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Mahathir-Misreporting

MISREPORTING AFFECTS INVESTMENTS, SAYS DR MAHATHIR

By: Mikhail Raj Abdullah

KAMPALA, Aug 20 (Bernama) -- The Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has ticked off the foreign media for their continuous nasty reports on Malaysia and Africa which turn away potential investors.

"Be bold enough to report about the good things that are happening in the country, tell the truth," he said during an interaction between heads of government and the media at the Global 2001 Smart Partnership International Dialogue here late Sunday.

"If they want the truth, then the foreign media should be prepared to print the truth," he said.

The interaction, which has become a regular feature at the smart partnership dialogues where leaders put forward questions to journalists, saw some sharp criticisms being hurled at the media for what the leaders claimed as reporting half-truths rather than the whole story.

He said that the Smart News Network International (SNNi) to be launched here Monday would provide alternative reporting of the same news.

Under the SNNi, four media organisations in Malaysia and three in Africa would initially contribute news items to an Internet portal.

Dr Mahathir said the SNNi would include both the good and bad news. Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni likened negative reporting which turned away investors to that of enemy action.

Some of the leaders said that while the media were clamouring for accountability from government officials, legislators and politicians, they themselves "don't care about the kind of perception they bring to society."

Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa expressed disdain at the media for pressing for greater accountability from ministers and a code of conduct for them but for some reason, "they believe freedom of the press is absolute."

"You are also accountable," he said, stressing there were two sides to a story but only one side was reported.

Uganda-based Financial Times journalist Mark Turner said that the media more often was blamed for speculation, but sometimes they had no choice as it was difficult to gain access to civil servants.

Civil servants viewed the media as combative, he said.

A broadcast journalist said that while bad news was readily available, it was difficult to get positive news from the government immediately.

"Don't wait for weeks, appoint professional officers to react immediately to good news and they should especially be available after office hours," the journalist added.

-- BERNAMA

MR KHY RYN