



*Prime Minister
Singapore*

7 September 2016

Dear Chief Justice,

I wish to express my thanks to you and the Commission for the deliberation and thoroughness with which you have carried out your tasks.

The Elected President is an important institution in our system. As the Head of State, the President is a unifying figure for all Singaporeans. In addition, since 1991, he has been given certain custodial functions, in particular, safeguarding past reserves and protecting the integrity of the public service.

Over the past 25 years, we have accumulated valuable experience operating this second key mechanism. The institution has served us well, but we must continue to update it regularly to ensure that the President can effectively carry out both his symbolic as well as custodial functions.

This is why in January I appointed the Constitutional Commission to study and make recommendations on aspects of the Elected Presidency relating to:

- 1) The qualifying process for Presidential candidates, particularly whether the eligibility criteria for such candidates should be updated, and if so, how;
- 2) Ensuring that minorities have the chance to be periodically elected to become President; and
- 3) Reviewing the framework governing the exercise of the President's custodial powers, including whether the views of the Council of Presidential Advisers can be given more weight, and if so, how.

The report reflects the collective wisdom of the Commission. It has benefitted from the views of the many Singaporeans who gave their considered opinions to you. The Government accepts in principle your main recommendations on the above three aspects.

In addition, the Commission has expressed views on some matters beyond its Terms of Reference. The Government will study these views seriously. In particular, the Commission has suggested that Government consider reverting to a President elected by Parliament. While I appreciate the Commission's reasons for this suggestion, as the Government has pointed out even when the scheme was first conceived, it would be difficult for a President to exercise custodial powers over the reserves and public service appointments, and veto proposals by the Government, without an electoral mandate.

We will soon publish a White Paper setting out the Government's detailed response to the Commission's report. Subsequently we will table Constitutional amendments in Parliament, to achieve the objectives for which we set up the Commission. We will have a full debate on the issue when the bill is tabled for its Second Reading.

Once again, I extend my thanks to you and the Commission for the report.

Yours sincerely

Lee Hsien Loong

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