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Headline: Countdown to the GE begins

WHAT WE SHOULD EXPECT FROM THE ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES REVIEW COMMITTEE REPORT

Countdown to the GE begins

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With Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's parliamentary reply yesterday confirming the formation of the Electoral Boundaries Review Committee (EBRC) two months ago, the signs are clearer that Singapore's 12th General Election (GE) will be held in this Golden Jubilee year of independence. However, his reply does not provide clarity as to when the GE will be called. The ruling People's Action Party craves the element of surprise as to when exactly the nation will go to the polls.

The EBRC's task is to provide for fair and balanced representation through adjusting electoral bounda-

ries by looking at population shifts and housing developments since the previous boundary delineation exercise in early 2011.

Given that there are 2.46 million eligible voters today, and assuming that the current Member-of-Parliament-to-voter ratio of one to 26,000 is maintained, there could be as many as 94 or 95 electoral seats, up from the current 87. However, the EBRC may recommend a smaller increase or no change in the number of elected Members of Parliament (MPs). Incremental change is always preferred in our political system.

Compared with the lead-up to the 2011 GE, the announcement of the establishment of the EBRC comes two months after the fact.

The last time around, the EBRC's formation in October 2010 was an-

nounced that month itself and its report submitted in February 2011.

Given that the previous two EBRCs took four months to complete its study and submit its recommendations, we can expect the current EBRC to submit its report in the coming weeks.

There are currently 15 Group Representation Constituencies (GRCs), comprising two four-member GRCs, 11 five-member GRCs and two six-member GRCs. This translates to an average of five MPs per GRC. Mr Lee has directed that the average size of the GRCs in the next GE be below five MPs and that there be at least 12 Single Member Constituencies (SMCs).

It is likely that there will be more four-member GRCs and there will perhaps even be the return of three-member GRCs, which featured only in the 1988 GE, when the GRC scheme

was first introduced. There may also be no more six-member GRCs, currently helmed by Mr Lee (Ang Ko Kio GRC) and Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean (Pasir Ris-Punggol GRC).

This move towards smaller GRCs is to be welcomed. Typically, for division of duties and responsibilities, each MP focuses on looking after his or her own district in the GRC. Consequently, MPs in a GRC are less likely to know the voters in the other districts, resulting in voters finding it harder to identify with the enlarged electoral division, or with the other MPs of the GRC.

In 2010, PM Lee said the move towards smaller GRCs was to strengthen the link between voters and their MPs as well as have candidates and their political parties provide voters with a strong incentive to vote for

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