

25 JUL 2000

Party

UPKO UPBEAT ON GREATER PROGRESS UNDER BN

By: Mohamed Nasir Yusof

KUALA LUMPUR, July 25 (Bernama) -- Come Thursday, Upko or Parti Pertubuhan Pasok Momogun Kadazandusun Bersatu, in all likelihood, will become the first Sabah-based party to spread its wings to Sarawak and the Peninsula.

It is a foregone conclusion that the party's congress on Thursday would endorse constitutional amendments towards that end, said Upko secretary-general Datuk Wences Angang.

Going pan Malaysian, he said, would help the party serve the aspirations of politically-conscious Kadazandusuns and Muruts, estimatedly in tens of thousands scattered and employed nation-wide.

"We expect the two-day congress to approve the constitutional amendments," he told Bernama here today.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is scheduled to open the congress.

The proposed amendments also seek to add the words Murut to the party name, transforming it to Parti Pertubuhan Pasok Momogun Kadazandusun Murut Bersatu although the acronym Upko would remain, Wences said.

Upko, one of the three main parties in Sabah since pre-Independence days, was dissolved in 1967 and was revived in August last year when Parti Demokratik Sabah (PDS) changed its name to Upko.

The name change saw Upko membership doubling to 100,000 from 50,000 when it was then known as PDS, indicating the increasingly strong support it enjoyed from Sabah Bumiputera communities namely the Kadazandusuns and Muruts who were previously more inclined to affiliate themselves to the opposition Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS).

Wences said he was convinced that the Kadazandusuns and Muruts represented by Upko would stand to benefit more from the mainstream of national development by being within the ruling coalition Barisan Nasional (BN).

Translated into statistics of power politics, he said, support for Upko could be seen in terms of the three parliamentary and three state assembly seats it now holds besides a senatorship.

"We revived Upko with the aim of convincing the Kadazandusuns and Muruts into supporting the BN and this we have accomplished. We're now embarking on improving this further," he said.

Wences said the last general election also testified that Upko's gain was PBS' loss in terms of support when Upko president Tan Sri Bernard Dompok won the Kinabalu parliamentary seat by a commendable majority of 6,000 votes.

In contrast, the dwindling support for PBS was reflected by the 250-vote majority secured by PBS president Datuk Seri Pairin Kitingan in Keningau where Kadazandusuns made up more than 90 per cent of the electorate, he said.

In the 1990 general election Pairin won the seat by more than 8,700 votes.

Wences said that with 25 divisions and 1,600 branches throughout Sabah and the Federal Territory of Labuan, Upko has been accepted by the Kadazandusuns and Muruts as a vehicle for them within the BN as MIC is for the Indians, MCA the Chinese and Umno, the Malays.

"It has dawned upon both Sabah's old and new generations that Upko within the BN, which we joined in 1994, is specially for them. We've achieved much for the community... the biggest achievement being the approval for bahasa Kadazandusun to be taught as a subject in schools in Sabah," said Wences, who is also the state Minister for Human Resource and IT Development.

Upko has struck a sentimental chord in the hearts of the Kadazandusuns and Muruts, he said.

According to Wences, Upko also fought and secured a Universiti Malaysia Sabah senate seat for the Kadazandusuns and Muruts besides securing a RM2-million state allocation for the university to conduct research on them.

He said Upko was also instrumental in initiating the establishment of the Kadazandusun chamber of commerce and industry to seize opportunities for economic betterment alongside the Malay and Chinese chambers.

"Upko will remain steadfastly with the BN to bring the Kadazandusuns and Muruts into the mainstream of development. We have no other choice as the multi-racial nature of the country requires us to cooperate and share power in order to continue to progress in peace," he added.

Thursday's Upko congress would discuss the future direction of the Kadazandusuns and Muruts within the BN in the new millennium as well as well as their education, economy, politics and unity.

-- BERNAMA

MNY AHH RYN