

## **Contest the post as it exists, says Tony Tan** **Don't try to make presidency separate power centre**

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All the candidates taking part in this month's presidential election should run for the office that exists - not for the one they wish to have, said former deputy prime minister Tony Tan yesterday.

Dr Tan, himself one of those in the running for the state's highest office at the Aug 27 polls, also reiterated that the elected president is not - and should not be - a separate power centre, although he could be a person with influence.

The 71-year-old made these points in response to the ongoing debate following last Friday's Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) dialogue on the roles, responsibilities and powers of the elected presidency - an event which he attended as a guest.

'The president can - and should - address the concerns of Singaporeans and take them into account when exercising his or her powers,' said Dr Tan in a statement posted on his official campaign website.

'These concerns can also be raised formally or informally through appropriate channels. The choice of channels to pursue depends on the individual situation.'

Dr Tan, one of six people who submitted their forms for an eligibility certificate required to contest the election, said that the president 'must have a heart for all Singaporeans'.

'He must also know how to reflect these concerns effectively in the context of national and international affairs,' he said.

'One can, of course, imagine very different roles for the president that would require a constitutional amendment. But the presidential election itself is the wrong forum for this.'

The IPS event - which featured presentations by Law and Foreign Minister K Shanmugam, ambassador-at-large Tommy Koh and constitutional law specialist Thio Li-ann - has caused some confusion among the public about what the president can or cannot do.

Mr Shanmugam said, among various things, that the president could speak on issues only as authorised by the Cabinet and that he must follow the Cabinet's advice in the discharge of his duties.

The minister also said that the president was someone who was able to give his views and advice even in areas outside his scope. The quality of the advice, however, would depend on the calibre of the person offering it.

Besides Dr Tan, the other five presidential hopefuls - Tan Kin Lian, Tan Jee Say, Tan Cheng Bock, Andrew Kuan and Ooi Boon Ewe - have all weighed in over the last few days with their own views on the constitutional role of the elected president.