

26/02/2003

48 countries for OIC meeting today

Ramlan Said

IF numbers are any indication, the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) informal meeting today is already a success as 48 countries have confirmed their attendance.

Fourteen nations will be represented by heads of government and state.

Malaysia, which has called for the meeting to take advantage of the presence of so many OIC leaders at the Non-Aligned Movement Summit that ended yesterday, should not be faulted for its initiative.

It is irresponsible to accuse the NAM chairman, which will assume the leadership of the OIC in October, of wanting to usurp the current chairman, Qatar.

With 50 OIC members who are also NAM countries in Kuala Lumpur for the summit, the opportunity to discuss issues affecting the Muslim world was too good to pass up.

With Iraq, a member of both the OIC and NAM, facing imminent war, it will be a dereliction of duty and obligation not to act and to send the strongest message to the United States and its allies that war is not the path to be pursued.

The deteriorating situation in Palestine is another grave issue that warrants the immediate attention of Muslim countries.

With Palestinians being killed almost every day by the Tel Aviv regime, Muslim nations are equally responsible for the continuing bloodshed if they choose to be idle.

OIC has 57 members and invitations to attend the informal meeting to the seven members who are not in NAM have been sent out.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who will address today's meeting, is expected not only to continue with where he left off at the NAM summit - where he made the call to outlaw war - but also to speak on the failure of Islamic countries to unite to protect their fellow Muslims.

OIC members should not let the collective condemnation and rejection of war arising from the NAM summit peter out so soon.

Never mind the contention that another condemnation from another talk-shop will not deter the superpowers.

Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar addressed this, saying that what's important was for the OIC to make its views known.

And the large number of member countries attending was already a good sign, said Syed Hamid.

"Forty-eight is a good figure even for an ordinary or special meeting. You can't expect to get full attendance."

He admitted the number surpassed Malaysia's expectations, considering that Qatar has summoned members to an emergency meeting on March 4 and 5 in Doha.

Arab leaders will also meet in Cairo on March 1 where they will attempt to adopt a common policy concerning Iraq.

On the remaining nine OIC members who were not coming to Kuala Lumpur, Syed Hamid said some, like the non-NAM members, were unable to attend due to the short notice.

But he said there would be representatives at the advisory level from these countries.

Syed Hamid said Dr Mahathir would kick-start the meeting, after which a "free-wheeling" discussion would commence.

"We hope the discussions will provide valuable input for the Doha

meeting."