

## Halimah Yacob 'could redefine Speaker's role'

AMIR HUSSAIN AND TAN WEIZHEN  
amirhussain@mediacorp.com.sg

**SINGAPORE** – The impending appointment of Madam Halimah Yacob as Speaker of Parliament will not only be a historic one — given that she is the first woman politician here to assume the office — there is every chance that she might also redefine the role, which has traditionally been less high-profile compared to other political offices.

Given Mdm Halimah's impressive track record in advancing social and family causes — first as a vocal backbencher, and then as a Minister of State (Social and Family Development) — observers and political analysts felt that Mdm Halimah, 58, would continue to contribute to policymaking, be it behind closed doors or not.

Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong

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hinted as much yesterday, when he confirmed media speculation that he will nominate Mdm Halimah as Speaker when Parliament next sits on Jan 14.

Thanking her for her "many valuable contributions" as a Cabinet member and Minister of State, Mr Lee said in a statement that Mdm Halimah spoke up in Cabinet "with a practical, compassionate voice, helping us to shape effective policies with a human touch".

Under her portfolio, among other things, she oversaw the expansion of home- and community-based eldercare services, enhanced ComCare support for the poor, and worked with women's groups to "expand the space

for women to contribute to our economy and society", he said.

Mr Lee added: "She is passionate about these issues, and threw her heart and soul into the work, as she had done during her time in NTUC, tirelessly championing the cause of low-wage workers. I look forward to Mdm Halimah continuing her interest in social issues and pre-school education, in a suitable capacity that is compatible with her role as Speaker."

Acting Minister for Social and Family Development Chan Chun Sing also paid tribute to Mdm Halimah's work in the ministry. Adding that he was "heartened" by the fact that he will have the chance to continue working with Mdm Halimah, Mr Chan said: "She has been a torch-bearer in our work with her passionate and tireless style."

Mr Lee said he briefed People's Action Party Members of Parliament yesterday on the nomination. With the "full support" of the PAP MPs — in



**VIDEO**  
**PM LEE TO**  
**NOMINATE**  
**HALIMAH**  
**YACOB AS NEXT**  
**SPEAKER OF**  
**PARLIAMENT**

Scan the QR code using the reader app on your smartphone, or you can visit [tdy.sg/speaker0109](http://tdy.sg/speaker0109) for the video.

Mr Lee's words — Mdm Halimah's election as Speaker on Jan 14 by the MPs will be a matter of formality.

Mdm Halimah will resign from her position as Minister of State a day before the Parliament sitting, as the Speaker cannot be elected from MPs who are office holders.

She said in a statement that she was "deeply honoured". She added: "I really love what I am doing now (as Minister of State) ... I am glad that even if I am elected, I will be able to continue work on some of these areas." Contacted by TODAY, Mdm Halimah said that "the actual ways I can contribute have not been worked out yet".

Mdm Halimah was first elected as an MP for Jurong GRC in 2001. She became known as a vocal advocate for family and social causes. In 2011, she was appointed Minister of State — a position that would have given her more opportunities "to influence ... Cabinet on the issues that she champions",

Deputy Speaker Charles Chong noted.

As Speaker, Mdm Halimah will continue to have the opportunities — and the access to the nation's top political leaders — to do that, political analysts said. They pointed out that the Speaker has to be seen as non-partisan and neutral — a requirement that could have a bearing on how a politician functions in the role.

Still, Singapore Management University law lecturer and Nominated MP Eugene Tan said: "I don't see (Mdm Halimah) being passive or being cloistered in Parliament. I think she will be involved in public events. Through her speeches and all, I do see avenues for her to play that quiet advocacy role."

Mr Chong added that it "would be a waste, and also not commensurate with her capabilities" should Mdm Halimah not contribute beyond her new role as Speaker. "My hope is that she will not just perform the job exclusively as Speaker," he said.