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Mahathir: D-8 can meet objectives

Jailani Harun in Istanbul

ISTANBUL, Mon: Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir is confident the new grouping of developing Islamic countries in the Developing-Eight (D-8) will meet its objective of improving the economic standards of its members although the West belittle it.

The prime minister said it is common for the new hegemony of the West to see other countries being less developed and poor, as had been the case in Malaysia not a long time ago.

"We have not forgotten it ... they were saying that Malaysia will collapse under communal tension. They had never give us encouragement, but instead tried to worsen the situation.

"If we read their reports about Turkey, we would think that the situation here is bad, but once we are here we found out that everything is normal. It is true that Turkey is having political problem, but we also have that in Malaysia," he told Malaysian journalists here today.

He was asked to comment on media reports that some Western diplomats in Turkey and Europe have nicknamed the D-8 as "Disaster-8" for grouping together countries which are still plagued with political turmoil, such as Turkey, Nigeria, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

As to how Malaysia can extend assistance in promoting economic cooperation within the group, the prime minister said is by having dialogues and implementing viable projects together.

Another area of interest to the D-8 leaders is Malaysia's own brand of privatization, which Dr Mahathir said is a model to other countries, including the developed.

On his stinging reminder that the D-8 should fold up should it fail in get results, the Prime Minister said: "I was being very frank about it. We do not need an organisation which only resorts to organising a meaningless meeting. We need a pragmatic body which can deliver."

Dr Mahathir, who arrived here on Saturday to attend the inaugural summit meeting of the D-8, left for Beirut, Lebanon in the afternoon.

The D-8, mooted by Turkish Prime Minister Dr Necmettin Erbakan last year, is aimed as an economic forum within the Organisation of Islamic Conference.

During his stay here, Dr Mahathir has also held bilateral talks with Sheikh Hasina Wajed of Bangladesh, President Suharto of Indonesia and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan.

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