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Polls preparations to dominate discussions

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Umno's preparations for the next general election will dominate discussions at the party's general assembly here this month, party executive secretary Datuk Tengku Adnan Tengku Mansor said today.

Tengku Adnan said the presidential address would be tabled as one of the three resolutions of the assembly. The other two are on education/religion and on the economy.

He expected the president's address to draw a lot of attention from delegates as not only would this indicate the direction to be taken by the party, but would be the last amanat (message) from party president Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad before he passed the baton to his successor, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in October.

"For the first time, all liaison committee heads will be given the opportunity to debate the party presidential address during the three-day Umno general assembly. The head of the party's three movements - Wanita, Youth and Puteri - will also be given the chance to debate the same topic," he said, adding that preparations for the assembly were going on smoothly.

Tengku Adnan said this when asked on the weekly Umno management committee meeting today chaired by Abdullah.

The meeting discussed the forthcoming party assembly and the membership application of Bingkor assemblyman Datuk Dr Jeffrey Kitingan.

Tengku Adnan said the assembly would be an ordinary affair, with no promise of a surprise although this would be the last for Dr Mahathir.

"The prospect of a general election does add pressure but, other than that, it will be just an ordinary assembly with no frills although I am sure any member will consider this meeting to be not like any other Umno meeting before," he said.

Tengku Adnan said the programmes lined up would be similar to the previous assemblies, to be held over three days between June 19 and June 21.

"As this will be Dr Mahathir's last assembly, delegates will look forward to Dr Mahathir's amanat (message)," he said, adding that the assembly would focus more on strengthening the party and BN at large, to ensure the party's success in the coming general election.

With that, Tengku Adnan said delegates - from divisions and the party's Youth and Wanita wings - would certainly want to raise issues concerning Umno's preparation.

He said Dr Mahathir was expected to give his briefing to all the 165 division heads at 3pm on June 17, while Abdullah would open the Wanita, Youth and Puteri assemblies the same night.

The assembly proper will be from June 19 to June 21. Preparations began some three months ago with the finishing touches being put in place to ensure smooth proceedings.

On Jeffrey Kitingan's application, Tengku Adnan said the committee had discussed the matter but had yet to make any decision.