

## Applications open for first reserved Presidential Election

**Siau Ming En**

**TODAY**, 1 June 2017

SINGAPORE — The run-up to September's historic presidential election, which has been reserved for the Malay community, formally kicks off today, and applicants for the post can now apply for the necessary certificates to contest, given the tightened criteria.

It will be compulsory for the prospective candidates to submit one form to the Presidential Elections Committee to get a certificate of eligibility, and another form to a newly set-up Community Committee, to declare that they are part of the Malay community and get a Community Certificate.

From now until five days after the writ of election is issued — sometime in late August — prospective candidates should apply for these certificates before polls are held to elect Singapore's first Malay president since the late Yusof Ishak.

Failure to submit an application with either committees will rule them out of the election.

Previously, applicants had up to three days after the writ of election is issued to submit their applications. Prospective candidates are given this extra amount of time to prepare their applications, and they will be informed of their outcome before Nomination Day.

The Elections Department said yesterday that the nomination papers would be revised to include a new statutory declaration that candidates understand the role of the President, and would not be drawn into making statements or promises which exceed the prescribed role of the President as stated in the Constitution.

While not mandatory, a new form will also be available for candidates to declare that they will campaign for the election in a "manner that is dignified, decorous and consistent with the President's position as the Head of State and the symbol of national unity".

This form, if signed, will be put up on the notice board with the nomination papers during the proceedings on Nomination Day, and members of the public will be able to view it.

Speaking to TODAY, Institute of Policy Studies deputy director (research) Gillian Koh said that the application time frame is needed as there are a few more requirements imposed on the prospective candidates.

Under the new system, prospective candidates could wait for the writ to be issued to learn if the election is a reserved one. "But since the system is quite clearly set out and transparent, it will be obvious to potential candidates if an upcoming election will be reserved and for which ethnic community," she added.

Singapore Management University law don Eugene Tan said that any prospective candidate should make the necessary applications early rather than later. "For someone running for the (position of the) Head of State, it's important that that person doesn't seek to contest on a whim or fancy. All these have to be very deliberate decisions, which also require advance planning," he added.

In February, the Government announced that the polls to elect the next President will be held in September should more than one candidate step forward to stand for election. It moved the campaigning period away from August to avoid clashing with National Day celebrations.

After President Tony Tan's term expires on Aug 31, an Acting President will assume the office until his successor is elected and assumes office. If no one is nominated in this reserved election, the Prime Minister will issue a fresh writ declaring an open election.

Last November, changes to the Elected Presidency scheme were passed into law. This included instituting a mechanism that reserves an election for a particular ethnicity that has not had an elected representative for five consecutive terms.

Earlier last month, former presidential candidate Tan Cheng Bock mounted a legal challenge in the High Court against the Attorney-General's Chambers' finding that Dr Wee Kim Wee was Singapore's first elected President. This was because it was the basis for triggering a reserved election for Malay candidates.

Later, non-practising lawyer M Ravi also filed an application in the High Court, arguing that reserving elections for particular races goes against the Constitution.

Other amendments to the election process include overseas voters having two more calendar days after the writ is issued to register as an overseas elector, while the ballot paper has a new format that shows clearly demarcated areas for the voter to mark an "X" next to his or her choice of candidate.