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Mahathir-summit

MAHATHIR URGES D-8 TO TRADE AMONG THEMSELVES

By: Mokhtar Hussain

ISTANBUL, June 15 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has urged developing states to learn to cooperate and trade among themselves for mutual benefits instead of allowing rich countries to make the most from trade with poor nations.

He said if the rich nations could extract benefit from poor countries, the latter should also be able to do the same from each other.

"It is believed that poor countries are not good trading partners. But what is a fact is that the rich have always traded with the poor.

"Obviously they benefited from this trade. If they can extract some benefit from the poor, we should be able to do the same from each other. Only with us the extraction and benefits should be mutual," he said addressing the inaugural summit of heads of government of the group of eight Islamic Developing Countries (D-8) here.

The summit was earlier officiated by Turkish President Suleyman Demirel.

"That is why we welcome membership in the D-8. We hope to learn from the other members and cooperate and trade with them," Dr Mahathir said.

The D-8, comprising Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Turkey, was mooted by Turkish Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan to enhance economic cooperation among a smaller group of developing countries.

Apart from Dr Mahathir and Erbakan, other leaders attending the summit in this historic city of Islamic civilisation were Bangladeshi prime minister Sheikh Hassina Wajed, President Suharto of Indonesia, Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

Egypt was represented by Prime Minister Kamal El Ganzouri while Nigeria by Minister of Industry Mohammed Halladu.

Dr Mahathir said the D-8 countries could increase trade between them if they could put in place the necessary policy and legal framework.

"For this we need to exchange information. I would like to stress here the need for strong political leadership. Political will is going to be very necessary if we are going to make any progress at all," he said.

Dr Mahathir warned the D-8 countries, which have a combined population of almost 800 million, not to be overly ambitious but more prudent in planning their moves.

"If the D-8 is going to gain credibility, we must show results, results which are irrefutable, on a yearly basis.

"If we fail then we should not make a pretence of being useful. We should fold up rather than hold meaningless meetings. That is the challenge that we have to face," said Dr Mahathir.

He spoke of the need for developing countries to formulate their own form of democracy to help accelerate economic development and avoid reverting to being colonies.

"We, the D-8 have come together in order to cooperate. The first thing that we should cooperate on is in defence of our system of democracy. We must be democratic but democratic in our own mould," he stressed.

Dr Mahathir said in many developing countries, democracy simply led to irresponsibility.

"Governments are elected which are not given a chance to govern. Newly-elected governments are brought down through democratic strikes and

democratic demonstrations and new governments put in place, only to suffer the same fate.

"And so despite the virtues of democracy what we get from it is anarchy. And anarchy cannot help us to develop," he said.

Erbakan, in his speech earlier, said D-8 member countries should focus on the effectiveness of whatever projects undertaken.

"We are going to share or borrow technology, knowledge and experience from each other to ensure the success of this grouping especially in increasing trade," he said.

He said the D-8 was not an alternative to any other grouping but its main goal was for society's well-being and happiness.

Indonesian President Suharto said D-8 member countries must promote cooperation to become more competitive in the global economy and thereby solve social and economic problems "in a way that will make a difference to our people."

He said the reality today was that the developed countries would not voluntarily share their technology with the developing world.

"Every technology that we need must be purchased at a price we can barely afford and on terms that are scarcely acceptable," he added. --

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