

Candidates For Singapore Presidential Race Make Final Push To Garner Votes
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SINGAPORE, Aug 25 (Bernama) -- The four "Tan," candidates of the Singapore presidential race are making their final ditch to win the hearts and minds of the citizens to vote for them this Saturday.

Singaporeans will choose a new president among the four to replace the incumbent, S.R. Nathan, who completes his term on Aug 31.

The polls will be the first contested election since the 1993 election when Ong Teng Cheong won in a straight fight and it will also be the first multi-candidate presidential race for Singapore.

Friday is the cooling-off period and candidates can no longer be campaigning to woo voters.

The four presidential hopefuls -- Dr Tony Tan Keng Yam, Dr Tan Cheng Bok, Tan Kin Lian and Tan Jee Say -- are seeking a six-year term as head of state.

An intense electoral bout started since Nomination Day, Aug 17, with every one of them pledging to do their utmost best for the nation and its citizens in particular, if elected.

Although the president's position is largely ceremonial, the 1991 constitutional amendments gave the president certain reserve powers over government expenditure of financial reserves and appointments to key public offices such as the Chief Justice, Attorney-General, chairman and members of the Public Service Commission, chief of Defence Forces and the Commissioner of Police.

The president also has certain powers of oversight over the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau and decisions of the government under the Internal Security Act and the Maintenance of Religious Harmony Act.

In vying for the post, all candidates gave their justification on why they are deemed fit to be elected as president.

Kin Lian has promised to be a president who would make life better for Singaporeans, if he is voted into office.

At a recent rally, the former chief of NTUC Income, a cooperative insurance society, said he was standing for election as a public duty and outlined areas that he would champion if elected as president.

These include giving better recognition to national servicemen, helping the elderly and sandwiched class, and making homes more affordable for first-time buyers.

On the other hand, Jee Say, a former senior civil servant, said it was important to emphasise transparency, fairness and independence to gain voters' trust.

He said people would trust him because he would not do things that were not within the scope of the presidency.

Jee Say said: "If they (the voters) believe I am campaigning for the good of Singapore, and that I am pledging to do my best to make life better for Singaporeans, then the ordinary people will vote for me."

He also promised to look into the plight of the Malay community in Singapore.

If elected, the Malays could approach him and his advisers, who are Malay leaders, for help, he said.

Candidate Dr Tan Cheng Bock said he would promote multi-culturalism very strongly if elected as president.

"It [multi-culturalism] is in me. I think it is a cornerstone of the Singapore way of life. It is something very unifying. I think that is good for our country and we must continue to promote multi-culturalism," he said.

For Tony Tan, who has vast experience in the economic and financial sector, the presidential election is different from the general election "because our president must be above politics".

"The president does not have executive powers except in five areas clearly specified in the Constitution," he noted.

"The president is not a centre of power in Singapore. Only the government is. They make the economic decisions, not the president.

"But this does not mean the president does not have influence. He has access to the prime minister, Cabinet ministers and all Cabinet papers," he added.

"(If elected,) I will encourage Singaporeans to strike out in new areas, and give them opportunities to try new ventures and new ideas. I can help encourage their dreams and bring them to reality," he pledged.

Much have been said and promised by the candidates, and it is now up to Singaporeans to decide who can serve them best.

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