

**Anwar's New Malaysia**  
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Opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim shares his vision of a new Malaysia and says "Patriotism, and I will include here racial politics, is the last refuge of the scoundrel."  
MCPX

Accountability, transparency, good governance, the need to eradicate corruption, cronyism, and nepotism - these are the values of Anwar Ibrahim's 'reformasi' (social reform) agenda.

anwar ibrahim opposition leader parliament 03Speaking about them has been his platform for the last ten years, for which he has endured a lot.

His words have lit a spark in the people of Malaysia, as a younger generation - free from the fears that plagued the older generation - with access to knowledge and information, began to take his words to heart.

They were exposed to the ways of the world, and saw in his words a hope that was exhilarating in its audacity of promises. The world was passing Malaysia by, and the need for change - for the basic reason of adapting to the changing world -was becoming imperative.

Today, the desire for change has grown stronger, as the seeds that Anwar's words planted in people's hearts 10 years ago have germinated and blossomed .

And in this exclusive interview with Passions magazine, Anwar Ibrahim shares with us his vision for a new Malaysia.

### **New economic agenda**

Anwar Ibrahim's words are a refreshing change from the talk of race and religion that is seemingly the wont of so many political personalities in the country. Instead of beating about the old communalist bush, he spoke issues - economic, social, and political issues that affect all Malaysians regardless of colour and creed.

anwar permatang pauh polling day 260808It was therefore apt, considering the current global and local economic climate, that the first thing he spoke about was his New Economic Agenda, which promises to bring about a seismic shift in the Malaysian economic climate. A shift, perhaps, for the better. But are Malaysians and Malaysia ready for such a change?

For Anwar, the question is a no-brainer. As he puts it, "Malaysia has been stuck with an obsolete economic programme, which has led to the loss of competitiveness, the diminishing attractiveness of the nation for foreign investments, which is further worsened by the lack of transparency, accountability, and good governance."

The answer to such a "malaise", he puts it, "is to embark on a New Malaysian Economic Agenda, based on market economic principles and driven by Malaysians working together to enhance economic competitiveness. All Malaysians," he said with conviction, "must play a part and be part of this new direction."

And thus he makes no bones about it. "Obsolete policies have to go." And to him, one of the

biggest epitomes of a failed and obsolete policy is none other than the New Economic Policy or NEP.

anwar permatang pauh polling day 260808 12As he puts it, "We need to promote growth, and that can only happen if we are seen to be a market-driven economy." But will scrapping the NEP bring about a doomsday scenario for the Malay community, as so many of the policy's adherents claim? Definitely not. Because as Anwar told us, "market growth is not a zero-sum game at the expense of the poor and the marginalized.

But instead of a race-based affirmative action policy, what we should have is a needs-based policy. In doing so, the majority of the Malays will still be taken care of, and at the same time so too would the needy and marginalized among the other communities in the country, such as the Indian estate workers."

For him, the path is clear. "Economic growth and competitiveness," he told , "come hand-in-hand with good governance, the rule of law, and a free media. I do not believe that such an agenda is the concern of the present ruling establishment, although there have sometimes been some platitudes towards that direction from the establishment."

Nevertheless, to him, the Old Guard are the progeny of failed policies, which is why he believes that it important to "transform the nation and at the same time ensure that the transition is smooth and stable so as to garner hope for all Malaysians."

## **A new Malaysia**

`malaysia merdeka 50th anniversary 280807 ethnicWhat Anwar wants to bring about then is a Malaysian agenda. Of course some parties might be reluctant to see that come into fruition and have appealed to baser instincts such as race and religion to create a platform against him. However, as Anwar so nicely puts it - paraphrasing from Samuel Johnson - "Patriotism, and I will include here racial politics, is the last refuge of the scoundrel."

