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Reports by Kamarul Yunus and Hamisah Hamid

Call for media groups to pool their resources

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MEDIA organisations in East Asia should pool their resources and cooperate to provide news on developments in the region from the Asian viewpoint, according to experienced media practitioners.

Senior editors at the First East Asia Congress believed the media had a role in building the East Asian Community (EAC) and assist the region's integration process through fostering greater understanding, promoting unity and building trust.

They said the Internet would be a strategic tool for such a co-operation, especially in disseminating accurate information and countering the Western-centric news provided by Western newspapers and satellite networks.

"The media in the region can collaborate and form an online archives, featuring editorials from newspapers in East Asian countries," a former journalist from Japanese newspaper Mainichi Shimbun, Akiko Kato, told the conference in Kuala Lumpur.

Also on the panel of discussion on "Media: Contributing to the East Asian Community" were Singapore's Straits Times editor-in-chief Cheong Yip Seng; Indonesian Press Council executive director and South-east Asian Press Alliance vice-chairman

Lukas Luwarso; China Central Television (CCTV) executive producer Li Xiaoping; and the Korean Times chief editorial writer Park Moo-jong.

Kato, who had 20 years' experience in print media, related her experience in interviewing Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad during the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis.

"I was surprised that he (Dr Mahathir) wasn't a dictator as was being portrayed by the Western media.

"The media was very biased at that time . . . always criticised and wrote stories based on assumptions . . . as if Malaysian Government will collapse anytime," said Kato, who was Mainichi Shimbun's bureau chief in Hong Kong.

Kato, who is a research associate at Keio University in Tokyo, said freedom of the Press did not mean journalists could say or write based on assumptions.

When met later, Kato said she was currently writing an analysis on Dr Mahathir's policies over the past 20 years.

"I would like to evaluate his policies and study what he has done for Asian countries. The book will be published in November," she told the *New Straits Times*.