

Presidential Election on Aug 27

Writ of Elections issued yesterday; Nomination Day is Aug 17

Teo Xuanwei

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In 13 days, Singapore will know if there will be a contest for the job of President of Singapore.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong issued the Writ of Election yesterday announcing Aug 17 as Nomination Day.

If more than one candidate qualifies to run, Singaporeans will go to the polls 10 days later, on Aug 27, to pick the Republic's third Elected President in what will be only the second contested election since 1993.

Candidates have until 1pm this Saturday to submit their applications for a Certificate of Eligibility.

Five people have declared their intention to contest in the Presidential Election. Their candidacies are subject to the approval from the Presidential Elections Committee, which will issue the certificate to successful applicants not later than the eve of Nomination Day.

On Nomination Day, candidates are required to present the necessary documents — including the Political Donation Certificate — to the Returning Officer, as well as pay the S\$48,000 election deposit to the Accountant-General.

Former Deputy Prime Minister Tony Tan, former People's Action Party (PAP) Ayer Rajah MP Tan Cheng Bock, ex-NTUC Income chief Tan Kin Lian and former civil servant Tan Jee Say — who contested in the recent General Election under the Singapore Democratic Party banner — have already submitted their forms. The fifth, former JTC Corporation group chief financial officer Andrew Kuan, who was disqualified in the 2005 Presidential Election, has said he will submit his forms tomorrow.

In the statement yesterday, the Prime Minister's Office also named the People's Association (PA) as the Nomination Centre, and PA chief executive director Yam Ah Mee as the Returning Officer.

Readying their campaigns

With nine days for campaigning — with Aug 26 designated as Cooling Off Day — Mr Tan Jee Say noted that it is “not easy to cover the whole country” within the timeframe. “But it's something we have to live with and do the best we can,” he added.

Dr Tan Cheng Bock told Today that his campaign team has drawn up different plans for straight fights as well as multi-candidate contests.

“We are quite prepared for the campaign, and we will carry out all our plans, such as going around malls and hawker centres to be visible. We will also tap on other means, such as through the media and online,” he said.

Political commentators, however, felt that nine days are adequate for the Presidential Election campaign.

Said Institute of Policy Studies senior research fellow Gillian Koh: "The rules are clear on this. They've had the full liberty to speak to people and create their own audiences all this while and, in fact, the first-mover started building his profile in March and declared his interest in the post soon after the General Election."

The presidential aspirants also took the opportunity to reiterate their independence from the ruling People's Action Party.

Mr Tan Jee Say said his "absolute independence" from the PAP accords him the "moral authority to fulfill the mission of the Elected President".

Mr Tan Kin Lian noted that, while almost every presidential hopeful is claiming to be independent of the Government, "the people of Singapore ... can see who is truly independent and who simply cannot be".

He added: "I intend to work in full cooperation with the Government to find common ground on issues that the people feel strongly about. I believe that a good government will be able to recognise a genuine call from the people and that the moral authority of the President will be sufficient weight for fair consideration."

Mr Tan also urged companies and civic organisations to donate to charitable organisations instead of spending on "wasteful political advertising for their preferred candidate".

In response to media queries, Dr Tony Tan said he looked forward to a "vigorous exchange of views during the campaign, carried out with decorum and in a manner befitting the office at stake".

He reiterated his belief that the next President "will be involved in decisions about the economic future of Singapore, perhaps needing to invoke the formal powers of the President on whether to draw down past reserves".

Dr Tony Tan, who resigned as executive director of the Government of Singapore Investment Corporation and chairman of Singapore Press Holdings, added: "This is why I resigned from jobs that I loved to step forward and offer my candidacy."