

Speaker of Parliament Halimah Yacob to run for President in coming election

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SINGAPORE - Speaker of Parliament Halimah Yacob will step down from her post to contest the upcoming presidential election in September, becoming [the first woman to run for the highest office in the land](#).

Confirming her decision on Sunday (Aug 6), she said she had given the issue much thought since she announced three weeks ago that she was "thinking about" running for the presidency.

She added at the Marsiling-Yew Tee GRC National Day Dinner at Marsiling Mega Sports Park that she was honoured that many people had expressed support for her candidacy.

In the past few weeks, Madam Halimah has been meeting various groups of unionists, community groups as well as residents.

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She has also been giving speeches on the need to upgrade workers' skills and uphold racial and religious harmony at events, including several dialogue sessions.

Her announcement on Sunday ends months of speculation about her possible candidacy in next month's election, which will be the first reserved for Malay candidates following changes to the Constitution last year to ensure the elected presidency reflects Singapore's multiracial society.

Madam Halimah's decision to stand also raises questions about who will take over her current posts, since she will have to step down as Speaker of Parliament and MP of Marsiling-Yew Tee GRC by Nomination Day to contest. There is no requirement under the law to call a by-election if an MP resigns, even if that member is a minority.

She must also resign from the People's Action Party, where she is a member of the central executive committee and chair of the PAP Seniors Group.



Madam Halimah Yaacob with her husband Mohammed Abdullah Alhabshee (second from left) at the Marsiling-Yew Tee GRC National Day Dinner on Sunday (Aug 6) where she announced her intention to run as President. Also present are fellow MPs Alex Yam (first from left) and Lawrence Wong (fourth from left). ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

Addressing her residents at the dinner on Sunday, the 62-year-old said: "I have decided to offer myself as a candidate for the Elected Presidency.

"Though I will miss my residents, my constituency work and my role as Speaker in running for the Office of the Elected President, my passion to serve all Singaporeans remains unabated. It is a heavy responsibility but I hope that with the support of Singaporeans, we can do more good together."

She also said she will ask Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong to assign another MP to her constituency to help out.

Speaking to reporters later with her husband, Mr Mohammed Abdullah Alhabshee, 62, standing behind her, she said: "It was a tough decision to make and I have done extensive consultations with my family, my colleagues and my close friends over the past two weeks to consider this.

"It is a decision that I cannot take lightly and I had to take into consideration my current responsibilities and what will become of them."

Mr Mohammed told reporters: "She's very capable, she works very hard, she's very experienced representing Singapore in various unions, so I think she's the right person." He added that he had advised his wife to go ahead with her plans, and that there were many factors they have to discuss, including family matters and housing.

Madam Halimah also said she wants to continue living in her flat even if she becomes president, unless there are security concerns. She added that more information on her campaign will be released soon.

National Development Minister and fellow MP Lawrence Wong said Madam Halimah has made [a very significant impact](#) on the lives of residents since moving to the GRC after the 2015 general election.

Her candidacy will mark a historic first in Singapore, with no other woman having run for the presidency.

Madam Halimah is also Singapore's first woman Speaker of Parliament.

She had said previously that she had been asked by many Singaporeans from all walks of life if she would stand in the coming presidential election, adding that she was honoured and humbled.



A resident giving Madam Halimah Yacob a hug. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

When she announced on July 16 that she was mulling over contesting, she said she wanted to address the topic as "a lot of Singaporeans have asked me so that's why I want to share with you the thought processes that I go through... before making the final decision".

She also said that she needed to consult her colleagues "who are supporting me in the various duties that I am doing".

Madam Rahidah Mohd Noor, 51, hugged Madam Halimah after her announcement.

"I'm very touched by her announcement," the teacher and grassroots leader said. "I cried... I can feel her heart and it's a very hard decision for her."



Teacher and grassroots leader Rahidah Mohd Noor, 51, hugs Madam Halimah Yacob after her announcement. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

Her name had come up as she ticks all the boxes of the eligibility criteria for those from the public sector, having spent at least three years in a key public office.

Madam Halimah, a career trade unionist who has been MP since 2001, has been Speaker of Parliament since January 2013.

As Speaker, she is required to assume the duties of the President should both the President and the chairman of the Council of Presidential Advisers be away.

She has also had a career of 40 years in the labour movement and public service, having joined NTUC as a legal officer in 1978 and risen to be its deputy secretary-general from 2007 to 2011, when she was made a Minister of State. She was also the first Singaporean to be elected to the governing body of the International Labour Organisation.

So far, [two other people have announced their intention to run](#): chairman of marine service provider Bourbon Offshore Asia Pacific Farid Khan, 62, and Second Chance Properties chief executive officer Mohamed Salleh Marican, 67.

Both men have collected application forms from the Elections Department.

Prospective candidates must satisfy the Presidential Elections Committee that they meet the eligibility criteria to stand - which for those from the private sector, includes having been the most senior executive of a company with at least \$500 million in shareholder equity for the most recent three years he led it. It should also have made profit after tax in the time he helmed it.

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The prospective candidates must also apply to the Community Committee to declare that they are part of the Malay community, as the election is reserved for Malay candidates.

An election is reserved for candidates from a racial group, if no one from the group has been represented in the presidency for five consecutive terms.

Singapore has not had a Malay president since Mr Yusof Ishak, the country's first president, died in office in 1970.

The last day to submit an application for the election is five days after PM Lee issues the writ of election. He is expected to do so in late August.