

BN opponents seek united front ahead of snap polls
Malaysiakini.com
February 18, 2011

Ahead of a possible snap general election many speculate Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak to call, opposition parties, civil society groups and the so-called 'third force' have met to form a united front in their bid to unhorse the BN.

They reached consensus at a meeting on Wednesday for all forces critical of the current BN regime to come together to take on the BN in the 13th general election in straight fights for all seats.

However, the mechanism for this could not be ironed out, with many contentious issues being raised.

One was on how the 'third force', mooted by the newly-established Malaysian Civil Liberties Movement (MCLM), which insisted on fielding candidates according to its own rules, could work with Pakatan Rakyat on seat distribution.

Initiated by PSM

PSM secretary-general S Arutchelvan confirmed with Malaysiakini that the meeting was initiated by his party to consolidate all progressive anti-BN forces ahead of a possible snap election.

However, Arutchelvan (right) declined to disclose details, explaining that it was a closed-door meeting.

It is learnt the meeting, the first of its kind since the 2008 general election, was attended by representatives from PKR, DAP, PAS, PSM and Human Rights Party (HRP).

The MCLM, led by fugitive blogger Raja Petra Kamarudin who is in self-exile in the United Kingdom, and human rights lawyer Haris Ibrahim, has been scouting 'credible' candidates to contest in the next general election.

Other participants were NGOs such as Aliran, Jemaah Islah Malaysia (JIM), Pusat Komunikasi Masyarakat (Komas), the community residents' association of Selangor and Federal Territory (Permas) and human rights watchdog Suaram.

The Pakatan parties were represented by bigwigs PAS secretary-general Mustafa Ali, PKR secretary-general Saifuddin Nasution and DAP Youth chief Anthony Loke. HRP was represented by its manifesto committee head S Paraman.

Two-party system or third force?

Sources at the meeting said there was heated debate over the role of MCLM and the other non-Pakatan opposition parties on whether they would help strengthen Pakatan towards a two-party system or build up an independent 'third force'.

Representatives of Pakatan argued that building a 'third force' was premature, for politics in Malaysia had not even developed into a two-party system. The focus, therefore, should be

on consolidating Pakatan to replace BN.

The attempts by MCLM to position itself as 'third force' and push the candidates it has vetted to contest under Pakatan ticket, and at the same time maintain its own rules, were also challenged at the meeting.

Some participants urged MCLM to drop its hostility towards Pakatan and develop a mechanism to work with the opposition.

Although Haris (left) clarified that MCLM was not a spoiler and reiterated its support in principle for Pakatan, several participants were of the view that MCLM's recent statements and moves had done more damage than good to Pakatan.

Some of the NGO representatives present suggested that the 'third force' should not involve itself in any electoral contest, but play an independent role in ensuring free and fair elections.

On the other hand, some of them accused the Pakatan component parties of failing to carry out many of their election manifesto pledges, including reviving local government elections.

The representatives also slammed Pakatan for not opening up space for cooperation with other parties and monopolising electoral seats by barring others from putting one-on-one challenges against the BN.

Unite against BN

Despite differences on several issues being unresolved, all the participants interviewed by Malaysiakini said the meeting had brought those present closer towards achieving their common goal - to unseat BN in the next general election.

"The participants agreed that the opposition's performance in the March 2008 general election was because everybody worked together," said a NGO representative.

"We all agreed that we must avoid three-cornered fights in the coming election and unite to fight BN... but we need more discussions to work out the mechanism," said a representative from a political party.

"The general consensus is that all forces must unite to take on the BN in the next general election."