

Balance, not numbers, the real issue

YOUR recent article on the most recent proposal by the Boundary and Election Commission to cut the number of elected seats from eight to nine in next year's election reveals another anti-democratic back-flip.

This commission is an independent body and is free to offer what it sees fit, but this must surely be in the light of the more democratic urges felt by Hong Kong people. Or are they independent of the people too?

The need is for more representation, for more directly elected positions, not less. This is especially so in the harmless, lower-tier positions when the battles mainly rage over how and when rubbish is carted off and if grass verges are nicely trimmed.

Under the proposal, the group of three directly elected members sitting on the Islands District Board would have to face the four appointed members and the eight ex-officio members.

It has to be understood that the ex-officio members come from the Rural Committees. These are people in

lifetime positions selected solely by indigenous families.

While the concerns of the indigenous people demand sensitive appreciation, under the present static system of the Rural Committees important matters are not given that sensitive attention.

In addition, the power allocated to the Rural Committee is getting out of proportion to the decreasing ratio of new islanders to old island inhabitants.

There is no need for appointed members on these low-level boards. Each island has its own character. There needs to be a directly elected representative of each island.

Discovery Bay needs its own representative. Lamma has to have its own, too. It is up to each island's representative to bridge differences between each of its constituent communities.

The main criteria for judging an election area is the shared interest, not how many share that interest. Forget this abstract issue of the ideal number.

People have to be given service according to their various identities, particular character and sense of community – the actual figure is only a final consideration.

The Humanist Association proposes a District Board comprised of a member each for Lantau, Discovery Bay, Peng Chau, Cheung Chau and Lamma, but no appointed members.

The different Rural Committees would elect one member to sit on the District Board, to make sure the indigenous people have a voice. The Government will want a voice so, with seven members, decisions can be made sooner.

The Area Committees advising the District Board members per island needs a composition from the various community groups, particularly the fishing and farming communities – in fact we would like to see these two groups on the main board.

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