

**Pandan MCA denies Tee Keat dropped, says GE13 pick still open**  
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**By Clara Chooi**

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 22 — The majority of Pandan MCA's committee members came out today to refute their party president's claim that Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat has been excluded from the Election 2013 contest, insisting the division has not decided on its choice candidate yet.

The leaders revealed that the division has not even met a single time to discuss candidate options, much less decided on Gary Lim, its legal bureau chief, to stand in the coming polls, despite Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek's announcement on Wednesday night.

A group of 14 Pandan MCA committee members, excluding chairman Datuk Eric Ong Chen Huing and vice-chairmen Wong Choy and Foo Ah Soon, held an emergency meeting today to clarify the division's position on the matter.

"Our meeting today is to clarify media reports claiming that Gary Lim is MCA and BN's (Barisan Nasional) candidate, as suggested by Pandan MCA.

"We would like to explain here that Pandan MCA has never met to discuss who should represent MCA and BN for Pandan," the division's Youth chief Chong Sin Woon told a press conference after the meeting.

Chong, who was also rumoured as among those who may be selected to contest Pandan, was flanked by his fellow party leaders, including Pandan MCA division deputy chairman Tan Chuang Yong, vice-chairman Tan Tong Giaw, Wanita chief Leong Siew Kam, secretary Chan Chee Peng, vice-secretary Datuk Terrence Chua Cheng Huat, treasurer Datuk Leow Kum Wah, vice-treasurer Chang Kam Ming, organising secretary Chung Mun Hing, vice organising secretary Lee Fook Seng, and committee members Chong Chee Yeon, Lee Kim Loong, Lee Cheing Fong and Wong Chee Kheong.

"So whoever comes out to claim to have the support of Pandan MCA, this claim is completely baseless. This is what the division meeting agreed on today," he said.

The youth leader, however, stressed that the division would support any candidate that the party and BN leadership finally selects to contest in Pandan, a parliamentary seat held for five terms now by former MCA president and incumbent Tee Keat.

He said this support would be unconditional, regardless whether Tee Keat or Lim is selected, and had been agreed on unanimously by those who attended this afternoon's meeting.

As such, Chong said this meant that even if the party division never meets to decide on its choice candidate for Pandan, any individual that finally earns the endorsement of BN chairman Datuk Seri Najib Razak would receive their full support.

When asked why the division has yet to discuss its candidate options even when it was clear that polls are drawing closer, the leader told reporters to direct their queries to division chairman Chen Huing.

"It is not that we are not united, so do not drag us into saying that. Look here, we have 90 per cent of our division members here.

"We only called this meeting to clarify media reports that the division decided on Gary Lim and that he is our proposed candidate in Pandan," he said.

Chong's remarks, and supporting statements from leaders present at the press conference, sparked a barrage of questions from reporters over the state of unity in Pandan MCA and the identity of person with the division's actual support to contest.

But the leaders refused to answer, repeatedly maintaining that despite the apparent misunderstanding among themselves, there were no factions in Pandan MCA.

They would not state their support for either Lim or Tee Keat as their choice to be candidate, only reiterating that this was their party leadership and Najib's decision at the end of the day.

Asked if the division planned to hold another meeting, this time with the presence of its chairman and two absent vice-chairmen, and whether the next agenda would be to discuss candidate options, Chong said the matter would be decided on later.

"If there is a need to, we will hold another meeting," he said.

Talk among party circles was that Lim, who was parachuted in from Pahang MCA, has already been preparing his campaign for the polls.

It is believed that the 39-year-old lawyer has the support of the Pandan MCA division chief, as well as Dr Chua, whose open rivalry with Tee Keat is believed to be the root cause of current shake-up in Pandan.

At a Pandan MCA Chinese New Year gathering on Wednesday night, Dr Chua had told reporters that Tee Keat was not included in the party's list of possible candidates for the 13th general election, which must be held by June.

It is believed that Tee Keat, who is Pandan BN chief, was neither present nor aware of the function held at a field in Jalan Pandan 3, Pandan Jaya.

The former health minister claimed this was because Tee Keat's own Pandan MCA division members had excluded him from their list of proposed candidates for the polls, indicating that he did not have the support of his own members and BN component parties in the area.

But a confident-looking Tee Keat shrugged off this claim during his over hour-long press conference at his service centre in Pandan Jaya yesterday, which was attended by several MCA division leaders, as well as former Cempaka assemblyman and Taman Cempaka Umno branch chairman Datuk Mad Aris Mad Yusof in the room, Selangor Gerakan Youth chief Ben Liew and Pandan MIC Youth chief TM. Padmanathan.

During the press conference, Tee Keat brushed off reports that he has been dropped as MCA's candidate, insisting that the final decision lies in the hands of Najib and not Dr Chua.

He said he was not the slightest bit perturbed by Dr Chua's surprise announcement on his candidacy, even saying he had already predicted it two years ago.

It is understood that Tee Keat is favoured by senior leaders in Umno to defend his Pandan parliamentary seat because of his personal popularity among constituents there.

Observers also believe that the best chance for BN to retain the seat is to field Tee Keat, especially with talk that PKR strategy director Rafizi Ramli is slated to contest in Pandan.

Rafizi, 35, who in the last year has made a name for himself with a series of exposés such as that on the National Feedlot Centre (NFC) scandal, is already a household name with his many appearances in the media and various opposition rallies around the country.

Dr Chua had deposed Tee Keat as MCA president in a fractious power struggle in 2010, and since then, rumours have been swirling over whether the former minister would drop Tee Keat as MCA's choice for Pandan.

In the following years after Dr Chua took the helm of MCA, Tee Keat grew increasingly isolated from his party peers, engaging at intervals in bitter exchanges with his successor, who has made his dislike for the latter openly known.

In 2008, Dr Chua stepped down as health minister and MCA vice-president after admitting he was the man featured in a secretly recorded video that showed him having sex with his lover.

He was formerly the Labis MP before the sex scandal became public. The Labis seat is currently held by his son, deputy minister Chua Tee Yong.

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