

Singapore PM's preferred candidate narrowly wins presidency
Reuters
August 28, 2011

SINGAPORE, Aug 28 — Singapore's former Deputy Prime Minister Tony Tan was elected president of the Southeast Asian city-state after a recount, with the slim margin seen as a blow for Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong who had backed him in the fight for the largely ceremonial role.

Tony Tan, who was previously executive director of Singapore sovereign wealth fund GIC, received 35.19 per cent of the 2.15 million votes cast, just slightly more than medical doctor Tan Cheng Bock who got 34.85 per cent.

Investment adviser Tan Jee Say got 25.04 per cent and the fourth candidate, former insurance executive Tan Kin Lian, got 4.91 per cent in the election that took place yesterday.

The returning officer in charge of the election ordered a recount because the difference in the number of votes cast for Tony Tan and Tan Cheng Bock was fewer than 2 per cent of the total number of valid votes cast.

Tony Tan's share of vote was well below the 60 per cent received by Lee's long-ruling People's Action Party (PAP) in May parliamentary elections when the opposition made historic gains.

The PAP, which was co-founded by Lee's father Lee Kuan Yew, has ruled Singapore since the city-state became independent in 1965.

"Voters faced a difficult choice between Dr Tony Tan and Dr Tan Cheng Bock. This explains why the winning margin is so narrow," the younger Lee said in a statement.

"Nevertheless, under our first-past-the-post system, the election has produced an unambiguous winner, who has the mandate to be the next president," he added.

Tan is the most common family name in Singapore, where ethnic Chinese make up about 75 per cent of the population.

Singapore's directly-elected president has historically performed mostly ceremonial duties. But the president wields veto powers that will let him delay the appointment of people to senior government positions as well as in government entities such as GIC and state investor Temasek.

Tan Cheng Bock, a former PAP parliamentarian with a track record of speaking up against unpopular policies, had said that if elected, he would use the president's powers to scrutinise government appointments more closely.

Opposition links

During the election campaign, Tan Cheng Bock was aided by several opposition figures as well as many PAP activists.

Tan Jee Say and Tan Kin Lian also had links to Singapore's small but growing opposition.

The PAP did not formally endorse Tony Tan although Lee had described him as a "unifying figure" who would bring honour and credit to Singapore.

Tony Tan was also endorsed by several business groups as well as many of the government-controlled trade unions.

Singapore's presidency was last contested in 1993 due largely to the tough conditions set by the government for prospective candidates that prevented many Singaporeans from running.

Outgoing President S R Nathan, whose term ends in August, did not face any competition when he became president in 1999 and was returned unopposed to a second term six years later.

Under Singapore's constitution, candidates must have served either at least three years in a top government position, or as chairman or chief executive of a Singapore-registered firm with paid-up capital of at least S\$100 million (RM247 million).

Like most top posts in the Southeast Asian city-state, the president is well paid with a salary estimated at more than S\$4 million — intended to do away with corruption, but a sore point with voters. — Reuters

The Malaysian Insider

Copyright © 2011 The Malaysian Insider

Source: <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/world/article/singapore-pms-preferred-candidate-narrowly-wins-presidency/>