

Tee Keat says no choice if forced to leave MCA
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By Boo Su-Lyn

KUALA LUMPUR, April 19 — Datuk Seri Ong Tee Keat said today he does not want to leave the MCA, but stressed that the people's wishes are more important in Election 2013.

The incumbent Pandan MP, however, did not specify if he would contest as an independent in the May 5 polls after the MCA fielded lawyer Gary Lim in the federal constituency.

"I am now in a tight spot," said Ong in an interview with Malay daily Sinar Harian published today.

"I have no other choice, this is the only way. First they bring me down, then they alienate me, and now they get rid of me. However, the party platform is not the only way for us to fight; our spirit and heart are more important in our struggle," he added.

PKR strategy director Rafizi Ramli, who will contest the Pandan seat, said yesterday that a three-way fight would benefit Barisan Nasional (BN).

Ong's supporters and followers have organised several gatherings in the past few days to express their support for him ahead of Nomination Day tomorrow.

MCA president Datuk Seri Dr Chua Soi Lek deposed Ong as MCA president in 2010, but the latter remains popular with independent Chinese voters and significant numbers within BN.

Ong said today that his friends in the MCA had expressed concern about him being expelled from the Chinese party if he were to run in the 13th general election as an independent.

"I have thought about this. This is a game of chess played by the MCA leadership; the party elections are after GE13 after all. But if I was forced to make a choice, I would place more importance on the wishes and aspirations of the people, rather than the party," he said.

Ong pointed out that he received much support at the grassroots level.

"Honestly, I was touched by the support given by so many parties, including the people at Pandan," he said.

"Everyone can see that my service centre and clinic grew rapidly. This success was not only because of me, but also because of the local residents and the NGOs who helped me a lot," Ong added.

Dr Chua reportedly said yesterday that the MCA had decided to drop Ong because the latter often criticised the BN component party, calling it irrelevant.

Ong, however, questioned Dr Chua's reasons for axing him from the party's candidate list.

"If that's the case, then it should just be stated in the party constitution or they should tell the whole country that the leaders of this party cannot be criticised. Just say it straight," said Ong.

"If it's true that I broke the rules and dishonoured the party, then the party's disciplinary

board should have taken action against me," he added.

Observers believe that BN's best chances in retaining the Pandan seat is by fielding Ong against Rafizi, who is known as PKR's "exposé man".

MCA won only 15 of the 40 parliamentary seats that it contested in Election 2008; seven of which were in Johor.

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