

Anwar promises 'New Deal' to unite, liberate all Malaysians

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An introduction of meritocracy in education, a dose of aid in housing, and the dispersal of industry from high-density urban centers to low concentration ones, were the highlights of PKR's economic agenda announced today.

"This is the 'new deal' that we will take to the voters in the coming general elections," said PKR de facto leader Anwar Ibrahim in comments made to malaysiakini following the unveiling of the party's economic agenda called 'The Malaysian Economic Agenda: Creating A New Deal.'

Details of the agenda were announced at a press conference today in Parliament House, jointly addressed by PKR president Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail and head of the party's economic brain trust, Khalid Ibrahim.

"Overall, the thrust of the agenda would see a more equitable distribution of the wealth of the nation," claimed Anwar.

"Thus far the distribution of the nation's wealth has been lopsided with undue concentration in the hands of the top 20 percent of the people. This is a recipe for economic oligarchies to spawn and for social discontent to spread among the have-nots," he contended.

Anwar explained that the party's programme would see fairer apportionment of wealth with the top 20 percent of the population controlling 35 percent of wealth (as compared to the present 51.3 percent), the middle class of 40 percent holding a 40 percent equity (as compared to the present 35.2 percent), and the bottom 40 percent sharing 25 percent (as compared to the present 13.5 percent).

Education

Clearly, PKR's de facto leader posits education - "the great leveller" - as the catalyst of economic redistribution and upward social mobility.

Under a PKR government, selection to 30 percent of university places will be based on merit regardless of candidates' household income. Also, a similar percentage of jobs in higher education will be awarded on merit.

"Education is the race between civilisation and catastrophe," opined Anwar. "We have to plumb for meritocracy at this stage of our national development or risk seeing our country slide in economic competitiveness."

He added: "At least for close to a third of the places in seats and in jobs in higher education we have to go for meritocracy as otherwise we will become mediocre and lose out in the race to build a modern, civil society that is equipped to compete in the global village."

Anwar said the remaining 70 percent of seats in higher education would be awarded with affirmative action considerations in mind, with priority going to the poor provided they meet the minimum qualifications.

He said the education system would be the conduit for the strengthening of the concepts of parliamentary democracy, with the executive, legislature, judiciary and press existing in creative and critical interaction among them.

"Educational opportunity, entrepreneurial ingenuity, wealth distribution and social mobility are all facilitated better under a system of governance that is transparent and accountable with the traditional checks and balances provided by the third and fourth estates (judiciary and press)," he asserted.

Then in tones redolent of his decades' long search for a synthesis of the best that has been said and thought in the world of ideas, Anwar launched into a sonorous peroration:

"Democratic pluralism is not something that we will merely give lip service to but will practise in earnestness because it is the lifeblood of the system of parliamentary democracy. I'm Malay and Muslim but neither a smug ethnocentrism nor a narrow conception of Islamic rectitude will do justice to my human identity as a Malaysian, as an Asian, and as a denizen of the global village.

"The dogmas of our racially stratified past are inadequate to our globalised present. Since our challenges are complex, we must think afresh and act anew. We must first disenthral ourselves."

Housing

Anwar said his party will not spawn neither will it coddle mediocrity.

"We will help people help themselves so that citizens would feel encouraged to give of their best in reasonable expectation of rewards for their labour. We will encourage the talented to flower for civil society needs multifarious talents to fructify to endure."

Clearly, housing for the underprivileged will be a priority because "shelter is a need which if not catered for would spawn a host of social ills from dysfunctional families to substance abuse."

Under a PKR government, a long-term inter-generational funding scheme spanning a 60-year borrowing and payback period will enable low-income earners to own a house that they might not have been able to afford otherwise.

As an alternative, low-income earners will be able to buy back basic housing units that can be sold back once they are ready to move up and acquire a better-quality house.

Complementing the drive for affordable housing, Anwar said a PKR government would cap development in high-density urban centers and provide incentives to entrepreneurs to invest in new townships to halt the rural-urban drift.

Healthcare

He said access to quality healthcare must be assured for the lower income group and viewed the shifting of that burden to the private sector as a measure that would raise costs and limit access only to those who could afford it.

"The provision of quality healthcare must not be allocated to the market only to accomplish. Government has an equitable role to play in its provision and must not shirk it," said Anwar.

Finally, Anwar addressed the question of a 'new deal' for the Malays who he said had benefitted from the New Economic Policy (NEP) but were now in danger of witnessing the opening up of a wide gap between a politically connected elite and the ordinary rakyat.

"We need a new needs-based NEP that will enable ordinary Malays to repossess opportunities and engage their energies and talents to acquire their share of the national wealth.

"We must free ourselves from the fallacious emotional baggage that the NEP, in the way that it has been implemented in recent times, is an avenue for Malay advancement. That is not true. The elites have railroaded the NEP for their own selfish gain while the vast majority is doled out the crumbs.

"This is a bogus NEP. PKR's new deal for the Malays would see the NEP impact on the Malay poor in such a way that it will empower and equip them with the means to use their rights for their genuine and lasting betterment."

Anwar also said the bumiputeras of Sabah and Sarawak would be given the full panoply of their rights without reservation of religion or ethnicity.

"Too often they have suffered from the tyranny of geography where their distant habitations from urban centers of development meant that they languished in neglect. PKR have heard their cry of neglect and will respond to help them."

In summation Anwar said PKR's new deal for Malaysians would unite the country and liberate its citizens by promoting "equity over privilege, talent over mediocrity, entrepreneurial energy over rent seeking, and genuine care for the needy over empty rhetorical pledges of aid."

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