

KeADILan Manifesto 2008 - A New Dawn For Malaysia

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Preamble

Part I - A Constitutional State for All

Upholding Unity, Integrity & Human Rights

Part II - A Vibrant, Prosperous Economy for All

Equitable Distribution for Better Competitiveness

Part III - A Safer Malaysia for All

A Cleaner Police Force for Safer Streets

Part IV - An Affordable Malaysia for All

Better Control of Prices for Petrol & Basic Goods

Part V - Better Education for All

Universal Access to Higher Quality Education

Preamble

As Malaysia stands at a crossroads, we must now decide if we are ready for a better future. Over the last few years, we have seen our nation being dragged through increasing racial division, debilitating economic performance as well as unprecedented levels of crime and corruption.

Where once we stood shoulder to shoulder with the very best in terms of economic growth, the rule of law and educational standards, the world now looks down on Malaysia as an uncompetitive economy with sub-par universities and courts completely bereft of any judicial integrity.

This document encapsulates KeADILan's™ vision for putting Malaysia back on track. It describes how we will build a nation that reflects the true potential, talent and calibre of the Malaysian people. It centres on five central positions that we believe are key to beginning the healing process in Malaysia.

First, we will make Malaysia a truly constitutional state for all.

KeADILan believes that the spirit of the Constitution and the rule of law must be honoured in deed, and not only in words. True adherence to the Constitution and principles of universal justice will ensure the rule of law and an independent judiciary, as well as guarantee that the basic human rights and dignity of all are protected and upheld. A constitutional state affirms the need to reject all forms of racially divisive politics and pave the way for a society that holds unity, justice and mutual respect above all.

Second, we will create a vibrant economy for all.

KeADILan's Malaysian Economic Agenda espouses our belief that if we are to compete globally and ensure vibrant internal growth, discriminative policies that only enrich the elites must be replaced with a policy that ensures assistance to all poor Malaysians regardless of race. For Malaysia to stand again amongst giants like South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore, we must play by the rules of the global game as well as eliminate corruption and wastage.

Third, we must make the streets and neighbourhoods of Malaysia safer for all.

Endemic mismanagement of the police force for political ends, internal division and tolerance of a culture of corruption have all crippled the ability of the police to serve and protect ordinary Malaysians. Countless children and loved ones have now tragically fallen victim to this fundamental failure of the authorities to guarantee our security. KeADILan envisions a police force that is professional, neutral, better deployed, better trained and better equipped to realise their primary goal of patrolling our streets and keeping Malaysians safe from every harm.

Fourth, we must make Malaysia more affordable for all.

As Malaysia is a net exporter of oil, sudden and dramatic hikes in petrol prices only reflect subsidies of an insatiable appetite for corruption in the ruling party. KeADILan promises to lower the price of petrol in line with higher Petronas profits as well as manage the prices of basic goods to ensure a consistent, steady supply. Tolls and tariffs will also no longer be raised unreasonably only to satisfy conglomerates and corporate interests.

Fifth, we must increase the standards of Malaysian education for all.

With Malaysian university rankings slipping well below the 200 mark and children leaving the national school system in droves, we must seriously re-evaluate the government's policies. KeADILan will allow institutions of learning the freedom to engage the best practices that raise the standard of education, pay educators the salaries their profession deserves, and enable universal access to scholarships and higher quality education for all. Only then can we can brighten the future of Malaysia and her children.

It is time for us to stand together as Malaysians and replace inept, failed leaders with leaders of calibre, vision and integrity. It is time to make Malaysia all it can be and to bring about a New Dawn for Malaysia.

Part I - A Constitutional State for All

Upholding Unity, Integrity & Human Rights

Living in the 21st century requires a 21st century government. Malaysia needs to leave behind outdated and harmful notions of racial segregation, repair the intense damage to her social fabric and bring integrity back into governance.

KeADILan's solution to this is embodied in the idea of a Constitutional State, where genuine social unity and respect for the constitutional rule of law is restored to its former heights.

The Constitution guarantees the rights of all Malaysians, regardless of race, class, gender or background. Adherence to its spirit and letter is the only way to ensure that the rights of every community is upheld and protected, paving the way for a society that is firmly united on the basis of mutual respect and justice for all.

