

25/05/2001

G-15 meeting to go on, pledges host Indonesia

Habhajan Singh in Jakarta

JAKARTA, Thurs: Indonesia is not backing out from hosting the Group of 15 (G-15) Summit, a meeting of developing nations, despite speculation that it may pull out at the last minute due to the uncertain situation in the country.

Diplomats, government officials and journalists covering the 11th G-15 Summit are already beginning to make their way to Jakarta, a sprawling city of 12 million dwellers.

The leaders from the Asia, Africa and Latin American countries will be converging at a convention centre a mere several hundred metres from the Indonesian Parliament, which will be sitting on May 30 to give the go ahead or impeachment proceedings against Abdurrahman Wahid.

The embattled Indonesian President, the first democratically elected Indonesian leader and popularly known as Gus Dur, is scheduled to deliver the G-15 inaugural session on that very day.

"As it stands, the meeting will go on," said a senior Indonesian government official in Jakarta.

Abdurrahman is facing a keen challenge to his leadership after being implicated over two multimillion-dollar corruption scandals.

Vice President Megawati Sukarnoputri, his number two in command and potential successor should Gus Dur make way, is scheduled to open the first session of the 19-nation summit today with an address to the private sector delegates.

The presence of Megawati, who leads the Indonesia Democratic Party-Struggle (PDI-P), will be closely watched as she has begun publicly challenging the President for the first time in the past week, adding to the pressure on Gus Dur.

Still, there are various pressing matters that will receive the attention of the delegates, including the restructuring of the financial system of the grouping's member countries that were hard hit by the 1997-98 economic crisis.

This will be the thrust of today's session for the private sector, with trade financing and banking reforms as part of the agenda.

Bank Negara Malaysia representatives will also be sharing Malaysia's experience in this area.

On Sunday trade and economic ministers will take the stage, while the foreign ministers will have their meeting on Monday.

The existing digital divide will be the main theme of discussion, as was decided during a G-15 ministerial meeting in Mexico.

The G-15 realises that the new reality, however, does little to redress the perennial issue of North-South division.

"While the developed world readily taps into the wave of digital revolution, the developing and least developing countries lag behind, creating the so-called digital divide," reads one of its statements.

Another issue that will receive attention is the question of reforming the international financial architecture, which has been highlighted by Malaysia at various international forums.

The previous summit in Cairo, Egypt, saw the issue being discussed on a more serious note, with some countries expressing the fear that their countries will be marginalised if the regimes governing the international financial architecture are not reformed.

Observers are certain that the underlying tensions between the two

Indonesian leaders will overshadow the summit, which carries the theme, "Harnessing the potential of the digital era for development".

"These are major developments affecting the country," he said.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, one of the foremost proponents of the G-15 gathering, is expected to lead the Malaysian delegation to the summit.

Other participating countries at the annual summit are Algeria, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iran, Jamaica, Kenya, Mexico, Nigeria, Peru, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Venezuela and Zimbabwe.

The G-15, founded in 1989 to counter the power of the wealthy, industrialised nations, groups 19 nations with the admission last year of news members Iran and Colombia.

(END)