

## **Many still appear confused as to what Elected Presidency is all about**

***Tan Weizhen***

***Today***, 6 August 2011

With less than a month to go before the Presidential Election is scheduled to be held, many Singaporeans still appear to be confused as to what the Elected Presidency is all about.

This confusion over the President's duties and responsibilities — which has led to much debate in newspapers and cyberspace — was once again reflected by the audience at an Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) forum on the Elected Presidency yesterday.

Political watcher Eugene Tan — a law professor at the Singapore Management University — who was among the audience, also noted that it is important that Singaporeans get to know what the Elected President does, as the remuneration is high for a role, which attends to many ceremonial functions.

The remuneration for the President and the ministers are currently under review by a committee.

Law and Foreign Affairs Minister K Shanmugam noted that while it is the task of the Government to communicate clearly to the public what powers the President has and what the issues are, Singaporeans should also educate themselves.

Echoing a similar view, law academic Thio Li-Ann said that voters “need to do the homework”.

She noted that information on the subject is readily available, courtesy of the “valiant efforts” of the law and finance ministries to publish it on their websites.

Mr Shanmugam added that presidential candidates also have a responsibility to help the people understand what they stand for. But he stressed: “Just make sure that what you say to the people is consistent with what you can constitutionally perform. Don't say things that you can't do.”

The issue of a candidate's independence was also brought up repeatedly at the forum during the question-and-answer session. A question was raised on whether candidates who were once members of political parties would be perceived as less independent.

To this, Dr Thio said: “The office makes the person ... Convince us you are independent, convince us you can count, convince us you actually know what you are talking about when it comes to your role.”

Mr Shanmugam said one can judge a President's independence by his ability to discharge his duties with a right mix of acumen, skill, wisdom and knowledge.

“It doesn't matter what his past affiliations were, as President Ong showed,” said Mr Shanmugam, referring to the late Mr Ong Teng Cheong, a former Deputy Prime Minister who had well-publicised run-ins with the Government when he was President.