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Editors to help set up South news network

MALAYSIAN editors are set to meet and iron out the finer details of the proposed news network for smart partnership members soon, following the consensus reached by heads of state and Government on Tuesday.

The New Straits Times, Utusan Malaysia and The Star are expected to play a crucial role in the setting up of the news network.

The presence of New Straits Times Group Editor Datuk Ahmad A. Talib, Utusan Malaysia Assistant Group Editor Sirajudin Rafia and The Star Editor-in-Chief Datuk Ng Poh Tip at a special dialogue with the leaders indicated their commitment towards the setting up of the network.

The editors are believed to have submitted a draft concept paper on South News Network (SNN), the proposed name for the alternative news source.

It was stated by the editors the objectives of the news network was to disseminate balanced and accurate news, counter inaccurate news disseminated by foreign wire services which are controlled by media practitioners in the developed world, and offer another view of contemporary issues affecting developing countries.

It was also meant to create a closer understanding between peoples of participating countries, and, after a period of time, to evolve into a credible South News Agency.

The participating African newspaper will be identified later.

Under the arrangement, the participating newspapers will contribute news items and features on a daily basis into a common website on the Internet.

The editors proposed that in the initial stages, SNN would carry news items and features that first appear in the respective newspapers selected to be members of the network.

It had been proposed that the Malaysian National news agency (Bernama) become the secretariat because it has the ability to disseminate the news items and features to 33 countries through 36 established news agencies.

The leaders stated that the initiative to set up the news source was to provide accurate, balanced and objective reports from a Southern perspective and counter distortions and lies presented by existing news agencies on developing nations.

Speaking at the end of the dialogue, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad stressed that the news source was not aimed at competing with the existing sources and channels.

Two names have been proposed for the news source.

Malaysian editors participating in the dialogue suggested that it be named South News Network (SNN) but an Ugandan participant proposed Smart Partnership News Network (SPNN).

The editors are expected to sit with the African counterparts to decide on the final name for the network. Initially, the news source would be in the form of a website to allow access to all participating members but it has been planned to be extended to include audio and visual media in addition to the print media.

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