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NIP AND TUCK IN THE GRCS

'Confident' PAP needs no major boundary changes

By Aaron Low and Krist Boo

THE minimal changes to electoral boundaries this round came as no surprise to political watchers and MPs, as they saw no strong reason for a major redrawing of the map.

Political scientist Ho Khai Leong of the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies said the move reflected the PAP leadership's desire to 'play it safe' this election.

Institute of Policy Studies researcher Jeanne Conceicao felt that 'the lack of major changes reflects a confident PAP'.

Former Nominated MP Zulkifli Baharudin agreed, noting that the PAP is in 'a very dominant position' and 'the changes will not make much difference to them'.

Tampines GRC MP Ong Kian Min said the absence of major changes to the electoral map will reduce accusations of gerrymandering and 'increase the sense of fair play'.

'In the past, people complained that radical changes were made to suit the ruling party, but those allegations cannot be made now,' Mr Ong noted.

Veteran East Coast GRC MP Tan Soo Khoon added that the minimal changes made it impossible for the opposition to 'point fingers at anyone'. 'They will have to fight on the basis of their track record,' he said.

In the report released yesterday, the Electoral Boundaries Committee recommended that 12 of the current 23 divisions be left untouched.

This stands in sharp contrast to that of 2001, when only four divisions were left intact and four-member GRCs were wiped off the electoral map altogether.

However, of the changes announced yesterday, two drew sharp interest. These are the absorption of single-member wards Ayer Rajah and Bukit Timah by neighbouring GRCs West Coast and Holland-Bukit Timah respectively.

Ayer Rajah ward has been the stronghold of veteran MP Tan Cheng Bock since 1980, while Bukit Timah is represented by five-termer Wang Kai Yuen.

Another veteran MP, Mr Tan Soo Khoon, also saw his Kampung Chai Chee ward in East Coast GRC split into two, with half remaining in East Coast GRC and the rest being absorbed by Marine Parade GRC.

Observers are divided as to whether this suggests that these three MPs will be stepping down.

To Ms Conceicao, the absorption of Bukit Timah and Ayer Rajah into GRCs possibly 'signalled the end

of Dr Wang and Dr Tan's political careers'.

Mr Zulkifli noted that the two have been outspoken and vocal in Parliament and 'set a benchmark for others to follow'.

'We should give the younger MPs and those coming in a chance to match and even surpass what these veterans have given to politics,' he said.

Mr Tan, a former Speaker of Parliament and an MP since 1976, would only say: 'Don't you think you have had enough of me after so long?'