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KL ready for important role at OIC summit

Farush Khan in Doha, Qatar

MALAYSIA is determined to play a significant role in the ninth Organisation of Islamic Conference being held here despite Saudi Arabia's boycott of the summit because of Qatar's continued ties with Israel.

"No matter what happens, we have and will continue to play effective role in the OIC," Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said yesterday.

Responding to a question on reports of Saudi's pullout, he said he had yet to get anything official on the matter.

He said the Palestine-Israel clashes which had left 192 people killed in six weeks, were not an Arab issue.

"It is the issue that must be given due attention by the entire Muslim world," he told Malaysian reporters at the conference between Nov 8 and 14.

Despite reports that a few of the 56 member countries might also stay away from the summit on the same reason, Syed Hamid, who is representing the country for the ministerial level meeting said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will participate in the summit, scheduled from Nov 12 to 14.

Syed Hamid warned that relationship and co-operation among Muslim countries, as well as the OIC were being watched by the world at large and that they would be isolated should they fail to work together effectively towards peace, unity and development.

"The world want to know whether the Muslims are able to work hand in hand to march towards peace and unity," he said.

In fact the theme of this OIC itself is "Peace and Development". OIC summits are held once in three years.

Saudi was reported to have decided on the boycott as Qatar still maintained ties with Israel despite the clamour in the Arab world to isolate the Jewish State.

OIC secretary-general Azzeddine Laraki was quoted as saying that a few other countries might follow suit.

He expressed regret on the boycott which he said would negatively affect the conference where the Palastinian issue is high on the agenda.

Three Arab countries - Oman, Tunisia and Morocco - have severed ties with the Jewish state following the Oct 21-22 emergency summit of Arab leaders, while Cairo threated to end ties with Israel.

Iran Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi had postponed a trip to Qatar on Nov 8 ahead of the summit. The decision was seen as an indication to pressure Doha to cut low-level ties with Israel to demonstrate support for Palastinians.

There were also reports by the media that Lebanon was also considering a boycott for the same reasons.

In the meantime, Qatar said it was reviewing its ties with Israel which included a Israel trade office in Doha and a Qatari office in Tel Eviv.

Observers said the outcome of the review which might be made known anytime now would certainly have a bearing in the decisions of these few countries, including Saudi Arabia, in their decision to stay away from this summit.

Reports of Saudi's boycott - its first of an OIC summit in the organisation's 31-year history, come on top of decisions to stay at home by Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and Bahrain's Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Issa

Al-Khalifa. Libya was also reported to have planned to stay away.

The Arab summit's follow-up committee groups comprise of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, the Palestinians, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Tunisia.

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