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OIC-Palestine

PALESTINE ISSUE POISED TO TAKE CENTRE STAGE AT OIC SUMMIT

By: Muin Abdul Majid

DOHA, Qatar, Nov 10 (Bernama) -- The ongoing Palestine-Israel conflict looks set to feature prominently at the ninth Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) summit here as various parties decry the atrocities committed by the Tel Aviv regime against the Palestinian people.

The urgency to address the matter could be felt as nearly two hundred people, mostly Palestinian Arabs, have lost their lives since what is known as the Al-Aqsa Intifada started in late September.

Such is the emotion over this issue that Saudi Arabia and several other key OIC countries had reportedly planned to boycott the leaders' three-day summit beginning Sunday to protest ties between host country Qatar and Israel.

And according to a report by the Qatar News Agency, the government had decided to close the Israeli trade representative office in Doha "to boost Islamic solidarity and create an atmosphere suitable for the convening of the summit."

The theme of the Doha OIC leaders' gathering - the "Summit of Peace and Development" - is only appropriate as the Islamic world is left behind in terms of development vis-a-vis other communities on the globe as the ummah seems to be locked in a perennial search for that elusive peace in various conflicts involving them.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar told a ministerial preparatory meeting Thursday that Malaysia supported the view that a strong signal must be sent from this summit to Israel with regard to the Palestinian issue.

"Clearly the Palestinians have had enough. They have suffered for far too long...Israel must be made to end its policy of harassment and intimidation.

"The plight of the Palestinians and the human rights abuses of the Israeli occupying forces have to stop if peace is to prevail in the region," he said.

Syed Hamid said that the rest of the world was watching how the Muslim community tackled the Palestine issue and emphasised that only with unity and dignity could they find a solution to the problem.

He also said that Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad would touch on the matter when he speaks on behalf of the Asian group during Sunday's opening ceremony. This will be Dr Mahathir's fourth OIC summit appearance.

The latest round of confrontations between Israel and Palestine was sparked off by a controversial visit by right-wing Israeli leader Ariel Sharon to a sacred sanctuary known to Muslims as the Al-Haram Al Sharif on Sept 28, the site of the beautiful Al-Aqsa mosque.

The Palestinian conflict aside, the advent of globalisation and the revolution in information technology as well as economic cooperation are also expected to be touched by the leaders.

According to Iranian Foreign Minister Dr Kamal Kharrazi, who was chairman of the eighth OIC summit, the organisation had yet to forge a structured framework of economic cooperation among Islamic countries.

"Ideas such as the establishment of the Islamic Common Market have long been on the OIC agenda and it remains for us to take further tangible steps during and after the ninth session in this respect," he said.

At the last summit in Teheran three years ago, Dr Mahathir said many Muslim countries were troubled by fratricidal wars and instabilities making their governments impotent either to develop and compete with their detractors or even to govern effectively.

He also lamented then that Islamic countries were unable to put their

rich resources to good use to serve and defend the religion.

The OIC, formed in 1969, is a major forum for Islamic causes and solidarity. Malaysia is one of the 25 founding member countries of the OIC.

Membership has since expanded to 56 countries and its previous focus on political issues has been stretched to cover economic cooperation.

Meanwhile, according to Malaysian officials, Dr Mahathir is scheduled to arrive at the Doha International Airport on Saturday.

Apart from taking part in summit deliberations, Dr Mahathir is scheduled to meet leading Muslim intellectuals and businessmen.

He is also expected to hold talks with several leaders, including Palestinian President Yasser Arafat.

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