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Independent candidates to remain on the outer until at least 2008

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The government assured Wednesday there would be no delay on scheduled local elections, but said independent candidates would not be allowed to run until the 2004 law on Local Administration has been revised.

And President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono said independent candidates aspiring to run in forthcoming elections should respect the rule of law. He said an outcome could be expected in early 2008.

"It is every citizen's political right to run as an independent candidate, but they cannot demand that right based on their own interpretation without a clear legal basis," the President told Antara.

Yudhoyono said he would name the new Home Affairs Minister next week so the revision process could kick off.

The President said he would replace the ailing Moh. Ma'ruf, who has for months been under treatment after suffering a stroke.

Several names have been tipped as candidates to fill in the vacant post, including outgoing Jakarta Governor Sutiyoso, secretary general of the Regional Representatives Council Siti Nurbaya, Central Java Governor Mardiyanto, Democratic Party legislator E.E. Mangindaan and deputy chairman of the National Defense Board M. Yasin.

The government and the House would schedule a meeting with the Constitutional Court to discuss the repercussions of the Court's recent verdict to allow citizens to contest a local election without any political party endorsement.

The verdict was met with a mixed response. Some said it promoted equal rights for all citizens and would see parties learn to reform.

Others said it would be hurtful to democracy if it was founded on a political party or used as a tool of political participation.

Yudhoyono said the revision of the law was expected to be wrapped-up by the end of the year and could take effect early 2008.

House Speaker Agung Laksono said the House had taken the initiative to draft the revision, which would focus primarily on the eligibility of an independent candidate in

terms of public support.

Most party leaders have said an independent candidate should have an equal percentage of public support with that required for parties -- 15 percent public support, with proof provided via the collection of identity cards.

Political analysts said gaining 15 percent public support would be too tough for independent potential candidates. They said a lower percentage should be applied.

Some referred to the 2006 law on Aceh Administration, which has seen the country's first independent candidacy in a local election. But these candidates required at least 3 percent of public support.

Aceh's stipulation is only valid for the 2006 election, pending the creation of a party by the Free Aceh Movement (GAM).