

11 NOV 2000

OIC-Qatar

QATAR WELCOMES MUSLIM LEADERS FOR 9TH OIC SUMMIT

By: Muin Abdul Majid

DOHA, Nov 11 (Bernama) -- The Persian Gulf state of Qatar is all set to welcome the leaders of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) for the 56-member grouping's ninth summit which opens at the luxurious seafront Sheraton Doha hotel tomorrow.

The Doha International Airport was reportedly closed temporarily to commercial flights until 11.30pm (local time) today to cater for the arrivals of the leaders and other dignitaries, prompting flights to be re-routed to other nearby cities.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad flew in from Kuala Lumpur for his fourth summit appearance this morning, and other leaders have either arrived or will arrive in stages throughout the day.

The three-day gathering dubbed the "Summit of Peace and Development" will be opened by the Emir of Qatar Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani.

The major thoroughfares of Doha have been spruced up, and well-frequented areas have been decked out in ornamental plants and colourful banners.

Brand new vehicles of all kinds with their seats still in plastic wrappings can be seen zooming around city streets ferrying delegates to their all-important meetings.

The weather is sunny today, a major change from Thursday when the heavens opened on the city and its outskirts causing low-lying areas to be waterlogged.

The summit is being held at a time when the Muslim world is expressing outrage over continued Israeli violence against the Palestinian people.

The OIC foreign ministers last night concluded their two-day preparatory meeting that largely focused on the six weeks of violence in the Palestinian territories.

The ministers reportedly approved a draft resolution calling on OIC countries to sever all ties with Israel for what they said were "war crimes" against the Palestinians.

There were earlier fears that several key OIC countries would shy away from the meeting because of Qatar's links with Tel Aviv.

After Qatar cut low-level commercial ties with Israel Thursday by closing the Israeli trade office here, Iranian President Mohamed Khatami and Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Abdullah have confirmed their participation at the summit.

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MAM YBY