

## Only one candidate qualifies in Singapore presidential race

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Singapore is likely to have its first female president, with only one candidate qualifying Monday for an election limited to members of the minority Malay community.

The Elections Department said only one of five hopefuls had qualified. It said the others had not satisfied stringent criteria, such as having held key public positions or running a company with at least 500 million Singapore dollars (\$370 million) in equity.

It did not identify the candidate, but former Speaker of Parliament Halimah Yacob confirmed that she had qualified.

Yacob, a former member of the ruling People's Action Party, entered politics in 2001. She won four parliamentary elections before being chosen speaker. She resigned from the party last month.

Yacob is expected to be named Singapore's eighth president on Wednesday without a vote. She is to take office at a later date.

"I can only say that I promise to do the best that I can to serve the people of Singapore, and that doesn't change whether there is an election or no election," she said.

The presidency is largely a ceremonial position. Singapore's Constitution allows the president to veto the use of the country's reserves and some public appointments, but doesn't give the post any executive authority.

Last year, lawmakers amended the constitution to include presidential elections limited to a particular race. This kicks in when a racial group has not held the presidency in five continuous terms, or 30 years.

The government has said that having a Malay hold office this time is important because the president plays a unifying role. Singapore's last Malay president, Yusof Ishak, died in office in 1970.

The city-state has a population of 5.6 million. It is 74.3 percent Chinese, 13.4 percent Malay, 9.1 percent Indian and 3.2 percent others.

The rising threat of terrorism makes unity crucial, said outgoing President Tony Tan. "One of these days, an incident will happen. And when that happens, it's very important to ensure we do not allow it to destroy our cohesion, or to have tensions between the various communities," he was quoted as saying by The Straits Times newspaper.

"In that respect, reserving this next election for the Malays is appropriate — unfortunately, because of these circumstances around the world which Singapore is caught up in," Tan said.

Tan, a former deputy prime minister, was elected in a tight race in 2011. He received 35 percent of around 2.1 million votes.

Analysts said Singaporeans may take time to accept such reserved elections. The country's first contested vote for president was held in 1993.

"It is not a surprise therefore that there is unfamiliarity with it, a questioning of whether any of it is needed, and a sense of ambivalence about having only candidates of one racial group contest in it," said Gillian Koh, a senior research fellow at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy.

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This story has been corrected to show that the Elections Department did not identify the qualifying candidate.