

## **George Yeo for President?**

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As the window opened yesterday for the race for the Presidential Election to begin, former Foreign Minister George Yeo, 57, sprung a surprise by indicating that he could yet throw his hat into the ring — despite seemingly ruling out the option last month.

As three others picked up application forms to be certified eligible for the role, Mr Yeo wrote on his Facebook page yesterday afternoon: “Many Singaporeans from different walks of life, young and old, have asked me to reconsider my decision on the Presidency, some impassionately. Thinking hard about it and praying for wisdom.”

He had said in a press conference on May 10 that he was a “free spirit” and did not think he was “temperamentally suited for such a job”, although when asked by reporters then if he was retiring from politics, he had said it was “the responsibility of every citizen to be involved in politics because politics is about the way our lives are run collectively” and he doubted that he would “ever retire from politics”.

In order to apply to run for President, Mr Yeo will have to resign from the People’s Action Party (PAP). He declined further comment when contacted yesterday, preferring to “leave it as it is for the time being”.

Former Member of Parliament (MP) Cynthia Phua told MediaCorp she was surprised by his message but was “very glad that he’s rethinking about it”. She said her former Aljunied teammate has done well in representing Singapore and was well respected over the world: “If he’s convinced he can bring Singapore forward, he will do it (run for President) ... His love for Singapore is tremendous.”

MP Charles Chong said that if Mr Yeo were to become President, the role would be an extension of the work he had been doing as Foreign Minister: “A President goes to different parts of the world to make friends for Singapore ... He’s imminently qualified to do the job, carry out the functions of the President, like protecting the reserves.”

Former PAP MP Tan Cheng Bock, who expressed his interest last week in running for the Elected Presidency, told MediaCorp yesterday he “welcomes the challenge” by Mr Yeo, as it would be good to have a contest.

Dr Tan, who collected his forms as the application period began yesterday, believes Singaporeans will vote based on the individual merits of each candidate.

Said Dr Tan: “I’d prefer that people take a deep analysis of the individual candidate, irrespective of his (past) party. I’ll lose some votes maybe because of my past association with the PAP. That’s all in the game; it’s okay ... But I want to believe that Singaporeans generally would assess me on a slightly different view.”

Minister of State (Manpower and National Development) Tan Chuan-Jin, a first-term PAP MP, described Dr Tan and Mr Yeo as “respected individuals in their own right” who are

regarded highly by people. On the fact that both have links to the PAP, he added: “Some will see it as a disadvantage but others will also view it as neutral or even positive.”

As some observers have noted, given the criteria set out in the Constitution, a candidate will likely have links with the establishment or the PAP Government.

With that in mind, Institute of Policy Studies senior research fellow Gillian Koh pointed out that it is not clear at this stage “if any political party will come out to endorse any candidate”.

Dr Koh said there may be a hangover from the “more lively level of partisan politics” in the recent General Election (GE). Said Dr Koh: “For instance, we know that there was an animated exchange on the issue of reserves during the GE, so the parties may pick up on that issue and shape the public’s thoughts going into any election.”

At the Elections Department yesterday, Dr Tan was accompanied by family members and supporters including former and current PAP activists. He told reporters that his former ward of Ayer Rajah will be his “base camp”. He will be “going back to his roots” to rally support for his campaign and intends to go on walkabouts as soon as this weekend.

The two others who turned up yesterday to collect the applications forms included self-employed Ooi Boon Ewe, who has never qualified for the Presidential Election, and Mr Martin Lee, who claimed to represent an entrepreneur in his 50s who fulfils the eligibility criteria — also with the surname Lee, though not related.