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Resolute on affirmative action

Saiful Azhar Abdullah in Jakarta

"IS now the right time to hold a Group of Fifteen summit in Jakarta?" asked the sceptics in the Indonesian capital.

At the same time the summit's inaugural session convenes tomorrow in the Jakarta Convention Centre (JCC) with a statement by Abdurrahman Wahid, the chairman of the G-15, the House of Representatives (DPR), just a few hundred metres away from the summit venue, will hold a plenary session to decide the fate of the Indonesian President.

House members are expected to call for a People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) special session to impeach Abdurrahman on the grounds that he failed to heed two motions of censure against him.

Meanwhile, G-15 heads of State and Government arrive today at the Halim Perdana Kusuma military airport and the Soekarno Hatta international airport to tight security.

Police forces have deployed 27,000 personnel around the capital and security chiefs have warned protesters that the police have orders to shoot if the situation warrants it.

Security checks at every entrance to the Jakarta Hilton International where the G-15 leaders and delegates will stay have been intensified.

Some 4,000 officers from the military and police will be present at the JCC and 7,000 others at the DPR to provide security.

"In ring I (referring to a critical area in front of the DPR), the police will use live bullets, not to kill but to paralyse the trouble makers," Jakarta Police Chief Inspector Gen Sofjan Yacob said on Saturday.

G-15 leaders would be sitting with Abdurrahman to redress issues affecting developing countries. Whatever the fate of the Indonesian President tomorrow, the member countries, especially Malaysia, are determined that the summit concludes with affirmative action plans to address international financial issues and the digital gap between developed and developing countries.

Briefing Malaysian journalists on Sunday night in Jakarta, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said Malaysia expects the summit to lay a concrete plan in the process of reforming the international financial architecture.

After going through the bitter experience of a financial crisis which sent nations in the region into the economic doldrums with the devaluation of local currencies by Western rogue speculators, Malaysia, in the person of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, is expected to press for the establishment of a panel of experts to study the international financial architecture.

"The panel will study how we can modify and improve the system," said Syed Hamid.

If accepted, it will be the first concrete action to be taken by any group to address the issue.

Malaysia is expected to explain to the summit that the same economic problems will recur if sufficient defences are not worked out.

"Certain procedures have to be devised to ensure the financial market operates in an efficient way," said Syed Hamid.

Malaysia will tell member countries that "the financial market in the present form will cause problems to developing economies".

Doubt exist whether Latin American countries would be receptive to the establishment of the panel in view of the West's influence on several of

them.

But Malaysia feels that the proposal to review the financial architecture has gained wide acceptance and "it is now just a matter of willingness to move forward".

If Malaysia's proposal materialises, it will be one of the more notable achievements of G-15 since its first summit in Kuala Lumpur in 1990.

That should also erase doubts about the significance of the group whose summit tomorrow has already been undermined for being one of the most sparsely attended.

Despite its name, the group has 19 members. Only seven Heads of State or Government are expected to attend.

Unfortunately, Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe has been reported to have cancelled his trip to Jakarta due to the death of Zimbabwe's Defence Minister Moven Mahachi in a car crash on Sunday.

Besides Abdurrahman and Dr Mahathir, the others are Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, Senegal President Abdoulaye Wade, Venezuela President Hugo Chavez, Egyptian Prime Minister Atef Ebeid and Jamaican Prime Minister James Patterson.

Other member countries will be represented either by their Vice Presidents or high ranking State officials. The new members are Iran and Colombia.

Events preceding the summit began last Friday, and yesterday the Foreign Ministers deliberated on the joint communique and the first ever declaration to be issued by G-15 in its history - the Jakarta Declaration.

This is also the first time a G-15 summit has a clear focus on the issues to be deliberated.

The theme for the summit is "harnessing the potential of the digital era for development".

The Declaration is expected to stress on the commitment of members to close the digital gap in their countries.

The officials have been working on defining the best strategies and practices to narrow the gap with the co-operation of the private sector.

Over the past few days, they have been trying to establish a common position on the legal framework for information communications technology development.

They have also discussed Indonesia's proposal to establish a common fund to finance activities of the G-15 task force on ICT as well as finance concrete projects in member countries.

The main concern of member countries was the huge gap in the world of ICT revolution.

In developing countries where approximately 84 per cent of the global population live, the ownership ratio of personal computers per 100 inhabitants is only 2.3 for medium-income countries and only 0.1 for low-income countries.

In developed countries today, there are 321 Internet service providers per 10,000 people compared with just six ISPs per 10,000 people in developing countries.

While in the United States roughly one in three persons uses the Internet, in South Asia only one in every 10,000 people does.

The resulting effect of this is that only five per cent of the world's population could claim connectivity and the greater majority of these are from the developed countries.

Meanwhile the joint communique is expected to touch on other matters including multilateral trade, the proposed new round of talks for the World Trade Organisation and the adverse impact of globalisation.