

## **Eight new single-seat wards created Five existing ones are scrapped as the total goes up from nine to 12**

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*The Straits Times*, 25 February 2011

Eight new single-seat wards have been created and five existing ones scrapped amid sweeping changes to electoral boundaries announced yesterday.

Of the current nine single-member constituencies (SMCs), only four remain intact.

The next General Election will see the new minimum of 12 SMCs, in line with political changes announced by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in 2009 and approved by Parliament last year.

Some 218,054 voters move from GRCs to SMCs. In total, 309,964 voters will now belong to single-seat wards, up from 218,783 in 2006.

The eight new SMCs revealed in the Electoral Boundaries Review Committee Report yesterday are Hong Kah North, Mountbatten, Pioneer, Punggol East, Radin Mas, Sengkang West, Whampoa and Yuhua.

The MPs in charge of the areas which now fall into the new SMCs are Dr Amy Khor at Hong Kah North, Mr Lim Biow Chuan at Mountbatten, Mr Cedric Foo at Pioneer, Mr Michael Palmer at Punggol East, Mr Sam Tan at Radin Mas, Dr Lam Pin Min at Sengkang West, Mr Heng Chee How at Whampoa and Ms Grace Fu at Yuhua.

Yesterday, all said they would relish the opportunity to go it alone at the hustings.

Meanwhile, opposition parties were quick to lay down their markers. By evening, all eight new divisions had at least one opposition party expressing interest to contest it.

How and why these eight were created and five others absorbed is unknown. But at least one analyst, Dr Gillian Koh of the Institute of Policy Studies, noted that the eight tended to come from GRCs where the PAP has done well.

Four were carved out from six-member GRCs: Mountbatten from Marine Parade GRC, Punggol East from Pasir-Ris Punggol GRC, Radin Mas from Tanjong Pagar GRC and Sengkang West from Ang Mo Kio GRC.

Another two were formed by pulling together polling districts from neighbouring GRCs. The new Pioneer SMC takes in a bit of West Coast GRC and Hong Kah GRC - both uncontested at the last election. Whampoa SMC includes districts from Tanjong Pagar GRC, which was also uncontested in 2006, and Jalan Besar GRC.

Notably, the list includes two divisions currently led by women: Ms Fu's Yuhua division, formerly part of Jurong GRC, and Dr Khor's Hong Kah North, formerly part of Hong Kah GRC.

If the incumbents are retained, it would be the first time the PAP has fielded a woman in an SMC since 1991.

As for the SMCs absorbed into GRCs, patterns were hard to come by. Any speculation that poor-performing divisions were disbanded proved unfounded.

Of the five - Chua Chu Kang, MacPherson, Nee Soon Central, Nee Soon East and Yio Chu Kang - only two polled worse than the People's Action Party's national average of 66.6 per cent at the last election.

Manpower Minister Gan Kim Yong gained 60.4 per cent of the votes in Chua Chu Kang while Mr Ong Ah Heng gained 65.4 per cent of the votes in Nee Soon Central. The other three divisions all had the PAP garnering around 68 per cent of the votes.

At the same time, Joo Chiat SMC, which Mr Chan Soo Sen won with 65 per cent of the votes the last time, was retained albeit with slight boundary changes. Two of his polling districts were moved to Marine Parade GRC while two others from East Coast GRC were drawn into his.

He said he was a little sad that the two districts he lost were the ones where he had worked hard to battle a sleaze problem. 'It is not like a bad area, or an election liability area, going to Marine Parade. I wouldn't look at it that way. After all, our problem has been eased,' he said.

The other three SMCs retained are the two opposition-held wards of Hougang and Potong Pasir, and the PAP stronghold of Bukit Panjang where MP Teo Ho Pin won 77.2 per cent of the votes.

The disappearance of five current SMCs raised the question of who among their MPs might be retiring, but the MPs themselves gave nothing away last night.

Nee Soon Central MP Ong Ah Heng told The Straits Times that he took nothing for granted and would let the party decide.

He said he was not surprised that his ward got bundled into a GRC together with the neighbouring Nee Soon East and parts of Sembawang GRC and Ang Mo Kio GRC as there had been speculation for some time.

'Anyway, both single seat or GRC are okay. After all, we are still serving the residents,' he said.

For Mr Seng Han Thong, whose Yio Chu Kang ward was carved out of Ang Mo Kio GRC in 2006 only to be reabsorbed now, the change is simply a 'reunion'.

'We are just going back into the big family,' he said. 'In politics, there are no certainties. It's good that I've gone through both an SMC and a GRC but my philosophy is always just to make sure to take care of the ground well.'