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Umno-Snippets
NEWS IN BRIEF ON THE 54TH UMNO GENERAL ASSEMBLY

KUALA LUMPUR, June 21 (Bernama) -- Following are brief news items on the final day of the 54th Umno General Assembly here today:

People who turned up at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) here for the 54th Umno General Assembly had a pleasant surprise -- complimentary copies of major local newspapers were given away.

Since Thursday, the opening day of the three-day assembly, Aastha Corporation Sdn Bhd has sponsored 1,000 copies of The Star for distribution to visitors and delegates daily.

Helping in the distribution were Jasmit Kaur Badsha and her daughter, Manisha Jeet Kaur, 8, who attracted attention with their "Jalur Gemilang" attire and constant smile and greetings.

Their unique dressing even drew a remark from Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad when he exchanged greetings with them before entering the Dewan Merdeka for the morning session today.

"Very nice costume," the prime minister was heard saying.

Copies of the New Straits Times, Berita Harian, The Malay Mail and Harian Metro were also given away for free for the past two days.

The Media Dining Hall catering to journalists covering the assembly was congested today because of gatecrashing by members of the public.

The queue for the free food and drinks provided by the organisers was longer than usual. Some journalists had to wait for up to 20 minutes to get their food, and those who did not have the time to spare left the place in disappointment.

The catering staff had their hands full attending to the crowd, and some workers were seen shaking their heads in disbelief.

The tables and chairs meant for some 50 people were fully occupied most of the time, forcing many to stand while eating.

As expected, PWTC was packed to the brim today, with many people having come to listen to the final winding-up speech of Dr Mahathir as the Umno president.

There was hardly any room to move on Level 2, where a sales promotion and exhibition were going on in conjunction with the assembly.

Many also took advantage of the special discounts offered by the 450 stalls as today is the final day of the assembly.

But the "Big Screen" still proved to be the strongest attraction -- many people parked themselves in front of the screen early to follow the proceedings live on closed-circuit television.

Given the big crowd, it is not surprising that some have fallen victim to pickpockets, although many police and security personnel were around.

Wallets and handphones were among the items reported stolen. One of the victims is a journalist, who lost a RM1,000 handphone while on his way to the Media Centre on Level 3.

"While trying to get through the crowd on my way here (Media Centre), I

suddenly realised that the handphone pouch hanging from my neck has become lighter," he told his colleagues.

Restoran Riverside, among the places catering to VIPs, also fell victim to people looking for free meals.

Several workers at the restaurant complained that it was difficult to ensure that everybody paid up because food was served buffet style and the place was packed.

Some patrons, with their wives and children in tow, took advantage of the situation by sharing tables with dignitaries and leaving without paying for their food.

Two waitresses were stationed at the main entrance of the restaurant to remind customers to settle their bills before leaving.

The constant crowd of people eager to shake Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's hand had given his bodyguards a hard time.

However, the situation did not deter Dr Mahathir from continuing to greet visitors and Umno members, especially when leaving the conference hall while on his way for the lunch break.

Flashing a smile, Dr Mahathir, accompanied by his wife, Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali, would stretch out his hand to meet the hands of those who lined up to greet him.

At one stage, his bodyguards suggested that Dr Mahathir use another passageway to avoid the thousands of people gathered at PWTC, but the prime minister did not agree.

It is learnt that Dr Mahathir did not want to disappoint those who had come to exchange greetings with him, especially since this is his last assembly as the party president because he is retiring in October.

As was the case at previous assemblies, the problem of toilets cropped up again this time although it has nothing to do with poor maintenance.

Rather, it was a case of the "veteran generation" complaining of difficulties in using "sophisticated" facilities at the washrooms.

Out of pity, some people offered to teach them how to use the taps.

-- BERNAMA

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