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Concern over globalisation, need for economic reform unites group

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GREAT men, they say, think alike.

True or otherwise, that was how it had apparently turned out to be at the second two-day summit of the Development Eight (D-8) which ended in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on Tuesday.

Virtually all the leaders who walked up the rostrum to address the meeting had expressed concern on identical issues, mainly economic reform, globalisation and its effects on developing countries.

Their views have all been incorporated in their 33-point Dhaka Declaration, adopted at the end of the summit.

Malaysia, through Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, was able to incorporate all its ideas on the current global economic and financial system.

It had also highlighted the weaknesses arising from unbridled capital flows and its destabilising implications on developing countries as well as on the lack of progress by the international community in terms of arriving at concrete measures for reform.

The reform, he reminded them, must be a global effort with all countries participating in discussions and making decisions and that it should not be an exclusive purview of the rich countries.

Dr Mahathir had also underscored the need for joint use of natural resources and assets for the betterment of the member countries.

Sharing his view, Indonesia called for new modalities for co-operation in trade and investment as a way of dealing with the surge of globalisation and independence. Leaders from other countries echoed their sentiments.

The congruence of their views is encouraging indeed for it shows that each and everyone of them is mindful of the direction they are moving.

And the direction, as spelt out in its D-8 objective, is quite clear - it is to bring welfare to the peoples of the grouping through increased co-operation and greater interaction in trade and intellectual matters.

Yet, if there is any scepticism by any party outside the D-8 of its actual objective, the Dhaka Declaration is so far the best reference to repudiate it.

One thing is clear. The Dhaka Declaration does not touch on political subjects at all.

The declaration actually spells out the need for reviews of the global economic scene and the status of on-going projects as well as to establish new projects.

This is quite different from the Istanbul Declaration adopted on June 15, 1997, which merely established the broad principles, objectives, goals and general parameters of the D-8 forum.

Such a development is refreshing as it goes to underpin the economic co-operation focus of the D-8 forum and process.

Like in any other forum, the D-8 is not free of criticism. Some media had tried to dub the summit as D-4 because of the absence of four of the heads of government or State for the meeting in Dhaka.

But the significance of the D-8 had not at all been affected by the absence of the leaders from Indonesia, Iran, Nigeria and Egypt, who could not attend it due to their other commitments and domestic matters. Those who attended were from Malaysia, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Turkey.

It will also not be fair for any party to regard the D-8 as a competitor

to, for instance, the Organisation of Islamic Conference or a threat to any other party.

In fact it can be complementary to the OIC or any other organisation which is willing to co-operate with it.

D-8 can certainly work together with the OIC for the good of Muslims, considering that the D-8 countries, with a total of 800 million people, the majority of whom are Muslims, can contribute substantially to OIC's efforts to improve the condition of the Muslims.

Not only are the D-8 countries most populous in the OIC, they also have good natural resources.

But that does not in any way mean that D-8 is a religious organisation. If that is the case, then other organisations which have members of other religions can also be considered as being religious bodies.

Now that the second summit is over, leaders and representatives of the member countries of the D-8 will have to take immediate steps to implement whatever plans and projects that they have jointly endorsed.

There is still a long way to go and they have much to do.

Not only to develop their countries, but also to guard them against recurrence of global financial crises and new threats of destabilisation - to name a few.

It is also a fact that Islam and the Islamic world are still divided, in disarray and are not quite able to cope with the various changes in the world.

Many Muslim countries have a great deal of wealth and potential among themselves, but have not contributed to the well-being of most of them.

None of them can also claim to be a force of consequence in the international arena.

Many of them have been able to make their nations stable and capable of making progress to match that of the advanced countries of the world, none of which are Muslim.

But, as Dr Mahathir had said when addressing the summit in Dhaka: "All is not lost".

They still have assets and intrinsic strength. What they need to do is to recognise them and find ways to put them to joint use.

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