

Puteri Reformasi ready for active politics
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In 1999, while speaking to a group of Malaysian students in Wales, Nurul Izzah Anwar was asked whether she would become a politician. "I'll cross that bridge when I come to it," she answered.

Eight years later, Nurul Izzah has come to that bridge.

As a novice thrust into political activism almost a decade ago, her main target was to get her father, Anwar Ibrahim, out of jail after he was dramatically sacked as deputy premier in 1998.

Today, Nurul Izzah - dubbed 'Puteri Reformasi' (princess of reformasi) - has set her sights on carving out a niche for herself in politics.

During a 90-minute interview at Anwar's new office in Petaling Jaya, where she is political co-ordinator for her father, Nurul Izzah, 26, announced she was ready and willing to contest a seat in Parliament.

"I strongly believe that I should (contest) and if given a chance, certainly (I will do so). I feel very strongly in taking a stand. It might not be an easy decision to make but I do not want to leave behind a life filled with regrets," she said.

Nurul Izzah added that she will be picking a Parti Keadilan Rakyat division "somewhere in the Federal Territories" for her political base and expressed her willingness to assume a post in the party's Youth wing.

Her political aspiration will however have to factor in a minor complication - her impending motherhood.

Married in 2003 to engineer Raja Ahmad Shahrir Iskandar, the couple are expecting their first child at the end of the year. It has been speculated that the general elections could be called as early as later this year.

The eldest of six children of PKR adviser Anwar and party president Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail (photo), Nurul Izzah said her parents and her husband are all supportive of her decision to be a politician.

This is not the first time she has contemplated a foray into active politics. In the 2004 general election, she had to drop her plan to contest a seat due to restrictions in the Universities and University Colleges Act.

She was also facing her final-year examination as an electronic and electrical engineering student at the Universiti Tenaga Nasional.

Her political awakening

Clad in a pink-and-purple headscarf and a smart grey jacket, Nurul Izzah appeared

confident and articulate when answering questions.

She recalled being thrust into the limelight during the reformasi years - the frenetic period of street protests for reforms after Anwar was sacked and then arrested, charged, convicted and jailed on charges of corruption and sodomy in quick succession.

Anwar has maintained that the charges were politically motivated. He later served out the six-year sentence for corruption but remained incarcerated pending disposal of his appeal against the sodomy conviction and sentence, of which he was eventually acquitted.

Nurul Izzah - then 18 - had to travel to many countries, either alone or with her mother, to seek international support to get Anwar out of jail.

Despite being a shy teenager, she spoke at numerous mass demonstrations in Kuala Lumpur and elsewhere at the height of the reformasi campaign.

"(All that was) so much (a part) of my political awakening, of who I have become and how it shaped me," she said, describing the period as "hectic" and a time of "turmoil" for her family.

On her taking a low profile since 2005, Nurul Izzah said she had spent 18 months at the Johns Hopkins University in the United States to complete her master's degree in international relations.

Coincidentally, Anwar was a visiting fellow at the prestigious university for a short stint while she was a student there.

"It (helped) me see things in a different light, (in a) different way and (rejuvenated) me in terms of contributing to the cause," she said of the academic sojourn.

Mandarin classes

She also attended Mandarin classes as well and can now conduct a simple conversation in the language - she greeted the malaysiakini team at the interview with "huan yin, huan yin" (welcome, welcome).

Throughout the interview, Nurul Izzah was jovial, her answers punctuated with laughter and witty remarks.

In the first part today, she speaks on the issues that she cares strongly about, PKR preparations for the upcoming general election and her take on the 'tension' between the fledgling opposition party and DAP.

In the second part tomorrow, she shares her feelings about impending motherhood and her family life, and comments on rumours that Umno Youth politician Khairy Jamaluddin had once tried to woo her.

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