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Sergeant leads assault

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WHO has not heard of Sapok Biki? The Sarawakian delighted many Malaysians when he won the flyweight gold at the Kuala Lumpur Commonwealth Games last year.

No one had expected any Malaysian boxers to reach the semifinals, much less the final of the second biggest multi-event games in the world.

But Sapok did.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamed himself turned up at the final together with thousands of local spectators to cheer him on while millions more followed the fight on television.

They were not disappointed.

Sapok defeated Kenya's Moses Kinyua and has since become a household name.

But the 24-year-old army sergeant has never won a Sea Games gold, having been beaten by Indonesian Lapene Mansar in the last Games.

Mansar has turned professional and will not be eligible to box in the Games but his absence will not make a difference as Sapok will fight in the light flyweight (45-48kg) category in Brunei.

The Malaysian Amateur Boxing Federation (MABF) are optimistic that Sapok will finally get his elusive gold.

MABF secretary Mej Maulud Othman said Sapok is not the only boxer expected to deliver medals.

Adnan Yusoh (featherweight), Rakib Ahmad (flyweight) and new recruit Mohamed Zaki Hamid are also worth a medal each, based on their current form, said Maulud.

"I believe these four can deliver," he said, his confidence based on the boxers' fine form in training recently.

Malaysia will be sending eight boxers although there are 11 golds on offer.

The other boxers are Eddie Suip (bantamweight), Muruguthevan Balakrishnan (lightweight), Benny Thomas Vivian (light welterweight), Zainudin Sidi (welterweight).

Maulud said the boxers made much progress during a 45-day training stint with a Thai clubs in Bangkok. They are now back in training at the Jalan Raja Muda Stadium in Kuala Lumpur.