Under the Constitution, bumiputera rights are guaranteed fully alongside with non-bumiputera rights. In a Constitutional State, the laws and policies that have created social divisions between Malaysians and barred the way to the mutual understanding that is required for genuine unity will be dismantled and replaced with laws and policies that promote political and economic equality as well as encourage mature, meaningful dialogue as the only way to achieve true harmony. KeADILan's new mould of non-racialised politics will be an important first step toward a Malaysia that is no longer caught in the polemic of ethnic polarisation and constant division.

The best Islamic values will continue to inform good governance, alongside the best values from all other religions in Malaysia. The primacy of Bahasa Malaysia will continue to be upheld, while the right to mother tongue education will never be diminished. Economic policies will be based on need, not on race, in line with the Malaysian Economic Agenda.

A Constitutional State also prioritises integrity and independence of the judiciary above all. Malaysia's institutions of justice must never again be allowed to fall into state of corrupt disrepair it has deteriorated into. We will move to institute independent judicial commissions to battle judicial fixing and restore honour and independence to the Malaysian judiciary.

In order to protect and uphold transparency, laws inhibiting the growth of a free press, independent investigations into corruption and a free and fair electoral process must also immediately be abolished.

The integrity of a Constitutional State will be safeguarded not by the government alone, but by institutions that will be fully empowered to fulfil their mandate of providing a vigorous set of checks and balance to the government, especially the media and the judiciary.

In line with creating greater accountability, local elections will also be immediately restored to take back from the ruling parties the constitutional right of Malaysians to choose only the best and most responsible leaders for their local municipalities.

KeADILan's vision for a Constitutional State will:

1. Restore genuine unity by returning to the Constitution as the fundamental document that outlines the guarantees of the rights and privileges of every Malaysian and provides the blueprint for true social harmony based on mutual respect.
2. Institute economic policies which offer affirmative action based on need not greed for all Malaysians irrespective of race, as described in the Malaysian Economic Agenda.
3. Guarantee the primacy of Bahasa Malaysia, the position of the Malay rulers, full rights for all Malaysian citizens and the role of Islam as the official religion. We will also take from Islam and other religions in Malaysia the universal values that form the basis of good governance and clean administration.
4. Allow and encourage free, mature and responsible dialogue aimed at bridging societal rifts, healing communal wounds and planting the seeds for true social harmony.
5. Dismantle any and all draconian laws that run counter to the spirit and letter of the Constitution, suspend fundamental liberties and inhibit the growth of a functioning democracy. These include the Internal Security Act and the Emergency Ordinance.
6. Institute more checks and balances into the process of judicial appointments by establishing a Judicial Commission and subjecting the appointment of major appointments in the judiciary to parliamentary confirmation.
7. Make the Anti-Corruption Agency accountable to Parliament, and not the Prime Minister's Office.
8. Encourage a free and fair media that reports without fear or favour by amending restrictive laws that regulate the press including the Printing, Presses and Publication Act.
9. Reinstate with immediate effect local elections for municipal and local councils to create greater accountability at every level of government.
10. Immediately enact the recommendations made by the Coalition for Free and Fair Elections (Bersih) to ensure a clean electoral process for every political party involved.

Part II - A Vibrant, Prosperous Economy for All

Equitable Distribution for Better Competitiveness

The Malaysian Economic Agenda

Malaysia is blessed with the black gold of petroleum, bountiful forests, and most importantly, a diverse nation of people from various backgrounds, bringing different mindsets and ideas from all the great Asian civilisations to the table. Malaysia should be ahead of most, if not all, of its neighbours.

But where is it today? South Korea has lived under the shadow of invasion from North Korea for over 50 years, and it is a developed nation. Japan has no significant natural resources - it too is developed. Singapore is an island the size of Malacca and has none of our resources, yet nobody can deny that Singaporeans are better off than their Malaysian counterparts. Inept management of the economy, especially in the last four years, has brought Malaysia's economic performance to its lowest levels yet.

