

Agenda 7: DAP@50 Declaration

A New Deal for Malaysians

Preamble

Democratic Action Party celebrates her fiftieth anniversary in 2016 as the nation's most united, disciplined, purposive and cohesive party, dedicated to the enduring ideals of justice, freedom, democracy, equal opportunity, integrity and human dignity; committed to fighting oppressive laws, corruption, cronyism and abuse of powers, as well as embracing new ideas that provide solutions to uplift the economic livelihood and prosperity of 30 million Malaysians.

DAP is no longer the permanent opposition party that it once was, our fight is not only against oppressive powers-that-be, but also to strive to offer sensible solutions to build a good future for the nation. During the last general election, more than half of Malaysian voters placed their hopes in DAP and her coalition partners. We must prepare ourselves to govern with our coalition partners, and not be mere bystanders watching the multiple crises unfolding before our eyes.

We must actively participate in reshaping the collective destiny of Malaysia, as it is DAP's responsibility to grow, inspire, provide hope and offer a New Deal to millions of Malaysians who deserve better.

Only during rare and important occasions will the party issue declarations. Previous declarations were: the Setapak Declaration (1967), Petaling Jaya Declaration (1981, when DAP turned 25), Tanjong Declaration (1991) and Shah Alam Declaration (2012).

Other policy documents discussing specific issues include the Declaration on Cultural Democracy (1968), DAP Wanita Tanjong Declaration (1992); DAPSY Declaration (1992); Kulai Anti-Corruption Declaration (1993), Gelang Patah (Issues facing ethnic Indians) Declaration (2013), and Bintulu (Issues facing Sarawak) Declaration (2014).

It has been 50 years since DAP was founded, 60 years since Merdeka and 54 years since the Federation of Malaysia was formed – we now enter 2017 and will face another challenging general elections. We, the National Delegates of the DAP, here assembled in Shah Alam, Selangor, on 4th December 2016, hereby in the brief words of a Declaration reaffirm the visions, guiding policies and principles of the party, in facing the challenges of our time.

1. DAP since 1966

DAP was founded on 18th March 1966 by a group of Malaysian patriots dedicated to the “sacred task of creative and constructive nation-building”, as the Setapak Declaration of 1967 proclaimed.

The party was formed against the backdrop of a tumultuous time - at the height of Cold War, just after the Malaysia-Singapore separation and during the Konfrontasi with Indonesia. Volatile domestic state of affairs saw escalating ethnic tensions and a faltering economy, with the ruling coalition exploiting communal emotions while suppressing the legitimate voices of opposition and dissent.

From the start, DAP has been a party of ideas and ideals, often ahead of her time. Humans only set foot on the moon in 1969 but DAP’s Rocket symbol signifies the unflinching quest for the impossible at the particular moment of history.

At the core of the first phase of DAP’s mission was the championing of a Malaysia that would treasure and not trash diversity, which was more or less achieved when our opponents largely abandoned hard assimilation as a ruling strategy by the 1990s. Today, DAP is still ahead of her time, in striving to inspire a Malaysian nation that places Malaysian perspectives first and foremost, to move beyond each others’ ethnic and communal cocoons.

The much demonised slogan of “Malaysian Malaysia” was meant to create a Malaysian nation, a Bangsa Malaysia, above other ethnic, communal and geographical identities.

While speaking up for the “the 99%” – ordinary citizens of all ethnic and geographical backgrounds – has now become trendy, it is important to remember that this has been a crucial theme for the DAP since 1966.

2. Malaysia in 2016

Malaysia is now known worldwide as a kleptocracy with a Prime Minister who is personally linked to the 1MDB scandal of global proportion, and who resorts to every possible means to stay in power. As a consequence, the country is also mired in communal and religious antagonism, increasingly restricted democratic space, and an economy that has no new impetus and is clearly on the verge of a crisis.

The situation has gone from bad to worse; Malaysians are looking to us for leadership in time of crisis.

Can the DAP and our coalition partners give hope to Malaysians that together we can turn things around fairly quickly? Do we have a compelling narrative to win the next general election with our allies? And, can a New Deal provide for a better tomorrow for all Malaysians?

3. Political Realignment

One of the most important questions on the minds of many DAP members and supporters is whether the Opposition can mount a formidable challenge in the next election as a cohesive force?

We are living in unprecedented times. The past three years saw PAS moving closer to UMNO as well as violating prior consensus of the Opposition coalition, leading to the split in PAS and the collapse of Pakatan Rakyat in June 2015. Together with Parti KeADILan Rakyat and Parti Amanah Negara, Pakatan Harapan was formed in September 2015. The period also saw the split in UMNO, resulting in the formation of Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia.

Between us and them, the line will have to be drawn soon. On the one side will be those who support Najib Razak's kleptocracy, corrupt and crony rule of the 1%, and continues to stoke communal and religious fears; and, on the other side stand those who are against kleptocracy and for democracy, for the 99% and for a Bangsa Malaysia that is hopeful, confident, united and values diversity as strength.

