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SINGAPORE — There were none at the last elections. But as the next General Election looms, the first indication has emerged that there may be an independent candidate this time.

And he is someone whom Singaporeans may remember: former Presidential hopeful Andrew Kuan, 57, who submitted his application for the 2005 Presidential Election.

The former JTC Corporation group chief financial officer said on Facebook that he was "preparing for 2011 GE as an independent candidate" and asked for comments on "what others have to say".

When contacted, though, he preferred to wait till the "fresh new year" to say more. He would only add — without saying if it could be a possible election slogan — that he wanted "Clearer Accountability, Responsibility and Equality for a better Singapore — CARE for a better Singapore".

Mr Kuan, who was last known to be running an executive search firm, was deemed not able to "effectively discharge the functions and duties of the office of President" by the Presidential Election Committee in 2005 because his three-year stint at JTC was "not comparable to those (qualifications) mentioned in the Constitution".

In Parliamentary Elections here, the eligibility criteria are less stringent. But few independent candidates have contested in recent times.

For the upcoming polls, only one other person has publicly raised the possibility of stepping forward. But that individual, former NTUC Income chief executive Tan Kin Lian, told MediaCorp yesterday he will not be contesting when the GE comes.

Mr Tan feels, though, that the chances of an independent candidate at the ballot box are "quite good". "Many people aren't happy with the cost of living. There are too many foreigners, so things are too congested. People would like to see some changes to Parliament," he said.

'DIVERSITY' WELCOMED

Opposition parties told MediaCorp that while they welcomed Singaporeans stepping forward politically, they clearly preferred if these individuals did so by joining a party.

National Solidarity Party secretary-general Goh Meng Seng said: "Most likely, they'll end up in a three-corner fight. If you have a three-corner fight, chances are you're not going to win, no matter you're an Opposition party or independent candidate."

Socialist Front secretary-general Chia Ti Lik added that independent candidates should be "forthright and forthcoming to the other political parties, so that we can get to know them". He said: "If they come late, they may not gain entry to the conference where the Opposition decides who goes to which ward to avoid three-corner fights."

While analysts note that the chances of success of an independent candidate have not been high historically — and remain so — due to the lack of a party machinery to support such bids, they welcome the diversity these candidates can bring.

But Institute of Policy Studies senior research fellow Gillian Koh noted: "It's going to be a crowded field... (independent candidates) may have to be quite outstanding to attract any attention."

Singapore Management University law lecturer Eugene Tan added: "Independent candidates can provide a non-partisan view. But the big challenge is: What do you stand for, and how are you going to carry out your election promises effectively?"