

Getting crowned on the second try

After eight years away, Sabahan wins Unduk Ngadau beauty pageant

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KOTA KINABALU: Eight years ago, she walked away empty-handed. This year, she walked away with the crown.

Atitih Yatih Robert of Tamparuli was crowned the 65th Unduk Ngadau Kaamatan at the Hongkod Koisaan on May 31, a traditional beauty pageant held in conjunction with the Kaamatan harvest festival.

The 26-year-old emerged the winner among 51 finalists from across Sabah and beyond, including participants from the Klang Valley, Putrajaya and Johor.

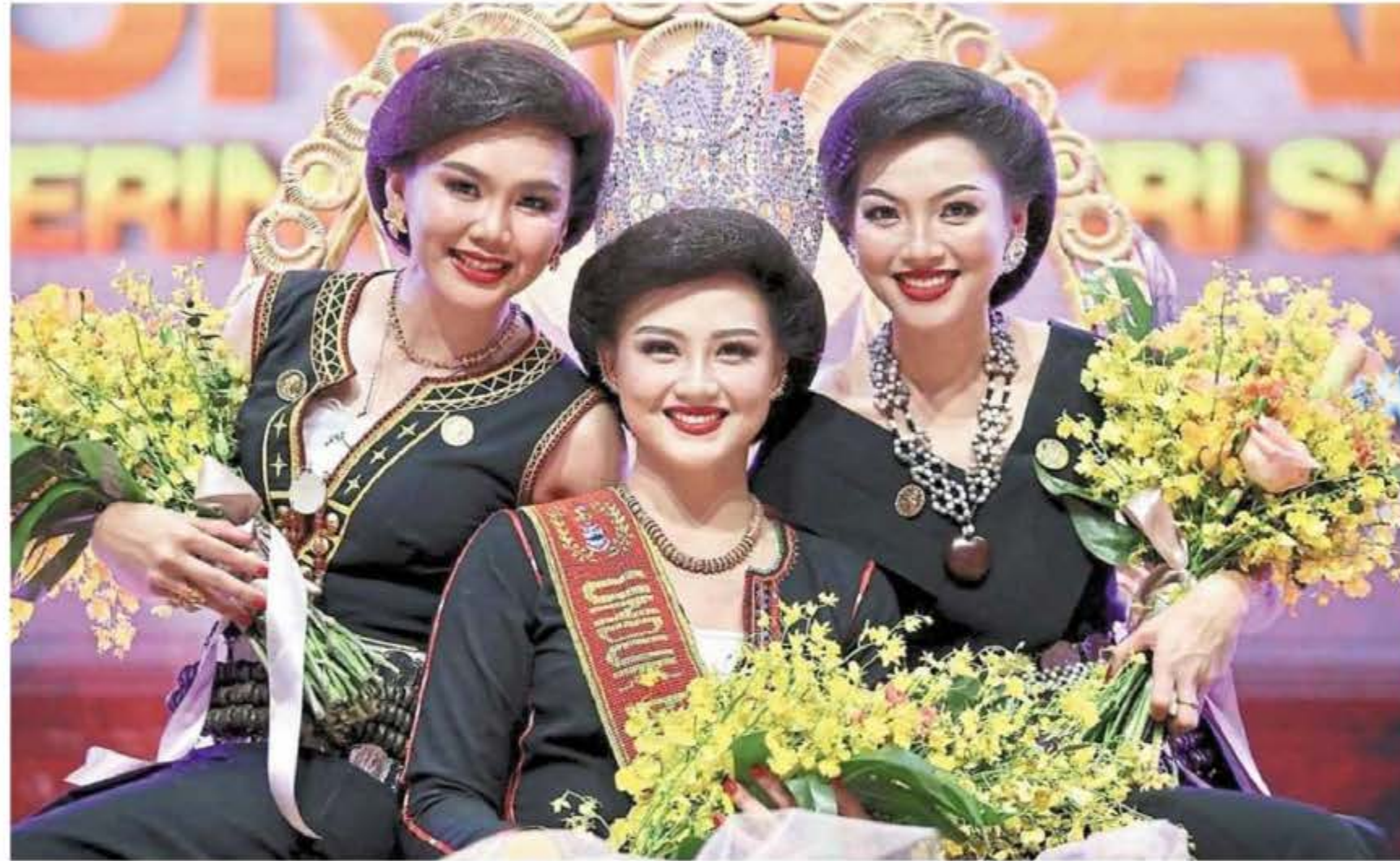
A graduate of Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) in Education (Bahasa Malaysia), Atitih is currently awaiting her teacher placement.

She first entered the pageant in 2017 at age 18, representing Kota Marudu, where she placed in the top 15 and was named Miss Popular Unduk Ngadau Sabah – a victory that nevertheless sparked disappointment among fans.

“I know many were disappointed back then. They asked me to return and this time, I gave it my all,” Atitih said.

After an eight-year hiatus to focus on her academic and career goals, she made a comeback with renewed purpose – this time representing Tamparuli, where she was crowned the district’s Unduk Ngadau.

Her maternal family traces its lineage back to Kampung



Winning and grinning: Atitih (centre) celebrates her Unduk Ngadau 2025 win with first runner-up Elka (left) and second runner-up Celarin.

Ruminding, Kiulu, in the Tuaran district, where her late grandmother Sungkim Elohoan once lived. Many of her relatives, including the current village chief, are still based there.

Atitih’s return to the stage wasn’t easy. In the five months leading up to the pageant, she lost over 10kg by practising regular workouts and a strict diet.

“That was my biggest challenge,” she admitted. “I used to weigh about 70kg. I loved sweets

– especially chocolate – but I made the decision to commit,” she said, adding that she pushed through even though there were moments when she felt like fainting from hunger.

“It’s not just about appearance. I wanted to show discipline and that I was serious.”

She also worked on building her confidence and overcoming deep-seated shyness.

Atitih has been active in traditional dance, singing, acting and

poetry recitation throughout her university life.

She also held leadership roles, including in the Sabah Student Association at UPM and Persatuan Siswazah Sabah di Semenanjung (G3S), where she promoted cultural pride among Sabahan youth.

She wore a traditional dress from Tenghilan known as the Pinialap, making her the first contestant to ever showcase the design at the Unduk Ngadau stage – a nod to both her heritage and

pride in her team.

Atitih took home RM15,000 in cash, a tiara, a UNK2025 sash, a trophy, bouquet and other prizes including scholarships, skincare products, dental treatments, free hotel stays and airline tickets.

Held annually as the highlight of the Kaamatan Festival, the Unduk Ngadau pageant is a cultural tradition cherished by the Kadazandusun Murut Rungus (KDMR) community – symbolising beauty, sacrifice and the legacy of Huminodun.

This year also marked a turning point for the pageant with the introduction of e-Unduk, a digital scoring system developed by Sabahan IT expert Aedeshie Daisy Rayner.

The organising committee described the system as an innovation that enhances the traditional scoring framework using scientific algorithms – a move they say will ensure greater fairness and credibility in the judging process.

As the curtains closed on the final night, cheers erupted for the top seven finalists who stood tall on stage – each carrying the pride of their districts and the spirit of Kaamatan.

Joining Atitih were Elka Alike Pijeh (Tambunan) as first runner-up and Celarin Jenny (Kiulu) as second runner-up.

Rini Swanda Jukilin (Beluran), Steavaynie Ginadus (Beaufort), Jenylin Janis (Ranau) and Evanatie Sannie (Bandaraya Kota Kinabalu) were the other finalists.