

Delegates: Business forum a success

BY NICK LEONG *star 18/10/03*

IF at all the current session of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) summit has failed to achieve anything, it can at least point to the success of its business forum.

The forum, the first to be held in conjunction with the OIC summit, provided a valuable venue for businessmen from Muslim countries to meet, network and explore the opportunities in each other's country.

"It is a wonder how we did not do this (holding a business forum alongside the OIC summit meeting) sooner," said Boualem Belazouz, a delegate from Algeria.

Pakistani delegate S. Ali agreed, saying that the forum was essential for the future of the OIC. "It should be institutionalised and held whenever the OIC meets."

The forum, he said, informed Muslim businessmen like him about opportunities in other Muslim countries. "If we can do business in other countries, why not in a Muslim country?" he asked.

Although important as a platform for Muslim businessmen to get

together, the forum served a wider and more important role, of bridging the gap between the public and private sectors.

"Such meetings may be common in Malaysia but are rare in many other countries," said a Malaysian delegate who declined to be named.

The forum also provided an avenue to put into action the pledges and declarations made by the heads of state.

Over the years, the OIC has acquired a somewhat undeserving tag as the "ultimate talk shop".

Although a harsh indictment, many felt the 57-member conference has more often than not, failed to deliver what mattered most - lifting of the living standards of Muslims.

"Too much time is spent on politicking and striving for idealistic but impossible aims like Muslim unity," said Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia political scientist Dr Nidzam Sulaiman.

He said while Muslims should not

be carried away by material development, they should also not neglect it.

It is a point Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad highlighted in his keynote address to the forum on Wednesday. He said Islam and trade went hand-in hand.

"The role of trade, or business, is so important and so great that Islam is the only religion which prescribes in detail the way that business should be done," he noted.

He said trade had even helped the faith to spread far and wide across the world, including to this country.

The message was not lost on Belazouz and Ibrahima Naite. Belazouz said he was struck by how far the Muslims had fallen behind.

Ibrahima said Muslims had been distracted by "too much politicking". "We talk about unity and religion but forget that Islam is a way of life. It is life." It was appropriate that Malaysia should lead the way, he said. "If there is a successful Muslim country in the world, it is Malaysia."

