

**Ka Ting : I didn't plot Chua's downfall**  
**Malaysiakini.com**  
**Apr 14, 2008**  
**Beh Lih Yi & Francis Paul**

exclusive MCA president Ong Ka Ting has broken his silence to vehemently deny that he had orchestrated the dramatic political downfall of ally-turned-foe Dr Chua Soi Lek, through the sex-tape scandal in January.

In an interview last Friday, four months after the controversy erupted, he responded to allegations in a whisper campaign that he was behind the scandal to kill Chua's political career.

The party president "strongly and categorically" denied the allegation.

ong ka ting interview 140408 02 "There is no reason at all for me to do anything to harm him. The stronger he is, the better for me because Johor will be in very good hands. All the time, I like him as an efficient leader - that is from the bottom of my heart," a slightly emotional Ong said during the 90-minute interview.

Known for his soft-spoken manner, Ong also denied he had ever pressured Chua - a potential challenger for the presidency - to quit all government and party posts when the scandal broke.

Ong, 51, pointed out that he had refrained from responding to the accusation earlier because he was focused on more serious matters.

"But if this keeps going on, I have to clear things up and put a stop to it," he stressed, saying that he has had enough of the "character assassination and unfair accusations".

Although Ong was not directly named, Chua's supporters had claimed that the 'top leadership' was involved. Chua himself is convinced that 'political enemies' were behind the distribution of the video tape.

chua soi lek mca 030408 Prior to the scandal, Chua, 61, was No 3 in the MCA leadership and was seen as a future party head. He wielded significant influence among members in several states, especially in Johor which has the highest number of delegates with voting rights at the party elections.

Political conspiracy theories later surfaced, attributing circulation of the sex tape to an attempt to kill the meteoric rise of Chua, who had hinted that he was going to contest for the top post in the party elections, now scheduled for October.

The fallout between the duo has been closely watched by members, more so because the two were blue-eyed boys of former president Dr Ling Liong Sik. They belonged to the faction dubbed 'Team A', which Ling led during an internal crisis in 2001.

Ong, a Perak-born former teacher, took over the MCA in May 2003 under a 'peace plan' inked by his mentor Ling and then deputy president Lim Ah Lek, who had led the rival 'Team B'. It ended a protracted crisis that had seen leaders engaging in an open war of words.

Ling and Lim stepped down together, paving the way for Ong and Lim's protege Chan Kong

Choy to take over as the top two.

### **'Members want me to stay'**

Wearing a light pink shirt and dark jacket, he was relaxed and accommodating during the interview - his first with an online media - as he fielded questions, answering in Mandarin and English.

ong ka ting biodata 140408 He responded to allegations that he has misused his power to place his elder brother Ka Chuan in power (creating the 'Ong dynasty'); that he fielded 'favourable' candidates in the general election at the expense of incumbents; and that he is a 'weak' leader who is subservient to Umno.

His side of the story on these claims will be published in the second and third part of the interview tomorrow and Wednesday.

Prior to the interview, he had chaired a four-hour presidential council meeting at the party headquarters. Among other matters, the meeting had touched on allegation that he is backing a clandestine group of 'spies'.

Ong appeared unfazed by the ongoing 'Save MCA campaign'. This is led by a loose group of disgruntled leaders who are demanding his resignation following the party's poor performance in the March 8 general election.

Like other Barisan Nasional component parties, the MCA was hit badly by the political tsunami, seeing its representation fall from 31 to 15 in Parliament and from 76 to 31 at state-level.

"It's for the MCA to go on, I don't think we really need to do anything to save MCA - the phrase is not relevant. What we need to do is how to rebuild, re-motivate, re-strategise, reinvent and re-engineer the party," he said.

He insisted that there was no basis for him to quit as he still commands the support of the majority of grassroots members.

"(They) are sending me messages like 'President, you have to be strong, you have to lead us through this very difficult period, you have to really get the whole team in place'. A lot of these words are coming back (to me)," he pointed out.

Ong also denied Chua's claim that he wants to be an "unchallengeable president", based on his recent decision to take over the Johor MCA state chief's post.

ong ka ting interview 140408 07 "If I want to be the unchallengeable president, I should have stuck firm with my ministerial portfolio. Why should I let that go?" he countered, explaining that his move was part of the effort to rebuild MCA.

The former housing and local government minister decided not to re-nominate himself for a cabinet post, after holding himself responsible for the dismal election results. By convention, BN component heads hold ministerial positions, but the MCA spot has gone to Ka Chuan.

Ong was tightlipped about whether he would defend the final term of his presidency in October.

He said the timing is not right and that he does not want to shift the focus from rebuilding the party to bickering over posts. He also declined to comment on possible multi-cornered fights for the No 1 post.

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