

16/06/1997

Dr M: D-8 must show irrefutable results to gain credibility

Farush Khan in Istanbul

DATUK Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the newly-formed Co-operation for Development or D-8, must show results to gain credibility. "If we fail, then we should not make a pretence of being useful," the Prime Minister said yesterday.

Dr Mahathir, speaking at the first summit of the group at the Ciragan Palace, said the D-8 must show results which are irrefutable on a yearly basis.

If it failed to do so, it should fold up, the Prime Minister said.

"We should fold up rather than hold meaningless meetings. That is the challenge that we have to face," he said.

The D-8 comprises Malaysia, Turkey, Indonesia, Iran, Egypt, Nigeria, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Dr Mahathir told grouping members that the first area they should co-operate on should be in the defence of their system of democracy, a topic which he spoke at length on.

He told them that they must be democratic in their own mould.

"Liberal democracy may be good for some, but not for everyone and I don't think from what I have observed, it will work for everyone of us".

The democratic system, said the Prime Minister, was not divine law, but concocted by very human and fallible people.

He said developing countries needed political stability more than ever before.

"Empires may be a thing of the past, but political and economic hegemony is very much alive. If we don't put our houses in order, if we remain weak politically, we will all revert to being colonies, in fact if not in name," he said.

Without political stability, he said, even the economically strong would become weak.

"Certainly the economically weak will become totally paralysed. And we are economically weak and often politically unstable."

The Prime Minister said he wanted to emphasise he was not advocating authoritarian rule.

"I am advocating democracy as practised by the Western democrats during their democratic infancy. When they were less liberal democratically no one condemned them or threatened them.

"We are asking that we be allowed to evolve our democracy at our own pace without harassment and threats. That is all."

On Malaysia's membership in the D-8, the Prime Minister said: "We hope to learn from the other members and co-operate and trade with them. It is believed that poor countries are not good trading partners, but what is a fact is that the rich had always traded with the poor."

The Prime Minister said: "So, Malaysia subscribes to the initial small membership. It is not, I am sure, a desire to be exclusive. It is merely the need to be manageable. Once progress or success has been achieved we should open our membership to others."

By confining to the eight countries in the D-8, the members were not doing anyone any disservice.

"I am stressing this because I would not like to create misunderstanding or to offend anyone," he said.

While it is true to say there was strength in numbers, the Prime Minister said numbers could also "weigh us down".

In the eight countries, he said, there were almost 800 million people.
"Whether they will contribute to strengthening us or whether they will
weigh us down depends very much on us, that is, the governments
responsible for the development or otherwise of our countries."

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