

16/10/2003

Resolving ummah's woes

Ashraf Abdullah; Kamarulzaman Salleh; Ramlan Said; Chok Suat Ling; Noor THE 10th Organisation of the Islamic Conference Summit opens today with leaders from 57 Muslim countries seeking consensus to resolve a host of problems afflicting the ummah.

This year's summit is the first to be hosted by a Southeast Asian country and affirms the growing prominence of Malaysia and the region as emerging Muslim powerhouses.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will address the opening of the summit as its chairman.

An announcement on a special award in his honour, called the "Mahathir Award for Islamic Studies" will also be made during the ceremony.

The largest gathering of Islamic nations since the Sept 11, 2001 attacks, will be dominated with difficult questions on post-war Iraq and the OIC's role.

The 35 Heads of State and Government, who will huddle over the next two days at the Putrajaya Convention Centre, will be faced with stark differences of opinions on how to help the occupied country return to normalcy.

Iraq's Governing Council had rejected the involvement of troops from any OIC member, saying it was more comfortable working with US-led occupation forces.

An eagerly-awaited OIC resolution which could have paved the way for members to contribute to Iraq's restoration and reconstruction was derailed.

The Governing Council yesterday asked the 57-member grouping for a postponement on the resolution in order to await for a United Nations Security Council decision being debated at the world body.

This came about after a request made at the UN Security Council by France, Germany and Russia for the US to set an exit timetable from Iraq was rejected by the Americans.

UN secretary-general Kofi Annan, who was scheduled to attend the OIC summit, cancelled at the last minute to attend to the matter.

Despite the setback, there is still optimism that the OIC's traditional declaration on Palestine will be followed through this time around with action.

There has been growing calls for OIC members to either impose economic and political sanctions on Israel or pressure the United States, Israel's chief ally, into action.

Amid such difficulties, the OIC summit this time around will pay greater emphasis on the development of Islamic-based trade and financing among members, which, at present, stand at a mere 11 per cent.

OIC secretary-general Dr Abdelouahed Belkeziz called on Muslim countries to seize the opportunity to reinforce trade among Islamic nations, describing the World Trade Organisation ministerial meeting in Cancun, Mexico, as a failure.