

Stop bickering over manifestos, says Saifuddin

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By Ram Anand

Umno supreme council member Saifuddin Abdullah called on politicians from both sides of the divide today to take their verbal fisticuffs on the originality of their manifestos beyond bickering to a proper discourse.

"I don't think we want to go down that lane (of arguing)," he in answer to a question on the originality of both manifestos during a forum on the key factors that will determine the election, organised by Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute (Asli) along with Youtube and KiniTV.

We need to bring our discourse to a higher level," he told some 100 participants along with his fellow panel members, which included his BN colleague Gan Ping Sieu, PAS strategist Mujahid Yusof Rawa and DAP's Liew Chin Tong at a Kuala Lumpur hotel.

"Rakyat should take this (similarities of the manifestos) as a blessing. It shows that both sides are becoming more centric with their policies," added Saifuddin (above), often known to be the most outspoken among his Umno colleagues.

His BN colleague Gan later shot down the opposition's claim that his coalition had copied their manifesto by saying that nobody has a "monopoly over ideas."

"Good governance, education, good roads- these are ideas that are common to all. You cannot claim monopoly over ideas," he said.

Asli director Dr Ramon Navaratnam (left), who gave a brief speech towards the end of the forum, seemed to have concurred, saying that ideas should not be a monopoly of any one party.

"But both sides (BN and Pakatan Rakyat) don't seem to be at loggerheads here today. They have more similarities," he said.

Debate can happen

At a press conference at the conclusion of the forum, Saifuddin said that the possibility of a debate between BN chair Najib Abdul Razak and Opposition Leader Anwar Ibrahim can still take place.

Saifuddin, a known exponent of the debate culture who has represented the erstwhile ruling coalition in many such forums and dialogues, said that the process must be initiated by a third party "both personalities are comfortable with."

"Today is not about me throwing a challenge to Mujahid (left) or vice versa. Asli engaged us

and we agreed to come. Similarly, a third party needs to initiate the process and negotiate with both leaders," he said.

"If you do it properly it can be done. It is not like it has never been done before," he quipped.

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