

Pedigree of little help to PKR's Poh Lai
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Tan Poh Lai, candidate in the Wanita PKR vice-presidential race, has a pedigree in oppositional politics that goes back a longer way than several of her presently more well-known peers in the party.

As the daughter of redoubtable one-time 'Mr Opposition', Dr Tan Chee Koon, Poh Lai (right), on name-recognition basis alone, ought to be a shoo-in for one of three vice-presidential slots in the women's wing.

That is not the case because the majority of the nearly half-million PKR electorate who are eligible to vote in the ongoing party polls would not know who Dr Tan was, let alone are aware that Poh Lai was on-course to being the PKR candidate for the Johor Baru parliamentary seat at the general elections a year ago but had to yield to a 'parachute' nominee – a retired general.

Now the general has disappeared into the august obscurity from which he had emerged, but Poh Lai is doing very much what she has done since enlisting in PKR since 2008: going about making the party a more solid political entity for fighting for the multi-racial and egalitarian Malaysia that her renowned father struggled for.

"At this point that goal of a multiracial and equal Malaysia requires the election of Zuraida Kamaruddin as the Wanita PKR head," said Poh Lai, who is aligned to the incumbent chief in the intense battle for positions in the ongoing party polls.

She gave her reasons for backing Zuraida.

"I have found her strong on the issues that face the country, willing to access and is available to the grassroots, interested in the programs that are held at the divisional level, and multi-racial in her general approach," said the lawyer who lives and practices in Johor Baru.

Does that mean she backs the candidate for the hotly-contested deputy president's post that Zuraida (left) is closely aligned with, Azmin Ali?

"I don't think I have a personal preference for the position and so, by extension of being for Zuraida, I'm for him," confessed Poh Lai, employing logic that's clever but not convoluted.

'Politics a jealous mistress'

She's untroubled by the surmise that her elder brother, Tan Kee Kwong, the PKR MP for

Wangsa Maju who was elected by an impressive margin over a placeman from Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak's retinue, may well be for party secretary general Saifuddin Nasution (below) in the race for the No. 2 position, an outcome made crucial by expected developments in the Anwar Ibrahim sodomy appeal.

"I'm not my brother's keeper and I should think he could very well make his choice and a good one at that, without reference to me," rationalised Poh Lai.

Poh Lai is one of only a handful of Chinese Malaysians who are vying for positions on the Wanita PKR hierarchy.

The other is Carolyn Khor, a music teacher, from Penang. Both are allied to the Zuraida faction in the party polls.

Poh Lai is not worried that the contest between the teams, one allied to Zuraida and the other to Dr Rodziah Ismail who is contesting Zuraida for the Wanita headship, will factionalise the party.

"You must bear in mind that PKR is a gathering together of members from different strands of the political spectrum in this country – from social democratic activists, religion-conscious reformers, and disenchanted ex-members of BN components," she explained.

"You have the broad range of the socially and politically aware in this country joining the party to bring change to a political system that is decayed beyond repair," Poh Lai elaborated.

"There would be much disagreement but there is also a recognition of the need for change and that is what unites us despite our different views," explained the daughter of the renowned Tan, whose adherence to a principled opposition earned him a name that may not be adequately known among the PKR electorate but is ineffaceable in the annals of Malaysian politics.

How does Poh Lai fuse the roles of wife, mother of three boys, one of whom is differently-abled, with the tasks of being a PKR Johor Baru divisional leader and now aspirant for national position in the party?

"Well, politics is indeed a jealous mistress but with the help of my family and friends I can cope with what is required of me," she said.