

**Publication: TODAY, p 16-17**

**Date: 14 July 2015**

**Headline: Countdown to the GE begins**

● CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

them. Smaller GRCs also reduces, but will not remove, the “riding the coat-tails” effect, in which less-well-known ruling party candidates are teamed up with heavyweight ministers.


If the proportion of GRC seats is maintained at close to 90 per cent of all elected seats, then there will be more GRCs in the next GE than the current 15. More minority candidates will also be needed. The current number of 12 SMCs may increase. For the Opposition, the barriers to entry will be lowered, as it would be easier to form smaller slates of candidates to contest the GRCs. But this could also result in more multi-cornered battles.

### **MUST BE SEEN AS NON-PARTISAN**

It is not so much the establishment of the EBRC or even the submission of its report to the Prime Minister that signals the GE is near. Rather, it is the publication of the EBRC report that marks the frenetic start of election fever — for political parties and voters alike.

In the past, a General Election was called anywhere from one day to eight weeks from the EBRC report’s publication. It would be best for the report to be made available to the public at the time it is submitted to PM Lee.

In the 2006 GE, there was an interval of about half a month between the Prime Minister receiving the EBRC report and its publication. In 2011, the time lag was three days. The releasing

 It is likely that there will be more four-member GRCs and even perhaps there will be the return of three-member GRCs.

of the EBRC report in a timely manner is only fair. Under our laws, there is no requirement for the appointment of an EBRC as part of the election process. The EBRC appointment is by convention.

Nonetheless, the EBRC’s role is critical for a level playing field. Voters are entitled to know why boundaries are redrawn and how they are done so. Otherwise, some Singaporeans may view the redrawing of boundaries as being calculated to undermine the Opposition or, at the very least, not to disadvantage the ruling party.

Ultimately, the EBRC’s work and report must not only be non-partisan, but must also be seen to be non-partisan. This is necessary to sustain confidence and legitimacy in the review of electoral boundaries, since that is an integral part of the electoral process.

Put simply, the process by which electoral boundaries are reviewed is just as important as the specific electoral boundaries changes that flow from the review. This is notwithstanding the reality that the redrawing of electoral boundaries is perceived to be inherently political and that it is probably impossible to have perfectly distributed electoral divisions.

For now, political parties and voters will wait with bated breath for the publication of the EBRC report.