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Curtain comes down in fitting show of unity

THE Umno general assembly ended yesterday and with it the seemingly festive air which had enveloped the Putra World Trade Centre for the past few days.

Traders who had set up hundreds of stalls at the concourse packed up their wares and dismantled their makeshift stands, but not before hawking off the last of their goods by offering "cheap sales".

Delegates and members of the public descended like locusts upon the baju kurung, samping, kuih-muih and costume jewellery stalls and then departed, as did others after having listened to debates and speeches at Dewan Merdeka or outside via a giant television screen.

They filed out in their colourful baju Melayu, kebaya or baju kurung, a veritable fashion parade.

The assembly ended with party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's winding-up speech, which focused on rebutting claims made by his former deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

Party treasurer and First Finance Minister Tun Daim Zainuddin, who also replied to points raised, delivered a candid yet insightful picture of the country's current economic scenario.

Delegates were accorded a rare chance to witness Daim, who is known as a man of few words, at his witty best. Presenting one of his longest speeches ever at Umno assemblies - the first in eight years - he refuted, among others, a claim that he had taken RM1 billion in cash out of the country.

Others who spoke during debates throughout the assembly were vice-president (who is assuming the duties of deputy president) Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, vice-president Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, Wanita Umno chief Datuk Dr Siti Zaharah Sulaiman, acting Youth chief Datuk Hishammuddin Hussein and supreme council members Datuk Dr Abdul Hamid Othman, Tan Sri Sanusi Junid and Datuk Ibrahim Ali.

A total of 34 speakers debated on three resolutions - the president's address, religion and society, and economy and education. All were passed unanimously.

Six speakers from Sabah, Perlis, Federal Territory, Malacca, Penang and Terengganu were denied the opportunity to speak due to time constraints.

The delegates agreed that the country's policies and Umno's efforts had contributed towards an increased pool of Bumiputera professionals via the education system.

They also said that Umno's struggles had enabled more Bumiputera students to be accorded places at local institutions of higher learning.

The speakers also unanimously agreed that the economic policies had worked towards the betterment of the nation, and contributed significantly in pulling the country out of the downturn.

Fittingly, to mark the end of the assembly and the resoluteness of party members towards unity and upholding the struggles of Umno, they collectively read a five-point pledge led by secretary-general Tan Sri Mohd Khalil Yaacob.

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