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Economic issues to dominate assembly

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KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. - The economy and issues relating to the economic problems are expected to dominate proceedings at the three-day Umno general assembly starting on Thursday.

Delegates will debate on only two topics - the economy and the president's speech - unlike previous years when specific matters on education, religion and social issues were favourite subjects.

Umno secretary-general Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik said party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will open the assembly and deliver the presidential address touching on various issues on Friday.

"In view of the prolonged economic problems, the highlight of the assembly will be the resolution on the economy. We expect to hear exchange of ideas and constructive comments from delegates.

"There is no restriction. The party's leadership will listen to any view," he said in an interview today at his office at the Ministry of Culture, Arts and Tourism.

Many party leaders are hoping the debate on the economic problems will go beyond rhetorics and raise constructive ideas to deal with the economic downturn and promote economic recovery.

They also hope the delegates would take a serious look at the economic woes because it could lead to public discontent.

Sabbaruddin said there was not much change made to the protocols for this year's convention and he was satisfied with the smooth preparation for the assembly, which began two months ago.

He said 1,907 delegates and observers from all over the country are expected to attend the assembly which will be preceded by the Umno Youth and Wanita assemblies on Thursday.

Besides inviting representatives from the 25 Umno clubs worldwide, Sabbaruddin said the assembly this year would see more foreign observers including Parti Kebangsaan Melayu Singapura, the Golkar party of Indonesia and Thailand Democratic Parti.

"Representatives of six political parties from seven countries have confirmed their attendance. They will be our guests-of-honour and observers," he said.

The joint opening of the Umno Youth and Wanita assemblies would be done by Umno deputy president Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim following which the respective heads - Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi (Youth) and Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman - will speak to their delegates separately.

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