

## **President not a separate power centre: Tony Tan**

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While the elected President can have influence, he "is not — and should not be — a separate power centre," believes presidential hopeful Dr Tony Tan.

What the President can and should do is address the concerns of Singaporeans and take them into account when exercising his or her powers, said Dr Tan.

"These concerns can also be raised formally or informally through appropriate channels. The choice of channels to pursue depends on the individual situation," he said.

Outlining his understanding of the President's role in a statement on Wednesday, he added the President must also have "a heart for all Singaporeans" and know how to reflect their concerns effectively in the context of national and international affairs.

"One can, of course, imagine very different roles for the President that would require a constitutional amendment. But the Presidential Election itself is the wrong forum for this," said Dr Tan.

"Candidates should run for the office that exists, not for the one they wish to have."

His comments come in the midst of an ongoing debate on the role of the highest office in Singapore, most recently stemming from Law Minister K Shanmugam's comments at an Institute of Policy Studies forum.

He said the President "can speak on issues only as authorised by the Cabinet; and he must follow the advice of the Cabinet in the discharge of his duties".

Dr Tan, who attended the IPS forum, said many have pressed him for his thoughts on the issue.

Other Presidential hopefuls have also raised their views. Both Tan Kin Lian and Dr Tan Cheng Bock agreed the President should work within the boundaries of the Constitution.

Tan Kian Lian disagreed, however, that the President could not speak without the Cabinet's approval. He urged the government to "adopt a more open approach towards the issues of the people" and engage the public on their concerns.

Dr Tan Cheng Bock took issue with Minister Shanmugam's comments that the influence a President depends on who the President is. Dr Tan Cheng Bock urged for mutual respect between the government and the President.