER the media likes it or not, they are now smart partners with the Governments they cover, at least with those who attended the Langkawi International Dialogue.

"We don't have to glare at each other," Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said during a reprise of the "reverse" Press conference at the tail-end of LID. "We can smile at each other."

The "reverse" Press conference is a unique situation - a world's first in a formal international platform - where the heads of governments become "reporters" and get to ask tough questions for senior journalists to answer.

Also taking part in the questioning was the Prime Minister's wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohamed Ali, Botswana President Festus Mogae, South African Deputy President Jacob Zuma, Lesotho Prime Minister Pakalitha Mosisili, Mozambique President Joachim Chissano and Mauritius President Cassam Uteem.

But unlike the one on Saturday, yesterday's Press conference was again reversed - the senior journalists returned to their customary role to ask the tough questions.

Dr Mahathir also sought to clarify his position on the Western Press. He insisted he was not against them.

While he was appreciative of the fact that the Western media, especially Cable News Network, exposed Serb atrocities that helped push for military action against Belgrade, he complained that they sometimes had the tendency to report nasty things about him.

Singling out the New York Times, Dr Mahathir said the newspaper had accused him of "not understanding herd instinct, not understanding finance".

"We understand enough to run a nation of 22 million people," he said. "It means we are doing something right. We are not that stupid."

Dr Mahathir said with all that Malaysia had achieved, at the very least the Western media should acknowledge it.

Instead, some of them carry pictures repeatedly on TV that Malaysia was in a constant state of turmoil during the demonstrations.

"The truth sometimes is not stated," he said. "But you can criticise the Government if we are doing something wrong. The Press should criticise the Government. All we ask for is the truth and not to distort things."

As for the usefulness of the LID, most of the senior journalists which included New Straits Times Press (M) Bhd group editor-in-chief Datuk A. Kadir Jasin, NST group editor Ahmad A. Talib and British Broadcasting Corporation's Chris Green, agreed that it had a very positive outcome.

However, Ahmad suggested that the next LID should be participated by younger leaders - politicians, business leaders and decision makers.

"I don't think we are very old!" Dr Mahathir quipped.

Green felt that smart partnership with the Press meant "smart reporting, educated reporting and questioning reporting but not negative reporting for the sake of being negative".

Kadir thought at first that the LID was an abstract concept during its inception - no disagreement and no communicate - and from a reporting point of view, not very easy and not interesting.

"It took us a long time to understand the concept," said Kadir, "but in the end, we saw the benefits."

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