

Soi Lek: Don't ask me about MCA seats, all up to PM
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By Clara Chooi

KUALA LUMPUR, April 10 — Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek berated the media today for constantly pushing him to answer questions on his or his MCA's contest in the polls, pointing out that the final decision lies solely in the hands of Datuk Seri Najib Razak.

Met on the sidelines of the Barisan Nasional (BN) divisional meeting at the Putra World Trade Centre (PWTC) this afternoon, the MCA president refused to entertain the questions and turned around instead to question the motive behind them.

"PM already told you people that there is no final decision. Why must we keep repeating the same thing again and again?" he said.

"You all must understand. The PM already has the final say. No final decision (has been made). So you don't need to sibuk-sibuk (be busybodies), hoping that I say something different from the PM.

"And then you can create another crisis - (that MCA has) differing views. What's the purpose? No purpose," Dr Chua added.

Dr Chua (picture) was asked at first to reveal if he would be entering the coming polls contest and to state his chosen seat, to which he replied, "Don't talk about myself. Talk about BN first."

Sources recently told The Malaysian Insider that the former minister had recently declined the offer to contest in Gelang Patah where Pakatan Rakyat (PR) is fielding DAP veteran Lim Kit Siang, leaving BN to consider other choices for what is expected to be the hottest battle in Umno's home state of Johor.

The Malaysian Insider also understands MCA is pushing for caretaker Johor Menteri Besar Datuk Abdul Ghani Othman to fight the DAP adviser but an unsettled Malay ground and pro-opposition Chinese voters could scuttle those plans.

"Some in the BN war room thought it would be a titanic fight and that Dr Chua is strong enough to face Kit but the MCA president said no," a BN source told The Malaysian Insider, referring to the veteran opposition leader by his moniker Kit.

"Now other choices are being considered as the final list must be ready by Tuesday," the source added.

PR announced last month that Lim was to run in Gelang Patah, and spearhead the opposition pact's push to pick up more federal seats in Johor. Soi Lek was then dared by the DAP to face Lim but the MCA president declined the challenge last week.

The MCA had earlier named local division leader Jason Teoh to run in the federal seat won by Johor Wanita MCA chief and deputy national vice-chairman Tan Ah Eng in Election 2008 when she retained the seat by defeating PKR's Zaliha Mustafa by 8,851 votes.

Lim's political arch-foe Malaysia's longest-serving prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad called the move from Ipoh Timor "ridiculous", calling BN members to bury the DAP adviser's

political career and said the local Chinese would not give support.

Lim then asked Dr Mahathir to run against him but was turned down. Since then, MCA-controlled newspaper The Star has been reporting that Ghani was popular with the electorate and would be ideal to face the veteran DAP leader.

However, it is learnt that BN has not included the caretaker Johor menteri besar in its candidates list due to a pushback from the local Malay community upset with rising costs and being elbowed out of the fast-developing and pricy Iskandar Malaysia economic corridor.

The 67-year-old Umno leader has been a four-term MB but it is understood that BN chairman Datuk Seri Najib Razak wants to put in younger and "winnable" candidates to helm the Umno home state.

"Najib has promised at least 40 per cent new faces and he wants those who are capable of pushing Iskandar Malaysia even higher," said an Umno source, confirming that Ghani's name is not on any list.

He cited Ghani's frosty ties with the Johor palace as one of the main reasons that the state leader is being dropped, adding "That's why he is free to offer himself for Gelang Patah because there is no seat for him."

It is understood that caretaker Higher Education Minister Datuk Mohamed Khaled Nordin and UDA Holdings chairman Datuk Nur Jazlan Mohamed are in a short list to replace Ghani as Johor MB if BN keeps the southern state.

"BN needs to put someone strong there as every parliamentary seat is crucial in this election. But Dr Chua doesn't want and Ghani is willing but there are issues that could cut his support," the Umno source said.

"We'll find out soon enough but it won't be a titanic fight now," he added.

Some 13.3 million voters, including 5,200 abroad, are eligible to cast their ballots in Election 2013 to elect lawmakers in 222 federal and 505 state seats in 12 states. Sarawak already held its state elections in 2011.

The Election Commission (EC) announced today that the 13th general election will be held on May 5, and nomination day falls on April 20, which will signal the start of formal electoral campaigns that will last 15 days.

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