

21 AUG 2001

MAHATHIR-SNNi

MAHATHIR SAYS SNNi HAS TO BE CREDIBLE

By: Mikhail Raj Abdullah

KAMPALA, Aug 21 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, in hailing the launch of the Smart News Network International (SNNi), said it must be credible in having news items which are not only critical, but highlight the positive aspects of developing countries.

"With SNNi, you should be able to exchange news that originate from the countries (concerned)," he told a press conference after the launch of the news exchange network available on the Internet ([www.snni.org](http://www.snni.org)).

Dr Mahathir, who is here to attend the Global 2001 Smart Partnership Dialogue at the Speke Resort at Munyonyo Village near here, said, SNNi was "a very wonderful and tangible thing that had come out from the series of smart partnership dialogues among South-South countries."

SNNi, a network where participating media organisations exchange news on a daily basis, was jointly launched by Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni and Dr Mahathir here Monday evening.

Among the participating media organisations from Africa are The New Vision of Uganda, the Mozambique News Agency of Mozambique, The Herald of Zimbabwe, the Daily News of Botswana, Namibia Today of Namibia, Bua News of South Africa and Seychelles Nation of Seychelles.

From Malaysia, the participants include the national news agency, Bernama, which also hosts the SNNi secretariat, The New Straits Times, The Star and Utusan Malaysia.

Dr Mahathir said from his discussions with African leaders, they said their own media were "not very friendly towards them and from all the news that comes out of here, nothing good is ever reported about African countries."

"Of course, the same thing happens to Malaysia," he said when referring to the half-truths and misreporting by certain foreign media.

While Malaysia had some advantage in being able to attract investments despite the inaccurate reporting, he said African countries were affected when investors turned away.

Given the continuous barrage of biased reporting, Dr Mahathir called on the press in developing countries to break the monopoly of the international media by reporting balanced news about the Third World.

He said some Western media had been so averse to Malaysia to the extent that they had described the smart partnership dialogue here as having been participated by so many countries but did not even mention Malaysia, one of the prime movers of the dialogue, at all.

"That's the BBC's report. They (even) misreport by saying that Taiwan is participating when it is not," he said.

Malaysia, which mooted the smart partnership dialogue, has always had a significant presence in such dialogues outside Malaysia with some 60 Malaysian participants attending this year's gathering in Uganda.

Dr Mahathir, who has been vocal about biased reporting by certain Western media, said if some Western media could have their own way, they would even want "to shut up these Malaysians."

In reference to SNNi, Dr Mahathir said it could give both good and bad news.

He said it could "give the true picture and stick to the true picture, but don't write something that is so uncritical as to be disregarded."

For instance, he said Uganda, the host for this year's dialogue, has beautiful game parks and the scenic Lake Victoria, and "all this needs to

be exposed."

Dr Mahathir said the media in developing countries, while trying to promote their own countries, should also be credible.

"If we start painting a glowing picture about different countries and which are not factual, people are not going to read the news. So I do hope that you be very selective," he cautioned. -- BERNAMA

MR MKO SHY