No evidence of unfair edge for PAP

George Yeo dismisses opposition’s claim of gerrymandering

BY TEO WAN GEK

ALJUNIED GRC’S anchor minister George Yeo yesterday dismissed charges of gerrymandering made by the Workers’ Party (WP) after Thursday’s release of new electoral boundaries.

WP chairman Sylvia Lim said the ruling People’s Action Party (PAP) had gained an unfair edge with the redrawing of constituency boundaries.

She referred in particular to the loss of an Aljunied GRC area next to Hougang — the constituency held by WP chief Low Thia Khiang — where she said the party enjoyed “significant support”.

That area, which is in MP Yeo Guat Kwang’s Aljunied-Hougang ward, comes under Ang Mo Kio GRC in the new electoral map.

But Mr George Yeo said in an e-mail reply to The Straits Times that there was no evidence to back up the WP’s claim.

Referring to Ms Lim’s claim of significant support for the opposition party in that area, he said the level of support there was “about the same as neighbouring areas” that come under him and fellow Aljunied GRC MP Cynthia Phua.

Ms Lim led her party’s “A team” to contest against the PAP team in Aljunied GRC in 2006. They secured 43.9 per cent of valid votes and she was appointed a Non-Constituency MP as a result.

While Aljunied GRC will lose about 23,000 voters to Ang Mo Kio GRC, it also gains some 20,000 voters from the Kaki Bukit ward of Marine Parade GRC.

That ward has about 27 per cent Malay residents — higher than the national average of 14 per cent — who have traditionally tended to vote for the PAP.

Aljunied GRC was one of the most hotly contested constituencies in the 2006 polls.

But Mr Yeo did not see the inclusion of Kaki Bukit residents giving his GRC any greater advantage against the opposition. The area is not new to him as he took care of Kaki Bukit ward for eight years when a part of it was under Aljunied GRC.

But he acknowledged that in proportional terms, there were now more Malays and Indians in Aljunied GRC.

As for whether the overall boundary changes had been a gain for Aljunied GRC, he responded: “The election is more about the future than the past. It all depends on the issues which are important in the coming election. Some issues might affect different races differently.”

The portion of Aljunied-Hougang ward that will come under Ang Mo Kio GRC is made up mainly of three-room to five-room Housing Board flats.

The Straits Times spoke to 10 residents from the area. Among them was Mr Anthony Koh, 60, a field volunteer.

He voted for the WP in the 2006 polls because he was unhappy over his son’s inability to secure a new flat despite repeated sessions with an MP. But when he comes under Ang Mo Kio GRC, he will vote for the PAP because of Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, who helms the GRC: “He is a good Prime Minister. Look at the Budget: he offered a lot of help for the lower-income group.”

While Ang Mo Kio has gained a part of Aljunied, it will in turn lose Seng Kang West and Nee Soon South wards. Seng Kang West has been hived off to be a new single-seat ward, and part of Nee Soon South will be in the new Nee Soon GRC.

The jury is still out on how the changes could affect results in Ang Mo Kio at the next polls. PM Lee’s team won 66.1 per cent of the valid votes in 2006.

Political observer Eugene Tan, a Singapore Management University law lecturer, said: “It will be interesting to see if the voters from Aljunied-Hougang will move from the Hammer to the Lightning Bolt, due to the PM’s standing and the popular perception that in the PM’s ward, you will be well taken care of.”