

## **How many will get to run for President? Not all candidates meet stringent criteria to land certificate of eligibility, say experts**

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The number 1727 may well be popular with the punters this weekend.

Aug 17 is Nomination Day for the Presidential Election and Aug 27, Polling Day.

Yesterday, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong issued the Writ for the presidential contest.

He also announced that Nomination Day will be held at the People's Association at King George's Avenue.

Punters are also betting that there will be an election.

Judging from the analysis of political observers, they are right.

Singaporeans will be casting their votes for the second time this year on Aug 27, a Saturday.

The potential candidates have said they are looking forward to a contest.

But will all the potential candidates meet the stringent criteria to land the certificate of eligibility?

No, the same experts said.

Yesterday, Mr Tan Jee Say became the fourth man to submit his application for the certificate of eligibility at the Elections Department.

The other presidential hopefuls – Dr Tan Cheng Bock, Dr Tony Tan and Mr Tan Kin Lian – have already submitted their applications.

The last man, Mr Andrew Kuan, is expected to submit his forms tomorrow.

Application for the certificate will close at 1pm on Saturday, the third day after the Writ is issued.

After that, all eyes will be on Aug 16 as precedent indicates that the three-man Presidential Elections Committee (PEC) is likely to issue the certificate of eligibility on the eve of Nomination Day.

Once the applications are in, the PEC takes over and scrutinises the papers.

Institute of Policy Studies senior research fellow Gillian Koh said the PEC will look at the records submitted by the candidates.

But it will also do its due diligence with background checks on those who apply to run.

What if a prospective candidate does not meet the explicit stated criteria for candidacy?

### **Hurdle**

One apparent hurdle has been the criterion: To be chairman or chief executive of a company incorporated or registered under the Companies Act with a paid-up capital of at least \$100 million.

Dr Koh said there is a clause in the Constitution that allows the PEC to determine if, in its opinion, a candidate has the experience and expertise that suggests the person could carry out functions and duties of the president effectively.

So there is a level of interpretation at play, she said.

Who is likely to contest the election then?

Political observer and Singapore Management University's assistant law professor Eugene Tan said that the PEC is likely to issue more than one certificate of eligibility. One would go to Dr Tony Tan.

Said Prof Tan: "If you go on paper, Dr Tan Cheng Bock does meet the criteria. The bigger question mark may relate to Mr Tan Kin Lian.

"I'm doubtful about Mr Tan Jee Say and I'm certain that Mr Andrew Kuan won't get it."

Political analyst Derek da Cunha named his picks: "Assuming that there will be a contest, I would expect it would be a three-cornered fight among Dr Tony Tan, Dr Tan Cheng Bock and Mr Tan Kin Lian."

While the PEC can interpret the criteria, it has no legal powers to make an exception, said Prof Tan.

He added: "They are not constitutionally empowered to do that. Essentially, if someone meets the criteria, that person gets the certificate. If someone does not meet the criteria, then he won't get it."

The potential candidates have to play their part too, by studying the rules and putting in their applications responsibly, said Dr Koh.

She added: "For its part, the PEC would have to convince the public it has done its due diligence, and keep the trust with the public when it gives out its decision, especially since its decision is final as the rules state, it is 'not subject to appeal or review in court'."

So are the criteria too stringent?

The New Paper polled 371 Singaporeans aged 21 to 35 and asked if the current criteria for qualifying as a presidential candidate were too stringent.

More than 56 per cent of respondents said no.

Said university student Wayne Chua, 24: "We definitely want the very best the country can produce as he or she represents the state.

"In fact, the criteria should also emphasise social involvement and moral benchmarks."

Agreeing, full-time national serviceman Shane Chong, 21, said that having a list of stringent criteria would allow Singaporeans to narrow down the field to a few strong candidates.

But student Annabelle Chan, 21, said any Singapore citizen who feels that he or she can make a positive contribution the country should be allowed a chance to run.