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Anti-graft forum for OIC member states

■ From Wan Hamidi Hamid in Bali

MALAYSIA, concerned with corruption and mismanagement in Muslim countries, will organise an anti-corruption forum for Organisation of the Islamic Conference member countries in August.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said Muslim countries would not be able to achieve their full economic potential if they failed to address one of the most fundamental issues pertaining to good governance.

"I am referring to the eradication of corruption in the management of our economies. Corruption benefits only a few at the expense of the many.

"Corruption disrupts the entire governmental process, undermines morality and erodes ethical behaviour," he said at the leaders' meeting of the Developing Eight summit here yesterday.

D-8, an offshoot of the OIC, comprises Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan and Turkey.

This is the grouping's fifth biennial summit and for the next two years, Indonesia holds the chair. Malaysia will take over in 2008.

Abdullah said Malaysia, the current OIC chairman, would organise the forum on anti-corruption and enhancing integrity initiatives as a contribution to the campaign against corruption in Muslim countries.

"Invitations have been sent out and I look forward to active participation from D-8 members."

Many OIC and D-8 member countries, despite their Islamic credentials, have problems with graft and lack of good governance, as well as political instability and poverty, eroding the potential for global investments and trade.

Abdullah said many people in Muslim countries were living in poverty and deplorable conditions, with about 50 per cent struggling on less than US\$2 (RM7.20) a day.

"Poverty for many in the Islamic world has created other problems such as illiteracy, malnutrition, disease and crime.

"The vicious circle must be broken. Poverty should not be the hall-

mark of Islamic countries."

For years, Malaysia has been urging Muslim countries to strengthen institutions of governance and rule of law, to invest heavily in education, poverty eradication, rural development and improving the living standards of the people.

It has also shown other Muslim nations that women can hold top decision-making posts.

Abdullah said Muslim countries must strive to foster noble values and ideals of Islam, progressively and holistically.

The summit yesterday also saw the signing of two agreements to reduce tariffs and facilitate Customs matters among member countries of the OIC.