As we enter the final lap of the electioneering in the 2006 General Election, we can expect closer engagement of the competing parties' manifestos, visions, and agenda of action.

Given that we have only nine days of electoral campaigning, precious time had been lost over the James Gomez saga. It is an important issue no doubt but I feel that we have other more important issues to focus our minds and hearts on.

Hopefully, the Singapore electorate can now devote its attention to making an informed decision before they head to the polling stations on Saturday.

"Skirmishes" would probably best describe the nature of engagement of issues, thus far, by the electoral contestants. One party raises an issue, fires a salvo, the other responds and then moves on to another "target issue." No locking of horns, no sustained battle of ideas... not yet.

The hustings haven't quite captured the imagination of the electorate of each party's vision, and agenda for action. The hustings are more notable for the controversies, name-calling, defamation suits, and rhetorical challenges.

Given that Singapore faces significant issues in the short- to long-term, it is somewhat disappointing that there has been no sustained and substantive debate on those fundamental issues.

For instance, I was hoping for a discerning, informative and engaging debate on the supposed WP "time bombs" in its manifesto. I was/am also hoping for a discussion on Singapore's future political development and how the political process can be made more inclusive as well as making everyone an engaged stakeholder beyond the elections.

May be I am expecting too much. Thus far, the PAP is the only party that can deal with national issues on a broad scale while the Opposition is generally more focused on municipal issues. So their playing fields are very different.

On 3 May, PAP Secretary-General and Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong argued that Singapore would be better off if there were less opposition in parliament. He said that to have a double-digit number of opposition MPs would result in the PAP government being less effective because of the time, effort, and need to manage the opposition members of parliament.

My sense is that Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's remarks essentially flow from the PAP's premise of Singapore's need for a first-world opposition and that, in its view, Singapore's Opposition is not up to mark yet.

I hope we can see an engagement on this strong assertion which strikes at the heart of the Opposition, as well as the sort of political system we need to have.

For me, politics involves dealing with the "high politics" of making and successfully implementing the appropriate policies for Singapore and her people to ensure our continued prosperity as well as enhancing our cohesiveness.

Politics also involve, what I may term, the "low politics" of keeping one's supporters loyal, enlarging the numbers, and dealing with the apparent mundane-ness of municipal/local politics.

It is low politics that most of us can identify with and feel more intimately connected with. Of course, high politics matter. Ultimately, both types of politics are intimately linked.
I suppose by now most voters would have made up their minds on which party to vote for come this Saturday.

One dimension of the focus for the last two days of campaigning is likely to be on swing voters.

We can expect all parties to make the final surge on Thursday and Friday. I think the approach will be more rhetoric, emotive, and empathetic with a combination of promises and last-minute incentives to woo voters.

It will be also be more of an appeal to the "heart" than the head in this final lunge in terms of reaching out to the swing voters.

For swing voters, my sense is that it is not about rationale and pragmatic arguments but about that momentary affective identification with a party.

So after a pedantic start, we can now expect more robust and sustained engagement of key issues. Much time has been lost.

So as the parties seek to engage the voters, may the 1.2 million eligible voters reaffirm their commitment to making an informed decision.

For those who are not voting, this election also presents a rare opportunity to debate, educate, examine, reflect, and assert the values and aspirations of our young nation and our role as stakeholders.

And as the poet Dylan Thomas expressed so memorably:
"Do not go gentle into that good night
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light."

Eugene Tan is Assistant Professor of Law at the Lee Kong Chian School of Business, Singapore Management University.