4. DAP as a Malaysian party and Impian Malaysia

DAP began its journey by fighting for all Malaysians and throughout the years, it has been steadfast in its aspiration to be the Malaysian party accepted by all ethnic groups and by people in all geographical areas within Malaysia.

Being a Malaysian party for all Malaysians should have been the creed of all political parties in Malaysia but instead, it is still seen as a lofty idea that is still being challenged and flattened out from all fronts. The ruling elite and establishment survives on racial, communal and exclusivist religious agendas, and continues to paint DAP as the bogeyman as an attempt to rally Malay support, therefore, we need to constantly inspire and encourage our supporters to think beyond ethnic terms and most importantly, to start seeing things in Malaysian terms.

As stated in the Shah Alam Declaration in 2012, DAP reaffirms the following:

To defend our system of Parliamentary Democracy and Constitutional Monarchy with the Yang di-Pertuan Agong as the Head of State; and upholding the Federal Constitution as the supreme law and to honour it in the spirit of Merdeka 1957 and the Malaysia Agreement 1963;

To preserve the special position of the Malays and Bumiputeras while protecting the rights of other ethnic groups as enshrined in Article 153 of the Federal Constitution;

To safeguard the position of Islam as the religion of the Federation while simultaneously championing the freedom of other religions to be practiced in peace and harmony, as enshrined in Article 3 and 11 of the Federal Constitution;

To dignify Bahasa Melayu as the National Language as enshrined in Article 152 of the Federal Constitution while encouraging the use and study of other mother tongues.

To move forward, DAP must go beyond just safeguards and guarantees but to articulate an Impian Malaysia (Malaysian Dream) which will build a Bangsa Malaysia that is hopeful, confident, united and values diversity as strength.

Our opponents are merchants of fear, whereas we must inspire Malaysians with hope.

As the world is increasingly challenged by migration and cohabitation of people of diverse background, DAP aspires to see a Malaysia that is the world's model of Islam in which Muslims coexist confidently with fellow citizens of other faiths. Malaysia's Islam can be the role model for the world.

As for languages and culture, fear of losing one's identity must be replaced with confidence and trust that diversity should be and is Malaysia's strength. "Malaysia truly Asia" was once the way the world learnt about us. We shall be a confident nation in which each of us respects, treasures, learns and masters more than one language and culture, and the ability to converse in multiple languages and to comprehend multiple cultures become the hallmark of a confident Bangsa Malaysia.

To instill confidence in a nation - trust, empathy and solidarity are crucial elements. DAP must be at the forefront in encouraging empathy among the people especially in the field of economy so that ordinary Malaysians of all ethnic groups share a common destiny in their livelihood.

5. A New Deal for the 99%

In 1967, the Setapak Declaration pronounced that

“The truth is that the fraternity of Malaysian ‘have-nots’ are to be found in urban and rural areas, and embraces Malaysians of all communities and religions.

This is the truth which the communal politicians deliberately ignore, for it upsets the neat and plausible theories which they habitually hawk as their stock-in-trade in order to justify themselves to their followers.

But it is a truth which national-minded democratic socialists must incessantly drive home, in order to help expedite the process of national integration on the basis of the common economic interests of the have-nots of all races.”

From the beginning, DAP has been the party for the “have-nots”. To put this in contemporary language (change to “terms”, we have always been the party for the 99% from all backgrounds.

As Malaysia continues to slowly slide into another economic crisis, it is important to remind ourselves that trust, empathy and solidarity are the cornerstones of our economic values which should translate into actual economic policies that favour ordinary Malaysians rather than the top 1%.

Malaysia has been dependant on foreign direct investment driven export-oriented industrialisation since the 1970s. This model has outlasted its usefulness, especially evident after Brexit and the election of Donald Trump as President of United States.

In the past two decades since the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997, Malaysia has been dependant on a diminishing export sector and oil and gas, palm oil and other commodities, property and infrastructure construction and very little else. The agriculture sector suffers from neglect too.

The implementation of Goods and Services Tax (GST) and the sharp decline of the value of the ringgit since 2014 have resulted in hardships among ordinary Malaysians, dampened domestic consumption and causing a confidence crisis.

Investment in education, as well as research and development are lacking. Hundreds of thousands of skilled Malaysians seek employment overseas while Malaysia depends on millions of unskilled foreign labour, resulting in stagnation of wages, skills and productivity.

Malaysia needs a New Deal that envisions the virtuous cycle of increased wages, better skills and higher productivity for Malaysian workers and industries. We will also need to ensure better public transport, health, education and housing for all Malaysians. Development of semi-urban small towns and rural areas need a new approach as well.

Better jobs and better quality of life binds us together as Malaysians. Ultimately, if there is any party that speaks for the 99%, DAP is the most clearly identified one.

