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Palestine issue to continue to be given due attention

PALESTINIAN leader Yasser Arafat may not be attending the 10th OIC Summit but issues concerning the Palestine-Israel conflict are expected to continue to be given due attention.

Since the first OIC Summit was held in Rabat, Morocco in 1969, member countries have not missed deliberating the issues but they have yet to come up with a concrete peaceful solution to the conflict.

The summit was held 34 years ago in the wake of an arson attack on the Al-Aqsa mosque on Aug 21, 1969 in Palestine, which brought the much-divided Arab and Muslim world together.

The late King Hussein of Jordan called for an urgent Arab summit to discuss steps to protect Islamic holy places, including the Al-Aqsa mosque.

By that time, holy places, including the Al-Aqsa mosque had come under Israeli occupation following its victory in the six-day war with Arab countries in June 1967 when it occupied East Jerusalem, previously under Jordan.

On Aug 25, 1969 the foreign ministers of the Arab League, at their meeting at the league's headquarters in Cairo, decided to call for a summit meeting of Islamic states to discuss the latest situation following the fire at the mosque.

Thirteen countries, including the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), attended the meeting where two proposals were reportedly made to convene a summit meeting of all Islamic countries and for an Arab summit meeting.

At the meeting, they reached a consensus to hold an Islamic summit conference in Rabat, with a preparatory committee meeting was held in the capital city of Morocco on Sept 8 and 9, attended by seven countries, including Malaysia.

The committee agreed to propose to the heads of Islamic countries to hold a conference in Rabat to discuss the mosque issue and the holy city of Jerusalem.

Twenty-five of 36 invited countries attended the first summit, with Malaysia represented by the late Tengku Abdul Rahman, who later became the first secretary-general of the organisation.

The summit ended with resolutions and declarations, which among others, declared that the "menaces which continue to threaten the sanctuaries of Islam in Jerusalem are the consequence of the occupation of that city by Israeli forces".

But till today, there seem to be a "never-ending story" to the Palestine-Israel conflict. Violence still persists and the Palestinians are being victimised and denied the right to their own land.

In fact, there was an attempt to remove Arafat from being the Palestinian leader by the Israelis. The possibility of assassinating him is also included as an option to remove Arafat.

Various quarters criticised Israel's action to remove Arafat, which led to the United Nations to pass a resolution demanding Israel retract threats to remove him.

The UN's vote against Israel's move was described by Palestinian leaders as an important sign of support for the Palestinians.

The United States, however, used its veto power over the UN's Security Council resolution seeking to protect Arafat from an Israeli threat to

remove "him".

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad had described the US move as "scary" as the veto seemed to be legitimising assassination.

Because of the threat from Israel, Arafat has been confined to his headquarters in the West Bank town of Ramallah for 22 months now.

Due to safety concerns, he was not able to attend the Non-Aligned Movement Summit in Kuala Lumpur in February.

Dr Mahathir had also reiterated that the US-initiated road map to resolve the Palestine-Israel conflict had no future unless the rights of the Palestinians were recognised.

Dr Mahathir, who is the incoming OIC chairman, said he did not see an amicable solution to the conflict in the near future as the Palestinians were continuously being victimised and denied the right to their own land.