Prices for all basic necessities are skyrocketing and though the government may deny it, the pockets of ordinary Malaysians clearly show that inflation is out of control. Our competitiveness and foreign direct investment (FDI) continue to plummet, while the authorities create misleading ways to interpret statistics and cover the truth.

The Malaysia Plans and other assorted "corridors" and "development regions" are but reinvented ways of redistributing the country's wealth among a handful of elite Malaysians. Friends of those in power receive lucrative concessions that are not subject to a transparent review process, while government regulation prevents Malaysian entrepreneurs from competing with them to provide the best service at the lowest price. Globally, we were once the largest producer of computer chips in the world, but now technological giants such as Intel and Texas Instruments have shut down their Malaysian operations due to increasing lack of confidence.

Worst of all, divisive economic policies have been abused to the point where they not only fail to help the truly poor, but are enriching a small circle of well connected individuals, creating even more inequality and ripping apart ethnic relations in Malaysia.

It is becoming increasingly clear that if we continue along the same path as we are currently on, our descendants will inherit a fourth class economy and a divided nation. Malaysia needs a better plan to recover from its economic malaise. KeADILan's answer is The Malaysian Economic Agenda.

The key to recovery is sound economic policies that are completely free from the tinge of corruption and graft. Singapore, South Korea, and dozens of other countries like Ireland and Estonia have become international economic powerhouses despite no economic resources because they have good economic foundations. The Malaysian Economic Agenda will provide the strong foundation our economy needs to encourage enterprise and entrepreneurship, the engine of growth in any economy.

The Malaysian Economic Agenda sets specific targets for Malaysia in line with her massive potential. Five years from its implementation date, the per capita income of Malaysians will be three times what it is presently; in seven years it will be four times and in ten years, five times the present value.

Should BN still be in power ten years from now, the income per capita of Malaysians will be one tenth of that Singaporean citizens.

The Malaysian Economic Agenda targets an average growth of 8% per annum for a period of ten years. China's economy today is growing at a rate of 11.2%; Cambodia at 9.2%; India 8.5%, Vietnam 8.3%; Singapore 7.5%. Malaysia's growth is only at 5.6%. While Datoâ€™ Seri Anwar Ibrahim was Finance Minister, Malaysia's economy grew at a rate of 7% per annum and petrol prices were constant.

With KeADILanâ€™s political will to combat corruption, wastage and mismanagement an 8% per annum growth rate is perfectly achievable. As part of this commitment, KeADILan will place Malaysiaâ€™s greatest profit generators such as Petronas under the auspices of a select Parliament to prevent abuse of oil funds and promote greater transparency.

In 2006, Malaysiaâ€™s great achievement was to be ranked 6th in the ASEAN region in terms of FDI. During the early 1990s, Malaysia was ranked 5th in the world. The current governmentâ€™s refusal to shed light on its procedures and economic operations discourage investment in Malaysia. Even Malaysian sources of capital are looking to foreign shores for their next major investments.

The key to growth under the Malaysian Economic Agenda is opening up the markets to generate economic progress. A well-regulated market, with a government willing to enforce contracts and deal fairly with the people, is the key to economic success. A heavily-regulated market, coupled with highly opaque government operations cripples the economy and discourages investment, which in turn prevents further growth. The Index of Economic Freedom puts Malaysia at a level of 40%, Taiwan and South Korea at 70% and Singapore at 90%.

The Malaysian Economic Agenda will reform the investment structure to raise freedom of the economy under the index to a level of at least 70%. A KeADILan government will remove restrictions on foreign capital inflows and outflows and revamp government protection of monopolies in industries like telecommunications and banking.

KeADILanâ€™s investment team plans to bring in foreign investment worth RM100 billion in the first 5 years of implementation. If our markets are strong and unfettered, and if our laws are transparent and enforced by impartial judges, we will not need special development corridors or regions to attract investment. A stable and clean business environment is far more important than special tax breaks and quotas handed out by a corrupt and opaque government.

Competitiveness is another core area that KeADILanâ€™s Malaysian Economic Agenda addresses. Monopolies and price controls have hurt Malaysian consumers terribly. In the Philippines, an open competitive market allows consumers access to a reliable SMS service for 0.1 sen while Malaysians endure bad service at overpriced rates because of telco monopolies.

