

Haris Ibrahim: We are not the third force
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When news of a "third force" first broke out a few months ago in the heat of PKR direct leadership elections, many viewed it with scepticism, rather than optimism.

While some political party leaders, notably from PKR, dismissed this third force as neither a "third" nor a "force", others even claimed that the newly-launched Malaysian Civil Liberties Movement (MCLM) meant to draw votes away from the party.

Indeed, the timing of the group has raised eyebrows and it was easy to link MCLM to the recently-concluded (and controversial) PKR elections.

NONE However, setting the record straight is Haris Ibrahim (right), MCLM president who was appointed to the office in October - in absentia - when the committee first met in London.

In an exclusive interview with Malaysiakini, Haris dispelled myths surrounding MCLM, explaining its core objectives, its benefactors and the "third force" label.

Emphasising that the movement was not a political party, and had no plan to be one, Haris seemed rather embarrassed by the notion of a "third force" party.

"I suppose when this idea was bandied about, the phrase 'third force' was used. Unfortunately, rightly or wrongly, it has attracted some form of connotation. We consciously moved away from that label.

"The third force carries an ugly connotation.

"If parties keep on talking about ketuanan rakyat, or Makkal Sakthi in 2007, the rakyat then is the third force. For us and MCLM to hold out as the third force, that's a joke," said the lawyer and blogger.

Funded by Malaysians living overseas

When the formation of MCLM was announced by blogger Raja Petra Kamarudin, people were more surprised by the fact that the announcement was made in London.

To that, Haris said it was a matter of convenience that the forum was held at a hotel in London.

"Would it have made a difference if it was held in another country? There was an attempt to register the society here, but got nowhere with the Registrar of Societies. So why London? It is because that's where there are many Malaysians keen to see the idea take off the ground," he said.

MCLM, he said, is funded by a group of "Malaysian diaspora with aspirations of wanting to see a better Malaysia". The candidates selected for a general election, he added, would only need to have allegiance to the rakyat.

One of the candidates is lawyer Malik Imtiaz Sarwar, whose name was announced by Raja Petra last weekend. Haris said 18 more persons have indicated that they want to join.

"We don't want frog festivals like what happened earlier this year. And can you believe that people like (Kinabatangan MP) Bung Mokhtar (Radin) keep getting fielded?" he asked.

"They (the candidates) don't have to be loyal to us. If they later want to join PKR or Gerakan, they can go ahead."

Haris said that while the numbers in MCLM might fluctuate, many of the candidates were "reluctant politicians" with other commitments NONEat hand.

"Many of them need time to tell their families, wives, husbands and so on. They need time," he said when asked why only one name was unveiled.

A pool of independent candidates

But once the candidates agreed to stand for the coming general election, Haris said, they would be shadow MPs, working on the ground in the different constituencies where the incumbents were "ineffective".

These MCLM candidates would then be offered to the various political parties as election candidates.

"Yes, we will abide by the whip and we will vote with the party. But we will break ranks if the policies are not pro-rakyat. Our candidates will not just be 'Independents'... they will be independent-minded," he said.

What then happens if BN takes an interest in the MCLM candidates?

"Can. For that (Prime Minister) Najib (Abdul Razak) will have to table a motion in Parliament in the next sitting in March to repeal the Printing Presses and Publications Act, Internal Security Act, Official Secrets Act and the University and University Colleges Act.

"Put that into place and then we'll talk," he said.

Asked if push comes to shove and no one is interested in the candidates, Haris said the rakyat would be the guide on whether they should contest as independents.

"We will do a poll. If the constituents like us and say that we should run, then I guess that's what we'll do," he added.