

**BN will field Tee Keat as direct candidate**  
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**By Leslie Lau**

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 26 — Barisan Nasional (BN) will field former MCA president Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat as a direct candidate for the Pandan federal constituency, an “elections war room” meeting chaired by Umno president Datuk Seri Najib Razak decided yesterday.

The decision was subsequently communicated to BN component party leaders who were told Ong’s candidacy would ensure the Pandan seat now held by him was “winnable” for the coalition.

“It was decided that it is necessary to move beyond personal differences and look at Ong’s (picture) personal popularity in the constituency,” a source with knowledge of the meeting told The Malaysian Insider.

It is understood that BN felt Ong’s candidacy would help the coalition claw back some Chinese support which is now at a low point.

“Ong’s support level among the Chinese is strong. It can help BN,” said the source.

Last week, Dr Chua suggested that his old political foe would be dropped as BN’s candidate for Pandan.

MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek had told reporters last week that Ong was not included in the party’s list of possible candidates for the 13th general election.

But Ong has since hit back and had organised a well-attended Chinese New Year gathering on Sunday that was attended by Najib.

BN had previously fielded an independent candidate under its banner during the 1995 federal polls. The Hulu Rajang MP then, Billy Abit Joo, made history as BN’s first candidate to contest as the coalition’s member.

Billy Abit did not belong to any of the component parties as there was no provision that required a BN member to do so. He later joined the Sarawak People’s Party.

The idea prompted suggestions that popular Mas Gading MP Datuk Tiki Lafe could also contest as a direct candidate after his faction, which includes four other parliamentarians and one state assemblyman, left the Sarawak Progressive Democratic Party.

Ong was deposed by Dr Chua as MCA president but the former remains popular with independent Chinese voters and significant numbers within the BN party.

Asked on Sunday if the rivalry could paralyse the party’s machinery and polls preparation in Pandan, Ong dismissed the idea, saying a win depended on many other factors and not solely on individuals.

The Pandan MP, however, refused to rate BN’s chances of retaining the seat, merely saying the party machinery there had worked hard since Election 2008.

“Despite the various obstacles and challenges, their spirit is never broken,” he said.

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