An inability to buy more than one bag of sugar at the local market or a car at the price paid by the rest of the world amounts are the painful results of policies meant to protect vested interests instead of ordinary Malaysians. At every juncture, the government has implemented anti-market policies designed to benefit itself and its cronies, at the expense of ordinary Malaysians. A competitive market on the other hand ensures a free and competitive country.

Within five years, KeADILan's Malaysian Economic Agenda promises to significantly curtail tariffs and other import restrictions. Price controls and quotas will be eradicated – Malaysians must be free to buy and sell as they wish. All markets will be opened to competition, with the exception of some natural monopolies like electricity, where the concessionaire will be subject to stringent review of its business practices and pricing schemes. Only by competing to see who has the best ideas, the best business acumen, and the best ability can we have a competitive economy. We must not be afraid to compete, as being competitive at home is but the first step towards being competitive globally.

Malaysia's economy must also be developed in line with its natural advantages. The mix of culture and ways of thinking combined with our position as a crossroads of history and global civilisations put Malaysia in a unique position to be Southeast Asia's engine of ideas and networks. Malaysia's natural beauty should also drive a vibrant, ecologically sustainable tourist industry.

At the same time, we must ensure that working Malaysians are not left behind as we progress into a developed economy. A minimum wage of RM 1,500 is necessary to affirm the basic dignities of working men and women. In order to remain competitive, regular training and retraining will be made available to Malaysians who are willing to obtain new skill sets to remain on par with global trends. Tax breaks and educational vouchers will be provided for those willing to retrain and retool themselves. Vouchers allowing someone to study at any college or technical school would increase productivity, and avoid wasted labour.

KeADILan also believes that the National Economic Policy must be replaced with an economic agenda that seeks to assist and affirm all poor Malaysians, regardless of their race. In this way, instead of rich elites abusing existing policies to make themselves even richer, Malays who make up the majority of Malaysia's poor will be fully assisted along side with poor Orang Asli and Orang Asal, Ibans, Kadazan-Dusuns, Indians, Chinese, and so on.

With such compassionate policies in place, the rifts caused by unequal development will finally begin to heal. Just as importantly, poor bumiputeras will finally be able to access economic aid that trickles all the way down instead of disappearing long before it reaches them.

The fundamental divide in Malaysia is between those who are free, and those who are not. The well connected are free to do as they wish - they need not worry about starting a business, a quota on how many bags of sugar they can buy during the festive season, or getting the best deal on a loan from the bank. As long as we insist that only certain businesses, certain individuals, get to be free, and as long as we fear competition to see who has the better ideas and the better talent, we can never hope to achieve the full potential that our great nation has been blessed with.

Affirmative action based purely on race, such as espoused by the New Economic Policy, has been shown to be too vulnerable to abuse and a poor reflection of the reality facing all Malaysians. There are rich Malays, and poor Malays, rich Chinese and poor Chinese, rich Indians and poor Indians, and so forth.

KeADILan believes that it is pointless and divisive to insist that each racial group has its own economic solution. Our economy is not a pie to be divided up. It is a tree to be well tended, a tree that belongs to all of us, and a tree that, if taken care of, will grow and bear fruit for us all. The same policies that put food on the table of a Malay can and will put food on the table of a Kadazan, Iban, Indian or Chinese.

The central principle of these economic policies is that the right opportunities must be made available to every single Malaysian – opportunities to learn, opportunities to make an honest living, and opportunities to achieve our dreams. This is what KeADILan's Malaysian Economic Agenda promises to all who live under the bright Malaysian sun.

