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Kadazandusun community the loser if leaders fight for CM's post

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AMIDST denials by State Government leaders of an imminent reshuffle of the Sabah Cabinet, the United Pasok Momogun Kadazandusun Organisation (Upko) has reinforced its claim to the Chief Minister's post.

This Upko move is prompted by the growing popularity of another Kadazandusun-based Barisan Nasional component party, Parti Bersatu Rakyat Sabah (PBRs).

Like Upko, PBRs is also keen to have one of its leaders become Chief Minister.

Under the rotation system, Sabah Umno head Datuk Seri Osu Sukam's two-year term as Chief Minister will end in March next year. He has to pass on the baton of power to an assemblyman representing the non-Muslim Bumiputera (Kadazandusun and Murut) community.

Osu, who is also State Finance Minister, was sworn in to head the State Cabinet, representing the Muslim Bumiputera community, after being returned as Kawang assemblyman in the State election in March last year.

Under the rotation system introduced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad in 1994, the Chief Minister's post is rotated among leaders of the Muslim Bumiputera, non-Muslim Bumiputera and Chinese communities, not necessarily in that order.

Upko's claim for the post after Osu's term expires is based on the fact that a Kadazandusun leader, Tan Sri Bernard Dompok, did not complete his two-year term when the State Assembly was dissolved to make way for the March 1999 State election.

Dompok was Chief Minister for about 10 months and was unable to continue to hold the post after he failed to retain the Moyog seat. He is now Minister in the Prime Minister's Department after winning the Penampang parliamentary seat in the November general election.

When Osu became the Chief Minister, the BN understanding was that after Osu completed his term, a Kadazandusun leader from Upko will complete Dompok's remaining tenure as the State chief executive.

And this understanding is what Upko wants the BN to maintain, says Upko information chief Wilfred Madius Tangau who feels that a leader from the party, headed by Dompok, should be appointed the next Chief Minister.

He says Upko won two seats - Datuk Wences Anggang (Kuala Penyu) and Datuk Siringan Gubat (Ranau) - in the State election. The party also has a nominated assemblyman, Datuk Wilfred Mojilip Bumburing.

Bumburing is a Deputy Chief Minister while Anggang is Resource Development and Information Technology Minister. Gubat is Agriculture Development and Food Industry Assistant Minister.

"Our two seats are genuine, we won it (under Upko tickets)," Tangau says.

Tangau, who is the member of Parliament for Tuaran, says Upko was making a legitimate claim for the Chief Minister's post as it was also spelt out in the BN manifesto.

Dr Mahathir is scheduled to open Upko's sixth congress next week, but Tangau says that as the Chief Minister's post has been promised to the party, the issue will not be among the items to be discussed by the delegates.

The issue of the rotation of the Chief Minister's post surfaced again when PBRs, which did not win any seat in the March 1999 State election, accepted six elected assemblymen from Sabah's main opposition Parti

Bersatu Sabah (PBS) into its fold.

The six are Datuk Dr Jeffrey Kitingan (Bingkor), Johnny Goh Chin Lok (Inanam), Atong Mangabis (Matunggung), Edward Linggu (Tamparuli), Louis Rampas (Kiulu) and Karim Adam (Kundasang).

From zero after the State election, PBRS, headed by Tan Sri Joseph Kurup, is now number two in terms of the number of assemblymen in the State Legislative Assembly.

Kurup, a former Deputy Chief Minister, is also a nominated assemblyman.

He is reticent about the rotation issue.

"It is best left to the top Barisan Nasional leadership to decide on the appointment of the next Chief Minister. This is up to the Prime Minister and we must all accept and respect his decision," he says.

Kurup adds that PBRS does not wish to quarrel with anyone on the matter.

He says since the six PBS assemblymen joined his party, it had caused concern and possible apprehension among certain BN component parties.

"But I wish to state categorically that PBRS has no intention of overshadowing or elbowing out anybody within BN. Our declared aim is to strengthen BN and cooperate fully with our partners in the coalition," he says.

But for the time being, a reshuffle of the State Cabinet is not being planned, as stressed by Osu. He says his Cabinet is just over a year old and everything is going well.

There is only one post of Chief Minister and whoever is appointed must be respected.

Fighting it out for the Chief Minister's post will not benefit the Kadazandusun community.

Upko and PBRS leaders must always remember that despite Kadazandusun leaders having been Chief Ministers in the past, the community is still lagging behind in all aspects compared to the other races.

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