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Proposal for news source cleared

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HEADS of state and government of smart partnership members have agreed to set up an alternative news source to provide accurate, balanced and objective reports of local events and developments from the local perspective.

It will counter distortions about developing nations by existing news agencies.

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

"It will help in balancing the news that come from other services," he said.

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).

Dr Mahathir said the final name of the network would be left for the media editors to decide.

Asked when the news network would be set up, he said: "We accept the need to have a news source and (we also accept the fact that) it is not going to happen overnight.

"We have to give time for the various newspapers from member countries to come on board."

Initially, Dr Mahathir said, the news source would be in the form of a website to allow access to all participating members.

Participants also agreed to co-operate in the training of journalists through attachments to media organisations in various countries, sharing experiences to improve capacity building.

Dr Mahathir said the role of the media in addressing social issues was recognised as the media could be a source of information and misinformation.

"A patriotic media that puts country first is essential," he added.

The next step, Dr Mahathir said, would be to establish a media arm in each national hub to facilitate and optimise the benefits of webbing with other hubs.

It will be followed by efforts to generate and provide alternative sources and views that will be incorporated in the proposed smart partnership news website. This is to examine the feasibility of the proposed smart partnership news website and to provide alternative sources of news as agreed by the heads of state and government.

National hubs will also be encouraged to establish individual websites.

The dissemination and exchange of timely news with other hubs will be a forerunner to the proposed smart partnership news website.