The Malaysian Economic Agenda will:

1. Bring Malaysia's growth rate to 8% and per capita income to become on par with developed Asian countries by driving transparent, competitive economic policies.
2. Dismantle networks of corruption, monopolies that disadvantage consumers in industries like telecommunications and banking, as well as protectionist policies that only benefit vested interests.
3. Invigorate foreign direct investment by eliminating disincentives such as a corrupt judicial system that cannot effectively guarantee contracts, a lack of media freedom and laws promoting transparency in business practices, as well as equity requirements that promote rents. A target of RM 100 billion in foreign investment is expected within 5 years.
4. Guarantee a steady supply of goods at reasonable prices by maintaining an open market that is free from self-interested political manipulation. This way, prices will remain steady and shortages will be avoided.
5. Encourage domestic growth by promoting entrepreneurship, lowering the barrier of entry for businesses and ensuring a level playing field for all.
6. Increase global competitiveness by investing in research and development, promoting international transfers of technology and removing restrictions that stifle the development of a knowledge economy. Emphasis will also be given to industries that reflect Malaysia's natural advantages, such as tourism and the service industry.
7. Affirm the dignity of all working Malaysians by implementing a minimum wage of RM 1,500 in line with the increasing cost of living. A steady stream of training and retraining will also be provided to maintain the global competitiveness of the local workforce.
8. Replace the New Economic Policy with affirmative action policies based on need rather than ethnicity to ensure that all impoverished Malaysians are given the means to empower themselves and break the cycle of poverty.
9. Promote a fully transparent culture of openness in the awarding of government contracts and tenders, and granting awards based not on connections, but on competitiveness and track records.
10. Place major GLCs such as Petronas under the care of Parliament to enable greater scrutiny of its funds and prevent any abuse or graft. This will ensure that the nation's profits are funnelled back to its people, and not to limited vested interests.

Part III - A Safer Malaysia for All

A Cleaner Police Force for Safer Streets

Development, prosperity and progress are meaningless if ordinary Malaysians cannot feel safe walking down the streets of their own neighbourhood.

KeADILan vows to redirect the full energies of every law enforcement agency back exclusively in to fighting crime. Every barrier and obstacle that has prevented the police from fulfilling their duties properly will be removed, and no expense will be spared to ensure that Malaysia's finest will be equipped with the best training, resources and equipment to battle crime.

Vast numbers of police are currently assigned to duties that have absolutely no bearing on the protection of ordinary citizens and neighbourhoods. Time, money and manpower is spent excessively on internal spying, restricting civil liberties and, in extreme cases, corrupt abuses of power.

KeADILan will insist that at least 80% of the police force be focused purely on street patrols and criminal investigations. The experiences of various countries show that it is the most basic of crime prevention techniques, such as frequent and visible patrols, that are most effective in fighting crime. Malaysians should not have to pay more for private security services when they already pay taxes to the government to guarantee their security.

As men and women who put their lives on the line every day to protect Malaysians, better care must be taken of the police. No expense can be spared when it comes to purchasing and upgrading equipment designed to save lives. Every innovation will be made to increase the security of our homes and neighbourhoods. From simple but extremely effective strategies such as the installation of street lamps and better police-community cooperation programs to advanced surveillance technology, every measure that can be taken to save even one life will be taken.

Higher wages and allowances as well as better housing conditions are also crucial to ensuring that a decent standard of living is made available to those who are willing to make the final sacrifice for their country. In addition, regular training and retraining will be made available to increase skill sets and heighten professionalism.

At the same time, the police must also be held to high standards. KeADILan will immediately implement the Independent Police Complaints and Misconduct Commission (IPCMC) recommended by the 2004 Royal Commission to Enhance the Operation and Management of the Royal Malaysia Police to ensure a zero tolerance towards potential abuses of power by the police including corruption and police brutality.

Public prosecutors must be held to extremely high standards with regards to securing convictions. All legal action against criminals must be made watertight and pursued relentlessly within the ambit of the law to ensure that felons are not released due to poor prosecution.

KeADILan's vision for a safer Malaysia will:

1. Ensure that at least 80% of the police force is tasked with purely crime fighting duties that have an immediate, tangible effect on security in our homes and neighbourhoods.

2. At least double the number of police tasked with performing regular, visible neighbourhood patrols.

3. Equip the police with better crime fighting equipment. Expense will not be spared for items and technology that can have an exponential effect in guaranteeing the security of normal citizens.

4. Place more mobile police stations and checkpoints in neighbourhoods, allowing a visible police presence to significantly discourage criminal activity.

5. Upgrade immediately all facilities that increase the security of a given area such as streetlamps and CCTVs to minimise any and all risk of criminal activity.

