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G-15 summit may be overshadowed

Saiful Azhar Abdullah in Jakarta

THE question frequently raised among delegates to the G-15 summit in Jakarta is whether next Wednesday is the appropriate time to hold such talks.

On that day while other G-15 leaders are sitting with Indonesian President Abdurrahman Wahid to address these issues, Indonesia's House of Representatives (DPR) will hold a plenary session to decide whether it should propose to the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) to hold a special session to consider ousting their embattled leader.

Leaders of the 19 member nations are expected to go through gruelling sessions of talks on that day and Thursday to discuss perennial issue of the North-South divide.

The main agenda is to find ways to bridge the digital divide which is affecting the progress of developing and least developed countries.

In the wake of the world's digital revolution, member nations have begun to realise that they will have to reconsider the way they conduct their trade, investment and other economic activities to keep pace with the fast changing world where information and communication technologies pervade every aspect of human lives.

But many believe current political developments in Indonesia have stolen the thunder from the summit.

Yesterday, the hugely popular Indonesian Vice-President Megawati Soekarnoputri made her appearance at the opening of the G-15 private sector meeting at the Jakarta Convention Centre, a kilometre away from where the DPR's plenary session would take place to decide Wahid's fate.

Indonesian Police Chief Gen Surojo Bimantoro had said he would be deploying 4,500 joint security personnel to secure the venues where the two major events would be taking place that day.

The venue of the G-15 summit has been placed under heavy security since yesterday, six days before the arrival of the leaders of the member nations.

Megawati set the pace for the summit when she called on the private sector to work closely with governments to gain mastery of information and communication technology.

She pointed out how hundreds of millions of people in developing countries, who were the victims of poverty, were lagging behind the people in developed nations due to their inability to master information and communication technology.

Only five per cent of the six billion world population, she said, really had the capabilities arising from their mastery and utilisation of information.

However, the participation of 250 people comprising bankers, business leaders, small and medium enterprise representatives as well as professionals from the ICT from all 19 countries of the G-15 pleased the host.

"Their presence provides the most eloquent testimony to the importance attached to this event by countries both inside and outside the G-15," said organising committee chairman of the private sector meeting, Haryono Eddyarto.

The participants spent six hours yesterday exchanging ideas and experiences on crucial matters of mutual concern and interest to the G-15 private sector.

It concerned issues relating to small and medium enterprises, trade financing and ICT.

"We are not going to be a member of Nato - meaning No Action, Talk Only," said Haryono at the meeting.

Three declarations came up from the meeting containing a number of specific proposals for co-operation among the G-15 countries.

These declarations will be submitted to the leaders for consideration on Wednesday.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will arrive here on Tuesday. He is among eight heads of government to lead their delegations to the summit.

Other heads of government or state who will attend the talks are from Algeria, Senegal, Nigeria, Venezuela, Zimbabwe and Jamaica.

Columbia, Iran, Sri Lanka, Peru, Mexico, Egypt, Kenya, India, Chile, Brazil and Argentina will either be represented by their deputy leaders or Foreign Ministers.

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