Dr Tony Tan's presidency bid may deter others from running: analyst

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SINGAPORE: With Dr Tony Tan announcing his Presidency bid, political watchers said it's unlikely more candidates will step forward.

Earlier, Dr Tan Cheng Bock and Mr Tan Kin Lian had stepped forward as potential candidates.

With less than two months before the Presidential Election has to be called, all eyes are trained on the three men.

"I saw we have probably reached the maximum number (of candidates) simply because I think Dr Tan, to many people, would be the candidate with the most impressive credentials. And I think that would effectively foreclose any other person from throwing his hat into the ring," said Associate Professor Eugene Tan, Law lecturer at Singapore Management University (SMU).

Meanwhile, Dr Tan Cheng Bock and Mr Tan Kin Lian said they are not surprised or undeterred by Dr Tony Tan's decision to contest the Presidential Election.

71-year-old Tan Cheng Bock expects a good contest and he feels the new wave of political awareness after the recent General Election will play a big part.

As for Mr Tan Kin Lian, he said all three candidates will be good for Singapore.

"This will be the contest - whether you want someone to continue the policies of the establishment, or if you want someone who brings to the office of the President, a new view reflecting the aspirations of large numbers of Singaporeans. And I hope that people of Singapore will make that decision when they cast their vote," said former NTUC Income chief Tan Kin Lian.

The three candidates had been associated with the ruling party PAP, whether as MPs or as grassroots leaders.

But following the May General Election - which saw some voters voicing their unhappiness with the government - all three candidates have made efforts to declare their independence.

"Singaporeans will vote for somebody who they think has unquestionable independence. This is very important because judging from my observation of the General Election - you know I went to attend a lot of rallies - and I find that Singaporeans want fairness," said former MP Dr Tan Cheng Bock.

"Some Singaporeans may take the view that given that we have a PAP government, that
the PAP dominates parliament, that it'd be good for Singapore to have the elected President to be someone who is not closely associated with the government," said Associate Professor Eugene Tan.

Political watchers expect the upcoming Presidential Election to be one of the most closely followed.

"There is a general feeling that people are becoming very aware of the importance of their vote and their vote matters. And including the elected presidency, they want to exercise their vote," said Zulkifli Baharuddin, a former Nominated MP.

Singapore last saw a contested Presidential Election in 1993.

A lot has changed since - including the channels for engagement. Political watchers expect the presidential candidates to have an online presence, and reach out to voters via forums and dialogues.

Mr Tan Cheng Bock said he would prefer a straight fight with Dr Tony Tan but would not be deterred by a three-cornered fight.

But for Mr Tan Kin Lian, he said he prefers a three-cornered fight as it will give Singaporeans a wider choice.

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