

Langkawi dialogue to be held in July or August next year

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THE Langkawi International Dialogue will be held in July or August next year despite talk of its uncertain future following the retirement of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in October.

Dr Mahathir said at the end of the Southern Africa International Dialogue on Saturday that leaders of the participating countries had insisted that the dialogue must go on.

"They protested when they heard talks about the dialogue not going to be held next year," he said.

As far as the leaders were concerned, the dialogue had achieved immeasurable success since it was mooted eight years ago.

Asked who had suggested that the dialogue should not be held next year, Dr Mahathir said: "It's our own people. Malaysians. At the last LID, there were people who said there was no need to have such a dialogue any more because we had discussed a lot already."

Dr Mahathir had earlier confirmed that he would be taking part in next year's LID. Besides agreeing to have the LID in July or August next year, the leaders also agreed that Zambia will host the 2005 Southern Africa International Dialogue.

On the Ezulwini dialogue, Dr Mahathir said this was the biggest smart partnership dialogue ever held.

Asked about the progress of the Smart News Network International (SNNi), Dr Mahathir said it was slow. This was because the media in some of the participating countries were not controlled by the local people.

SNNi, the alternative news network for developing countries, was officially launched in Kampala, Uganda, in 2001.

Eleven news agencies and newspapers then participated by contributing articles to the network via its website <http://www.snni.org>.

At present, it is participated by news agencies and newspapers from Malaysia, Botswana, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Ghana, Republic of Guinea and Lesotho.

Under the arrangement, participating media organisations would contribute news, features, photographs and video images to the website daily. The server of the website is located in Kuala Lumpur. The idea of a news network was to help the cause in fighting the Western media's biased reporting.

On his bilateral talk with King Mswati III on Saturday, Dr Mahathir said Swaziland was keen to get an understanding of Malaysia's experience in reforming the constitution as Swaziland was also going through the process.