To answer his detractors, he had this to say, "I am a Malay. A very committed and concerned Malay. But I cannot see my relevance if I cannot think as a true Malaysian, and show enough concern for the welfare of all Malaysians"

Wise words indeed, and again it is a sign of how wonderfully refreshing his words are to even the most jaded of ears. Anwar talks Malaysia first and foremost. However, he proudly states that he is very much pro-Malay, in a sense where it really matters - in the sense of being competitive and of being able to be proud of their achievements because they know they had earned it in merit. malaysia merdeka 50th anniversary 280807 youths

And this is why he said, "I am convinced that pursuing an obsolete agenda, including race-based politics will ultimately lead, not just to a breakdown of the social fabric, but will adversely affect the morale, confidence and resolve of the Malays."

Here he hits the nail right on the head. It is popular to talk about how unfair race-based policies in Malaysia are to the non-Malay communities. Yet the biggest victims of the policies are ironically the very people they try to help.

## **The real Malay dilemma**

He asks, "How many non-bumiputra can understand and appreciate the feelings of self-doubt that has been engendered by being told for two generations that you are not capable of standing up on your own two feet, that your achievements are not based on merit alone but on other more insidious factors? How terribly confidence-sapping it must be to have such thoughts always hovering in the background like a nagging doubt at the back of the head."

"Take my daughter for example," he offered by way of illustrating his point, "she is currently studying mathematics in Georgetown University in the United States. And she is happy because she knows that she managed to get in because of what she did and not because she happens to be of the right race."

malaysia parliament 060508 "I want to bring about that sense of confidence in the Malays through the New Economic Agenda," he said. "Now, at the same time, we would need - at first - to reassure the Malays that they would not be marginalized by it. And this is important because for the past 30 years, they have been subjected to incessant propaganda, which tells that without the NEP they would not be able to survive."

### **Hope in the new generation**

A new Malaysia such as the one that Anwar hopes to bring about would mean having what he calls, "A new generation of leaders." He is hopeful and confident about the future, noting "the younger generation of Malay Malaysians are rejecting the politics of fear, race, and religion." But there is still work to be done, and as he pointed out, "How we view issues like religion, culture, language, and education is still important."

Therefore within the Pakatan Rakyat (People's Alliance - the combined Opposition forces in Malaysia) leadership, we have already spelt out a clear agenda. And this is based on the Constitution, where Islam is the religion of the Federation with guaranteed freedom of practice for other religions. Because Malaysia is a multi-religious nation, and we cannot have and should not have had high-handed and unjust incidents such as the demolishing of temples."

Anwar's licence to speak about economic affairs comes in part from his previous role as the Finance Minister of the country. So too by being the former Education Minister, he is qualified to speak on matters of education.

un education team sos damansara visit 090207 overview And this is an area where he sees a great and urgent need for change, especially when one takes into consideration the fact that the education system is the one that shapes the future leaders of Malaysia.

Being a true Malaysian, he is adamant about the importance of the national language. "As a developing nation," he said, "it is important to have a national language and everyone should be encouraged to be proficient in Bahasa Malaysia. But we should not do this at the expense of English."

"We should," he emphasised, "be committed to enhancing the proficiency of English in Malaysians because it is the international language of business and trade. Otherwise Malaysia will lose out in economic and human development."

damansara school open 030107 new pupils "Take for example Indonesia and Thailand," he said. "Back in the 1960s, they were far inferior to Malaysia in terms of English proficiency."

But today they are catching up and in some ways have even surpassed us." Anwar has no doubts about the direction that is needed.

"We need to have more serious efforts in the teaching of English in Malaysian schools. We cannot afford to continue on in the haphazard and directionless manner of today," he said with firm determination in his voice.

Furthermore, the importance of the languages of the other communities in Malaysia such as Mandarin and Tamil should not be underestimated. It is as he said, "Mandarin is no longer just the language of the Chinese in Malaysia. It has become a very important economic language of the region." He brings up the example of the universities in the UK where elective language subjects are usually Mandarin or Spanish.

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