6. A New Deal for Sabah and Sarawak and new federalism

The Malaysian federalism favours the Federal Government at the expense of State rights. Resentment in the states are serious and there is a need for a New Deal for Sabah and Sarawak, as well as a new form of federalism for states in the Peninsula.

DAP take cognizance of the historical fact that Malaysia Federation was formed by four entities – Malaya, Sabah, Sarawak and Singapore (exited in 1965) in 1963.

For the past 53 years, Sabah and Sarawak have been subjected to an overly-centralised Federal government. A profound sense of disappointment and deprivation engulf Sabahans and Sarawakians.

DAP is committed to offer a New Deal for Sabah and Sarawak that recognises the equal partner status of Sabah and Sarawak in the federation, as well as to decentralise powers and tax revenue.

Under a new framework of New Federalism, Sabah and Sarawak shall enjoy a wide range of autonomy in community policing, health, education, transport, as well as enjoying a sizable share of tax revenue to finance the autonomy areas of competence.

Such a New Federalism framework can also apply to Johor, Kelantan and Penang which have seen rising disenchantment with the Federal Government in recent years.

7. A New Deal for Youth and Women

As the party of ideas and ideals which are at the forefront of promoting gender equality, the DAP shall continue to endeavour to be the party of choice for women.

DAP is committed to gender equality especially in the workplace where glass ceilings in terms of career advancement and remuneration still hold women back. Having more women in the workforce makes good economic sense for households and for the nation.

As a nation we should harness the talents and skills of women by striving to eliminate discrimination against women in society and the workplace and create better childcare infrastructure and support for mothers who work.

It is our belief that when we empower women, we empower the nation.

And, as the party founded by young idealists and constantly provide space for young leaders to emerge at all levels, the DAP shall also continue to be the party of choice for the youth.

The future belongs to the young and nowhere is this truer than in Malaysia today. 72 % of the Malaysian population is below the age of 40, while the median age is 27.1 years. Young people also contribute significantly to our economy, making up nearly two-thirds of our workforce.

Unfortunately, youths today face bleak prospects with high unemployment figures and high debts. Many are mired in low-wage, low-productivity jobs. Low income and high cost of living invariably leads to high bankruptcy rates among youth.

DAP believes that steps need to be taken to lift their incomes and give them better opportunities in employment, education and healthcare. We must implement policies that create meaningful employment opportunities, skills and vocational development.

DAP believes that youths should not be patronised but treated as equal partners, because as beneficiaries of the future, they have the most incentive to craft long-term policies. We need to mainstream youth leadership in politics and society by giving them a stake in decision-making roles.

8. BERSIHkan Malaysia

For the New Deal to happen, we need to BERSIHkan (clean up) the current regime of kleptocracy and rebuild our democracy with constitutional reforms to restore the rights of the people. Only incorruptible and democratic institutions can deliver the political, economic and social outcomes we envisage to uplift Malaysian lives.

That the ruling government is no longer just practicing cronyism and corruption but has become a globally known kleptocratic rule means it has no shame in doing anything to cling on to its powers. The nation is held ransom and citizens have lost their basic democratic rights.

We deplore the recent spate of arrests, prosecution and persecution under Security Offences (Special Measures) 2012 (SOSMA), Sedition Act 1948, Official Secrets Act 1972. The National Security Council Act 2016 is also of concern. We condemn the second prosecution and persecution of DAP Secretary-General Lim Guan Eng which was aimed at crippling the DAP.

To rebuild Malaysia, we need a clean set of institutions which include clean, fair and credible elections, a world class parliament that represents the voices and concerns of all Malaysians, a free media, an independent judiciary, and a neutral and effective civil service.

This can only happen by constitutional means, through the democratic process by the ballot box and not in any violent, unconstitutional or revolutionary manner.

We must not give up, after 50 years, our journey is far from over. Like every other human enterprise that matters, perseverance is the key to our endeavour.

The unfinished journey, the Malaysian Dream

The battlelines for GE14 have already been drawn, between the *ancien regime* long past its used-by date and a new deal, new hope. The voters of Malaysia are faced with a stark choice: to cast their vote for democrats or kleptocrats.

Do Malaysians want to be in the league of global kleptocracies? Or are we ready to become a world class nation in terms of democracy? We must take a stand.

We call on Malaysians to unite in one voice to declare that we will rebuild a New Deal for Malaysia that is united, tolerant and plural; that we will strive to realise the unfinished Malaysian Dream that offers economic prosperity and justice for all Malaysians, regardless of race, religion or region.

Kleptocratic rule will not prevail for long as its legitimacy runs thin by the day.

Like the enduring symbol of the “rocket”, which symbolises humankind’s quest to break known barriers and reach for seemingly impossible new frontiers, DAP has survived the darkest of nights to be where we are today, 50 years later. The Malaysian Dream will continue to be our vision as we forge ahead towards the brave new future together with all comrades and Malaysians who will not let these merchants of fear steal away our hope for tomorrow.

Terus berjuang!