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`SNNi will counter biased reporting'

KUALA LUMPUR, Sat. - The Smart News Network International (SNNi), a grouping of news organisations in Africa and Malaysia, will provide the world with accurate news and counter distortions of Western-based media.

"If we do not establish such synergy, we are leaving our countries' news to the western and foreign media," Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said when opening a SNNi workshop today.

He said SNNi would be an alternative source of news to the foreign news wires or agencies.

"At least our side of the story can be told," he said.

"We can report things as they are, rather than an interpretation by the biased Western or foreign media."

Syed Hamid noted that reports about Malaysia were often those quoted from foreign news media.

"Why should it be? It should be from our side. Even if they want to report, we must also have our side of the story. Then you decide for yourselves," he said.

SNNi was jointly launched by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Ugandan president Yoweri Museveni and President of Mozambique J. Chissano at Kampala, Uganda in April 2001 during the Global 2001 Dialogue.

Syed Hamid said many Western media organisations were prone to project a distorted coverage of the countries they were reporting on.

"They tend to highlight our failures instead of our successes."

He said ethical reporting is important as the media "has the power to influence and determine the fate of a nation."

The SNNi workshop is a 10-day training programme for journalists involved in SNNi to equip them with the skills to tap the potential of Information and Communication Technology.

Thirteen foreign and 12 Malaysian participants are attending the programme organised by the Malaysian National News Agency (Bernama).

The foreign participants were from Botswana, Namibia, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Guinea, South Africa, Ghana, Malawi and Uganda.