

12/06/1997

D-8 opportunity to consolidate strenght of Muslim world

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WHEN they meet in Istanbul on June 15 to officially launch an organisation referred as D-8, the member countries know that they carry the huge responsibility of ensuring its success. And that others are watching.

The D-8 comprise Malaysia, Iran, Turkey, Egypt, Indonesia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Heads of Governments of these countries will meet to discuss, and hopefully, come away with a concrete plan of action for closer cooperation on a broad front.

Malaysia will be represented by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who is currently on a two-month leave. Dr Mahathir has apparently insisted on some work during his leave.

The D-8 summit - the Istanbul meeting - will involve a scrutiny of sorts from the participants on on-going and future efforts to promote development and co-operation among them.

The D-8 organisation intends to enhance political and economic co-operation among member countries, with a view perhaps of enlarging the co-operation on a wider scale in the future.

The three-month-old movement, initiated by Turkey's Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan, will no doubt come under close scrutiny from both Muslim and non-Muslim nations the world over.

It is unfortunate that, despite all the strong words and noble efforts, Muslim countries continue to suffer the discredit of not being able to preach what they teach.

They have to help change the perception that Muslims and Muslim nations are only good at fighting among themselves and so are not able to solve their own problems.

The conflicts in Afghanistan and the Middle East, for example, have resulted in unkind remarks being made, besides taking a toll on the image of Muslims and Muslim countries.

It is certainly embarassing to hear accusations that the Muslims or Muslim countries are only good at talking, but not being able to deliver the goods.

It is hoped that the D-8, after having gone through two ministerial meetings in Turkey since beginning of this year, will emerge as a strong organisation able not only to help dispel any scepticism, but more important, consolidate the strength of the Muslim world.

Leaders of the D-8 know fully well their responsibilities far exceed the countries which they represent. What the OIC has tried to achieve, and partially succeeded, will now be tried at a different forum, albeit a smaller one but one which observers say have a good chance of greater success.

Senior officials from the D-8 countries are already working on the details of their co-operation to be submitted at the ministerial level which begins today and at the summit proper on Sunday.

Though there is still no confirmation, observers are convinced that continuous efforts to find ways to end the conflicts in Afghanistan and the Middle East will be discussed at length during the summit.

Also to be discussed are areas of co-operation, including trade and investment, human resources, science and technology, tourism and communications.

As much as they are determined to play their role, members of the group are also looking at how Iran, which has taken the initiative to end the

conflict in Afghanistan, will continue with its efforts until it succeeds.

Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who had attended earlier meetings of the D-8, had expressed the hope that the D-8 summit, along with the OIC extraordinary meeting in Islamabad, Pakistan on last March 23 and the eighth OIC summit scheduled in Iran in December, would pave the way for better political and economic co-operation.

D-8, which is mainly economic orientated, has held two ministerial meetings in Turkey. It is not impossible for an economic-based group or association to look deeply into other areas - political and social matters.

In not so many words, Abdullah was expressing the hope that the three major summits this year would be productive and bring greater progress for the Muslim countries.

And to do this, Muslim countries must first resolve their political differences and conflicts which actually undermine efforts to foster closer cooperation among the member countries.

After having achieved that, they must sit together and grab the opportunity to work towards proving the critics wrong, that is, Muslim countries and Muslims are practising what they preach.

Opportunities do not come their way all the time. They must make hay while the sun shines.

One must also state that the inclusion of Malaysia into the D-8 is a continued recognition of the country's and Dr Mahathir's leadership on the international stage.

Malaysia's outspoken nature and political, economic and social success is clear for everyone to see and the D-8 could well learn a thing or two from the country's achievements.

Working within a smaller group, they may have a better chance of success because the OIC, though relevant in the Muslim agenda, is big and, arguably, cumbersome. If the D-8 countries make a success of their programme, it could very well help the OIC in the long run.

It does look like Muslim countries, through the D-8, are finally taking steps to correct the misconception that Muslim countries are quarrelsome and war-prone. The D-8 must show that all that talk will lead to some concrete achievements.

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