

# Dr M's presence a boost for Upko

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Rivalry intensifies as parties  
eye Chief Minister's post

By **EDDY LOK**

**KOTA KINABALU**, Mon: United Pasok Momogun Kadazandusun Organisation (Upko), struggling hard for native support, will get a much-needed boost when Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad opens its sixth annual congress on Thursday

Unlike previous congresses, this time around, Upko's status is politically-enhanced because Kadazandusun-based political parties are making a claim for the Chief Minister's post under Sabah's rotation system.

Incumbent Chief Minister Datuk Osu Sukam is due to vacate the post by March.

"The presence of Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and other heads of Barisan Nasional component parties would also rejuvenate the party" observers said.

Upko faces stiff competition from other native-based political parties such as Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah (PBRS) and the opposition Parti Bersatu Sabah for the same Kadazandusun-Murut votes.

The Kadazandusun and Murut communities had traditionally supported the PBS, ignoring the PBRS in previous elections.

"The PBRS wants to reverse this trend and hopes this time around it will win more support from the indigenous communities," an observer said.

Upko, headed by Tan Sri Bernard Dompok, is made up mostly of former PBS leaders just like the PBRS which is

led by Tan Sri Joseph Kurup.

Six former PBS assemblymen, led by Datuk Jeffrey Kitangan, joined PBRS recently

There are about 800,000 Kadazandusun-Muruts in Sabah, who make up about 40% of the state population.

Upko is also amending its constitution to spread its wings to Sarawak and Peninsular Malaysia and form branches for Sabahans, mostly workers and students, studying and living outside Sabah.

"Our main target is people from Sabah who are living in various parts of the country" Upko secretary-general Datuk Wences Angang said.

*Pasok Momogun* means 'native' and the party claims to have 1,500 branches in 25 divisions with a membership of 100,000.

Wences said another amendment to the constitution would allow the party to incorporate "Murut" in its name.

If approved, Upko, which has three assemblymen (including a nominated member) and three MPs among its leaders, will be known as United Momogun Kadazandusun-Murut Organisation.

About 600 delegates will attend the congress but elections are only due next year.

Upko has two ministers at the state level and Dompok is a minister in the Prime Minister's Department.

Wences said among the issues the congress will debate are the economy, education, rural development, politics and unity between the Kadazandusun and Murut community