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Our women delegates draw Press attention

Ahmad A. Talib in Cairo

"TWO lady delegates? Senior delegates?" This was the question coming from a local female journalist at the Press Centre of the on-going G15 meeting which opened here yesterday. When told so, the journalist hurried off trying to get an interview with both Malaysians.

The journalist had apparently been scanning the television and newspapers trying to find "something different" to file her report on the 10th summit which was opened by Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak at the heavily-guarded Presidential Headquarters.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is leading the Malaysian delegation which includes Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, International Trade and Industry Minister Datuk Seri Rafidah Aziz and Bank Negara Governor Datuk Dr Zeti Akhtar Aziz.

The opening ceremony was carried live on Egyptian television, but Press coverage was restricted to short visual coverage by television cameramen and print media photographers.

A Press Centre has been set up at Sonesta Hotel with faxing, Internet and telephone services. Several television sets are located at several corners, but speeches of speakers are not readily available, though.

After Mubarak's opening speech, several other leaders representing their continents spoke for about 15 minutes each.

India's Vice-President Krishan Kant spoke on behalf of Asia. A total of seven Presidents, five Vice-Presidents, two Prime Ministers, two Foreign Ministers and one Deputy Foreign Minister represent 17 member Governments at the summit.

Mubarak's opening remarks centred on a call to the developed countries to effectively participate in the creation of a new international financial structure, besides a plea for a more balanced approach in globalisation.

Mubarak, at a meeting with Dr Mahathir on Sunday, when the latter paid a courtesy call on the current summit chairman, sought the Prime Minister's views in co-ordinating the stand of the developing countries at multilateral forums such as the World Trade Organisation, International Monetary Fund and World Bank.

Dr Mahathir's views on globalisation and the need for developing countries to be wary of its ugly side was another issue discussed by both leaders and would feature again at the summit proper.

After lunch, the leaders trooped off to their retreat, at the Mirage Golf Club just outside the city. They are expected to discuss issues facing the G15 in a more relaxed and informal surrounding.

Rafidah, who arrived here earlier and met her counterparts when Trade Ministers held their conference, had already raised the WTO issue, saying that G15 members must "work together in concrete terms" to help determine the agenda for future multilateral trade negotiations.

Her suggestion was for the G15 to have a two-tier plan of action - one at the ministerial level and the other at the level of negotiators in Geneva, the headquarters of WTO.

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