6. Increase the wages and allowances of the police by at least 15% and improve the housing conditions for police to reflect the great risks taken and sacrifices made by the men and women in uniform.

7. Under take regular training and retraining for police officers regularly to maintain a police force that is consistently up to date with the very latest in global crime fighting techniques.

8. Implement the IPCMC immediately to ensure only the very highest standards of professionalism and integrity within the police force.

9. Investigate relentlessly any and all allegations of graft and corruption within the police force. A fully empowered and effective ACA can and will remove any aspersions cast on any member of the force.

10. Scrutinise the work and success rate of public prosecutors to ensure that maximum effort is taken to ensure proper convictions.

Part IV - An Affordable Malaysia for All

Better Control of Prices for Petrol & Basic Goods

Staggering and unjust financial burdens have been heaped on ordinary Malaysians in these past few years. These burdens stem not from global trends or normal inflation but from endemic mismanagement and massive corruption.

KeADILan believes that the burdens caused by recent price hikes can be reversed and lightened altogether by

eliminating wastage and corruption. With the billions that can be saved by avoiding scandals like the Port Klang Free Zone, multi-million ringgit arms commissions and grossly disadvantageous toll and tariff concessions, KeADILan will immediately bring down the price of petrol and stabilise the prices of basic goods, tariffs and tolls.

KeADILan will also engage in a wholesome approach towards reducing the cost of living and increasing the real spending power of working Malaysians.

We will start by introducing longer housing loan repayment schemes to make home ownership a reality for lower and middle income Malaysians. Every Malaysian deserves the dignity of owning his or her own home.

Affordable health care is a must for every Malaysian, including providing free care for poor and financially burdened Malaysians. It is meaningless for our buildings to become taller and our cities larger if we cannot afford to look after something as fundamental as our health.

Toll and tariff concessions that favour corporate interests by being disadvantageous against Malaysians must be immediately renegotiated. KeADILan seeks to break monopolies and backroom deals that have allowed politically linked corporate interest to reap vast and disproportionate profits at the expense of working Malaysians.

The wealth of our country must be equally shared. To this end, KeADILan will initiate more programs that enable Malaysians from all backgrounds to own equity in profit earning government corporations and government linked corporations.

KeADILan believes that the dignity of hardworking Malaysians must be protected and will seek to implement a minimum wage to guarantee a basic standard of living for all working citizens.

Investing in a well trained workforce is key to a better future. KeADILan will immediately instate skills diversification and retraining programs to ensure that the Malaysian workforce is fully ready to meet the demanding needs of the 21st century global economy.

To encourage foreign investment and job creation, KeADILan will also take the lead in offering incentives to companies who open operations in Malaysia and provide a minimum number of jobs.

All these initiatives involve higher costs for the government, but KeADILan is fully confident that by eliminating the rampant corruption and wastage that is bleeding Malaysia dry, there will be more than sufficient funds to support people friendly policies that will make life affordable for all Malaysians.

KeADILan vision for a more affordable Malaysia will:

1. Immediately reduce the price of petrol in line with continuously growing Petronas profits.

2. Restructure our market systems to encourage price reductions, increases in quality and a steady, uninterrupted supply.

3. Re-examine any and all concessions and monopolies; any agreement that is found to be one-sided and abused to yield disproportionate profits for corporations must be renegotiated.

4. Implement innovative measures such as a 60 year repayment period for housing loans to make home ownership a reality for more Malaysians.

5. Keep health care costs must be kept low and made free for the poor by implementing measures such as creating health vouchers initiated to guarantee access to quality health care by lower and middle income earning Malaysians.

6. Make available more schemes that allow Malaysians to own equity in corporations linked to the government that yield massive profits by allowing easier subscription to shares.

7. Implement a minimum wage of RM 1,500 to ensure that all hardworking Malaysians are able to live their live with dignity.

8. Propagate skills diversification and retraining programs to equip Malaysians with the very best technical skills in line with trends in the global economy.

9. Offer tax breaks and other incentives to foreign companies who open operations in Malaysia and create a minimum of 1,000 jobs.

