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There's much to be done in the wake of D-8's launching

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THERE is much to be done in the wake of the launching of D-8 or the Development Eight group in Istanbul Sunday (June 15).

The grouping has already got out of the way differences over its name following the shooting down of a suggestion by former Turkish Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan that it be called M-8.

He could have wanted the alphabet M after probably considering the fact that all the eight members - Malaysia, Turkey, Egypt, Indonesia, Pakistan, Iran, Nigeria and Bangladesh - are predominantly Muslim countries.

His idea, however, was quickly shot down by other members which were not at all enthusiastic about giving the grouping an Islamic flavour.

They are quite right. Labels and names are not important. Performance and results are.

In fact, any association of the group with a religion may be misinterpreted. The grouping should avoid any move that attracts unnecessary obstacles.

Now that they have made a wise move in sidelining the issue on labelling, the eight countries must start working together to discover each other's potential and give a new thrust to strengthen their economic standing.

After all, the very reason the D-8 was established was to help increase political and economic co-operation not only among member countries, but also those outside it, especially non-Muslim nations.

Therefore, nothing should stop them from achieving their goals - not even the latest development within the organisation where Erbakan was forced to resign to avoid worsening political crisis.

The leaders of the D-8 countries who met in Istanbul have unanimously agreed on a 12-point Istanbul Declaration, all of which are waiting to be implemented.

They should start working towards achieving their goals, in the process taking into consideration views expressed around the table.

In fact, they have nothing to fear because co-operation among member countries is meant to accelerate progress and development.

Even developed countries are forming unions to improve their economies.

D-8 members should plan together to ensure that the grouping serves as a purposeful forum of like-minded countries discussing and working out programmes of action for effective co-operation among themselves and others.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, in his usual "no punches pulled" approach, had at the summit meeting cautioned member countries to come up with "irrefutable results" on a yearly basis to ensure the body gained credibility.

If they failed, he had said, the D-8 should just "fold up rather than holding meaningless meetings".

In the meantime, observers continue to debate on whether the grouping which is a week old has any future.

Detractors are already trying to pour cold water on the group's effort by predicting that it is just a matter of time before it will die.

Mischevious ones are referring to it as "Disaster-8".

Actions of some member countries are also not helping strengthen the image of the grouping.

The absence of leaders of some member countries had raised questions on

whether this was a sign of a lack of enthusiasm on the part of these countries in seeing the establishment of the D-8.

But the latest development which is being hotly discussed in the region is whether Erbakan's resignation will also spell the demise of this grouping.

The uncertainty is without good reason. Erbakan, leader of the pro-Islamic Welfare Party, forced out of power by strong pro-western generals, is the initiator of the D-8.

Soon after being sworn into office about a year ago, he had made two trips to all eight developing countries except Bangladesh, to get their support.

He had visions of creating the organisation and had prepared the groundwork for its formation.

At the recent joint declaration, the D-8 leaders had also given Turkey the task of being co-ordinator of the organisation at least until the next summit scheduled for Dhaka, Bangladesh, in November or December next year.

Now that the 71-year-old Erbakan has stepped down, some observers feel the days of the D-8 are numbered. The answer to this however, remains to be seen.

Those involved in making its goals a reality must realise the fact that no one is indispensable.

Doubts and criticism are also not uncommon as even bigger and most established groupings such as the Organisation of the Islamic Conference which has 54 members, have not been spared.

Some critics claiming that the OIC is not effective enough in helping some member countries out of their economy problems, have called it the "Oh I See".

However, as for the D-8, the future should be different. Erbakan may not be in office, but his likely successor, Tansu Cillar, is not giving the group a cold shoulder either.

During the ministerial meeting prior to the summit, Cillar declared that the D-8 would not create polarisation, but would contribute to "world peace, happiness and prosperity".

Some observers think as long as the organisation is not treated as an Islamic gathering to provoke others, but a respectable one with common goals, D-8 should succeed in establishing joint action and using prosperity for its members and others.

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