

12/06/1997

### Grouping's greatest challenge

ISTANBUL, Wed: The greatest challenge to the new Developing-8 (D-8) will be how to integrate with the global economy and maintain its Islamic identity at the same time, says a leading Islamic scholar here.

Mr Murat Mercan, an associate professor of science at Bilkent University here, said the D-8 success would depend on the good intentions and hard work of all the leaders of the countries concerned.

"If the D-8 cannot strengthen the character and the values of their people, the cooperation would not be of any use," he told Business Times ahead of the summit meeting of the leaders and heads of government of the D-8 on June 12-15 here.

He said as the economies of the nations grow, the people become more materialist, egotistical and greedy.

"It is not going to be easy to evolve a genuine Islamic economic system. No country can stay outside the global system," he said, adding that the greatest economic development is taking place in eastern Asia.

The D-8 is the brainchild of Turkey's Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan who developed the concept during visits to Africa and Asia after coming to power last year.

A part of the government's multi-dimensional foreign policy, the D-8 is to be based on a just world order where double standards and tyranny do not exist.

On January this year, eight Islamic nations which met here agreed that the D-8 should become a catalyst for revitalising the Organisation of Islamic Conference and give meaning to Islamic cooperation and solidarity.

They are Turkey, Malaysia, Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Nigeria and Pakistan. They have also agreed to form an Istanbul-based secretariat to coordinate the efforts for the group's creation.

The D-8 cooperation will also be opened to the future participation of other Muslim states.

Apart from Erbakan, other leaders who are expected to address the summit this Sunday are Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and Presiden Suharto of Indonesia.

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