10. Fund the initiatives above by implementing the highest standards of transparency to prevent multi-billion ringgit corruption, graft and wastage.

Part V - Better Education for All

Universal Access to Higher Quality Education

Education is the cornerstone of a brighter future for Malaysia. Over the past few years, Malaysia's education system has dropped to the level where the rich are universally opting for private education and the poor are stuck with substandard schools, colleges and universities.

KeADILan believes that the national school system must be revamped and reinvigorated. The first step in this endeavour is to ensure universal access to free schooling "from primary to university levels. Expensive barriers of entry to education for low income earning families must be eliminated once and for all because education is one of the most important step towards breaking the cycle of poverty.

Furthermore, scholarships for overseas studies must be increased and guaranteed for students who attain a certain standard of achievement in their examinations. This will allow Malaysia's best and brightest to reach their maximum potential and pave the way for them to bring back cutting edge skills and experience back into the country.

Providing quality education begins with ensuring the best quality of teachers. Higher wages and equal employment opportunities for teachers are the first step towards better schools. This most honourable of professions must be given the recognition it deserves if Malaysia intends to retain its best and brightest to nurture the leaders of tomorrow. Teachers must also be exposed to continuous training and professional development to ensure they continue to grow as educators.

Allocations to national schools must also be increased. KeADILan believes that children cannot be expected to learn in dilapidated buildings where repairs are subcontracted at overpriced rates to substandard contractors. This problem is especially endemic in Sabah and Sarawak, where some schools do not even have electricity or running water. This state of affairs cannot persist, because a conducive learning environment is pivotal if Malaysian students are expected to succeed.

Beyond infrastructure, the content of what we teach also needs re-examining. Rote memorisation and purely exam-oriented approaches must be rejected in favour of a more holistic education that emphasizes keen analytical skills and sharp problem solving abilities in addition to mastery of the traditional subjects. Only in this way can our children develop the skills and mental prowess to succeed in the global knowledge economy.

The decline in standards in Malaysia's institutions of higher learning must be arrested immediately. University rankings below 200 are an embarrassment to all and a sure indicator of troubled times ahead.

KeADILan firmly believes in the need to appoint only the best and the brightest academic and administrative leaders of our universities and colleges. Only with individuals who are chosen based on capability and not for politically tainted expediency in charge of our institutions of higher learning can we return to an age where Malaysia's institutions of higher learning are respectable centres of academia fit to be the envy of the region.

Repression towards free and unfettered academic pursuit must also be firmly rejected in favour of scholastic freedom that adheres to the best traditions of objective and independent pursuit of knowledge and truth. Only then will our graduates come into the world being able to distinguish fact from fiction and assess the world around them based on sound analytical principles.

KeADILan's vision for better education will:

1. Ensure universal access to high quality education by making school from kindergarten to university is completely free of charge for all Malaysians.

2. Guarantee government scholarships for students with a minimum of 4 Aâ€™s in their STPM and who are admitted into top international universities. Special attention will be given to poor families and students from rural areas.

3. Increase the salaries, allowances and benefits for teachers by at least 15% in line with the sacrifices and nobility of the profession.

4. Institute continuous professional development programs for teachers to ensure a lifelong commitment to improving their skills as educators and learning from the best global trends.

5. Increase the budget allocation for the maintenance and upkeep of schools, especially in the rural areas, to ensure that all students are able to study in decent, functioning buildings.

6. Upgrade the facilities of all rural schools, especially in East Malaysia to guarantee that every national school is at least equipped with electricity and running water.

7. Alter the curriculum of schools to reflect the latest research in education. Students will be taught in ways that emphasise analytical thinking, mental agility and problem solving abilities while simultaneously demonstrating a firm grasp of fundamental subjects.

8. Free the selection of Vice Chancellors and other leaders of institutions of higher learning from being tied to political or other interests and base them directly on the academic and professional capabilities of the best candidates available as well as the diversity of Malaysiaâ€™s population.

9. Immediately repeal repressive laws that restrict the right of students to exercise their social and political rights such as the University and Colleges Act.

10. Free academic research from any form of censoring so that the scholastic community will be fully empowered to seek knowledge and conduct research using only the truth as their guide.