

Tsu Koon claims sowed seeds of Guan Eng's gains

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By Shazwan Mustafa Kamal

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 20 — Senator Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon is claiming that Penang's economic success now should be attributed to his previous administration, accusing Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng of "unfairly" taking credit due to Barisan Nasional (BN).

Koh, who was Penang CM from 1990 until March 2008, lamented that the "solid foundation" of various development projects laid down by his administration was handed over to Lim who, according to Koh, then skilfully "used" the media to claim ownership to the success of various initiatives.

"To be fair we have to attribute the hard work of many people driven and guided by the state government, BN at that time, under me. The hard work we did for the past 12 years, by the time Lim Guan Eng took over developments, projects were already at an advanced stage.

"We did all the hard work. I would say all. But whatever's good for Penang, we rejoice over it. But if he (Lim) were to claim credit over it, it would be unfair," Koh told The Malaysian Insider in an exclusive interview this week.

According to the Malaysian Industrial Development Authority (Mida), Penang topped total capital investments in manufacturing projects in 2010 by attracting RM12.24 billion, up nearly five times compared to RM2.17 billion in 2009.

Koh accused Lim of "stealing" his credit for Penang's current revival. — File pic
Mida statistics also showed Penang was second only to Selangor up to May 2011, getting RM4.49 billion in approved manufacturing projects, or just below the RM4.74 billion Selangor received for the same period.

The Gerakan president also said that comparisons made between Lim's administration and his own were unjust, and pointed out that investments and development did not happen overnight as these were an "accumulative" effect.

"One prime example is Penang's listing as a World Heritage Site... my administration had been trying since 1996. We were hoping to get listed in 2006 or 2007, (but) it was very challenging because of our joint listing application with Malacca. Unesco listing was approved in July 2008, just four months after Lim Guan Eng took over," Koh said.

On July 7, 2008, Penang's city capital, Georgetown, was together with Malacca formally inscribed as Unesco World Heritage Sites.

The same thing applied to investments, according to Koh, who said it sometimes took investors "years" to decide on whether to invest in Penang, and added that these were also subject to negotiations with the Mida.

"Until today some of the investment approved by Mida or announced by investors was work that we had done five years ago. Many of this re-investment we have been promoting even during (Tun Lim) Chong Eu's time but especially during my 18-years as CM," added Koh.

The former three-term CM added Penang's announcement of a state reserve of RM1 billion last year was no great feat, calling it "misleading" that Lim failed to mention that the state's reserve was already at RM850 million when Pakatan Rakyat (PR) took over in 2008.

"He (Lim) made it sound as if BN had left the state with zero ringgit in reserves, and he raised RM1 billion... misleading assumptions, craftily created," he said.

Koh's latest attacks against his political rival come amid renewed efforts within BN to pressure the Gerakan president to step down before the coming general election. They said this was necessary if the coalition is to have any chance of wresting back Penang from PR.

Koh has been viewed as indecisive and a symbol of the BN leadership that was rejected by the voters in 2008.

The Economist called Penang "the first custom-made city of globalisation". — Picture by Jack Ooi

BN chairman and Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak has spoken behind closed doors on the need to rejuvenate the Gerakan leadership with younger talent and acknowledges that BN component parties need new blood if inroads are to be made in Penang, where DAP's Lim is a formidable opponent.

In its latest issue dated August 13, international weekly The Economist dubbed Penang "the first custom-made city of globalisation" and credited Lim for boosting the port city's revival by axing a racially-biased economic policy in the state to create a more level-playing field that appealed to foreign investors.

The international praise for Lim is seen as an indictment of Koh's rule of the island state, which began prospering under his mentor, the late Tun Lim Chong Eu, before the Princeton graduate took over as chief minister.

Admitting to be media-shy, Koh said this may have given his rival the upper hand.

"(But) I would say that if BN were to [have won] in March 08, based on the momentum we have created 21 years under Tun Lim Chong Eu, [and] 18 years under me, Penang would have achieved the same achievements (as the present DAP government.)

"I believe in teamwork, believe in working together. I don't steal publicity from other people... not like Lim Guan Eng," said Koh.

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