

Come to Penang and learn good governance, Saifuddin tells Najib
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The strategic adviser to the Penang chief minister says the prime minister's 'episodes of showmanship' on overseas trips are not going to solve the fundamental problems in the country.

PENANG: The strategic adviser to the chief minister of Penang, Saifuddin Nasution Ismail, wants Prime Minister Najib Razak to visit Penang to learn how to govern the nation.

Noting that in any developing economy, there would always be inflows and outflows of investment, as was happening in Malaysia and even Penang, he said:

“What is exceptional about Penang is its ability to attract quality knowledge-intensive investments.”

Major technology companies such as Intel continue to have a strong presence in Penang and the flow of investments into Penang continued to be in the top three in the country over the last several years, he said.

Saifuddin, who is also PKR secretary general, said in a statement that the Malaysian Industrial Development Authority's data showed that RM4.29 billion had flowed into Penang last year.

“At the same time, the state government managed to reduce its debt to only RM69 million compared with Kelantan's RM1.3 billion debt, Pahang's RM2.9 billion debt and Sabah's RM2.3 billion debt.”

He said: “The prime minister boasts about the billions in investments that he has supposedly brought in. Seasoned diplomats know that memorandums of understanding signed during state visits are just intentions and are not legally binding.”

He said individual parties involved, mostly corporations, still had to negotiate each deal and sometimes not all the announced deals led to actual investments.

“Even the recently signed deal between Saudi Aramco and Petronas is still being negotiated. So please don't count the eggs before they hatch.”

Saifuddin added: "So Prime Minister, are your overseas trips really about improving the conditions in this country or a part of your impression management in the run-up to the general election?"

"Short episodes of showmanship on your overseas trips are not going to solve the fundamental problems in this country. This is not Bollywood where people can be lulled into complacency with 1-2 hours of action and romance.

"Perhaps you should visit Penang and maybe you will learn something useful about good governance and competent management of the economy."

Turning to the country's performance, he asked, if Najib was doing so well, why were more than 400,000 youths unemployed and why was it that one in three graduates could not find a job.

Referring to a recent report by Deloitte, he said Malaysia was one of 15 countries expected to replace China as a low-cost manufacturing base, and that the country was experiencing declining competitiveness.

"In other words, even China is graduating out of the low-cost manufacturing segment and leaving Malaysia behind. Hey, how else does one explain Malaysia now having to buy trains and warships from China? There goes Vision 2020 and the desire to become a high income country.

"Instead, Malaysia looks certain to remain stuck as a low and perhaps upper low income nation," Saifuddin said.

"Remaining as a low manufacturing location also means that many of the new jobs created will be in low skill and labour intensive positions. And Malaysia is bringing in many foreign workers to do these jobs. So, are young Malaysians supposed to be excited about the prospect of such a bleak future?"

He also noted the budget cuts and the effect this has had. The cut in budget allocation and sponsorship for higher education, for instance, had led to a reduction in intakes of universities, especially private universities, he claimed.

"UniKL which is owned by Mara and caters mainly for Bumiputera students has experienced a decline of almost 50% in student intake. Is this better for the Bumiputeras?"

He ticked off Najib for finding it "necessary" to talk about Penang and criticisms about his leadership by Malaysians during his recent India trip. He asked if investors in India might not feel the whole country was complicit in corruption and that there was no hope for Malaysia because of what he had said there.

He accused Najib of wanting a nation where everyone was supposed to pretend that the emperor was adorned in fabulous clothes when in actuality the kingdom had been conned by a group of people.

Saifuddin said if Najib came to Penang, he would find that “even though Penang leaders are modestly attired, they sure have clothes on”.

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