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Umno delegates likely to send strong signal in support of leaders

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AMID strong speculations and rumours being circulated of late on what is in store in this year's Umno general assembly, the speeches, including by Umno Youth chief Datuk Ahmad Zahid Hamidi, are going to be scrutinised extra closely.

Ahmad Zahid and Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman will respectively make keynote speeches at the Youth and Wanita assemblies which will be held today, ahead of the party assembly proper.

Views and ideas raised by delegates will be analysed to determine their effects on the nation, now facing one of its worst economic problems.

Zahid's main speech at the Umno Youth Assembly will carry added significance as he had made certain remarks that triggered this round of speculation.

Being the main component party of the ruling Barisan Nasional, views of Umno delegates will likely have an influential impact on the Government's administration, especially on its efforts to address the current economic problems.

Thus any speculation and rumour concerning the party arising during and after the general assembly will be taken seriously by the people.

Some quarters claim the build-up of these unconfirmed reports over the past weeks had negatively affected the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange, already bruised by the regional economic slowdown.

Zahid is expected to clear the air about his recent remarks concerning "nepotism". He had described the practice of big corporations subcontracting privatised projects to companies they had interests in as "nepotism".

The Umno Youth chief had also in his speech at the opening of the congress on "Strengthening the National Economy" on June 7, called for positive elements like new management codes to fight corruption, nepotism and abuse of power.

Indeed, many speculate that the delegates will focus their speeches on these issues when debating the resolution on the economy.

Judging by Zahid's deputy Datuk Hishammuddin Tun Hussein's remark on Monday who said the movement leader's statement on cronyism and nepotism should be seen as sincere, one could expect the issues to be debated at length.

The spotlight will also be on the presidential address by Umno president and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad when he opens the three-day Umno general assembly tomorrow.

Delegates, invited guests and the people will concentrate on his speech expected to cover all aspects of the country's political and economic scenario.

On the content of the debate, a delegate to the assembly confided that the speakers would have to tread on the issue carefully when debating the resolution on the economy because "it is highly sensitive".

It would be damaging if any of the speakers were to point fingers, saying that debate would mostly circulate on suggestions to improve the economy.

Umno secretary-general Datuk Sabbaruddin Chik had told reporters at a briefing on Tuesday that only two resolutions would be tabled.

The resolutions are the debate on the presidential address and on the economy. With just two resolutions, he added, the delegates would have

ample time to debate the various issues.

The delegates, Sabbaruddin added, could still raise issues on religion, education and social issues when debating on the presidential address which would likely be touched by Dr Mahathir.

A total of 1,907 delegates comprising the permanent chairman and his deputy, 42 supreme council members, 30 Umno Youth representatives, 30 Wanita representatives and 1,803 Umno delegates from 165 divisions will attend.

Political observers believe that there would be emergency resolutions tabled at the assembly, particularly from Kedah Umno which had indicated it wanted to see no contests for the posts of party president and deputy president for next year's party elections.

The Kedah Umno liaison committee had on June 7 unanimously asked all divisions in the State to ensure that there would be no contest for the two top party posts.

Its chief Tan Sri Sanusi Junid had said the committee decided that Dr Mahathir and his deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim should not be challenged to enable them to concentrate on overcoming the nation's economic problems.

Observers said the best avenue to propose the motion would be at the general assembly. An emergency motion was tabled by a Penang Umno delegate in 1995 for a no-contest for the two top posts for the 1996 party elections and was unanimously passed.

Whatever the outcome of the assembly, Umno delegates are likely to participate actively in the debate and to send a strong signal to the people that they are strongly behind the present leadership in addressing the nation's problems.

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