

More trade, less talk 'key to reviving G15'

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FOR Malaysia, the key to bringing the moribund G15 group of developing countries back to life is to talk less and trade more.

"Sadly, progress in this regard has been minimal. But we must persevere in fostering trade and investment among developing countries in order to bring the more marginalised countries into the mainstream of the international system," Dafuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi told the 13th Summit of the Group of 15.

The G15, a club of ranking countries established following the Ninth Non-Aligned Summit in Belgrade in 1989 as the developing world's counterpart and eventual dialogue partner to the G8 group of industrial economies, has never lived up to its promise. It currently has 18 members, including Argentina, Brazil, India, Indonesia, Nigeria and Senegal, after Colombia announced its intention to leave recently.

"Malaysia is convinced of the latent potential for trade and investment among the Group of 15 countries," the Prime Minister said. "This is in view of the encouraging statistics we have regarding trade with the G15 countries, inflows of foreign direct investment from G15 countries as well as Malaysia's investment into G15 countries, all of which show growth and increases over the years."

Among the meeting's agenda is a report by a panel of consultants engaged in 2004 to examine the group's viability after its failure to get up and run since the inaugural summit in Kuala Lumpur in 1990. Members owe the G15 more than US\$500,000 (RM1.8 million) in arrears and it is struggling to meet its US\$1 million budget for 2007.

There is no doubt, however, of what the G15 could do. The consultants' report concluded that "the prevailing international environment underscored the continuing relevance of the group and the need to further energise it".

Abdullah agreed. "There are many issues in which our well-being would be much better served if we address them collectively. I believe the G15 can make an impact in shaping the global agenda if we can effectively adopt common strategies and policies in certain particular matters."

As with most multilateral setups, hauling every member country on board can be difficult, especially when, as in the G15's case, they have disparate interests and

institutional capacities.

To avoid the sluggishness of a consensus-driven approach, Abdullah proposed that member countries be allowed to undertake projects on their own initiative.

"We may need to revisit and decide on the best ways of getting some projects off the ground. We may not need to wait for all G15 members to participate before getting started. Some members may wish to get together to bring into reality ideas such as the South Bank, the University of the South or the South television network.

"Malaysia, for example, is ready

to work with G15 countries that are interested in the financial mechanism to enhance trade among developing countries," he said.

The 13th summit will also consider recommendations to streamline procedures and raise the G15's profile in the international arena.

"I wish to reiterate Malaysia's conviction that the Group of 15, acting together in a more coherent and concerted manner, can and will live up to its potential. It is really up to us to make our group serve its purposes and objectives."