

No rush for hubby to contest, says Azizah
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Opposition figurehead Anwar Ibrahim has no plan to stand in a by-election immediately after the ban from active politics against him is lifted on April 15, according to his wife Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail. MCPX

"It may not be as urgent as we thought it to be. If we had been government, yes, it would have been urgent for him. Now as the opposition leader, he can take a longer time," she told Malaysiakini in a 45-minute interview at her office in Petaling Jaya yesterday.

wan azizah interview 270308 03Instead, she added, Anwar's priority now would be to form the next government which came amid claims of elected parliamentarians from the ruling BN are in talks to defect to the oppositions.

The opposition is short of 30 seats to get a simple majority to form the government.

Wan Azizah, an ophthalmologist-turned-politician, officially heads the PKR - where Anwar is the de facto leader.

Anwar is banned from active politics for five years as a result of his conviction on corruption charges. The ban will be lifted on April 15.

First female Opposition Leader

Wan Azizah, 55, was initially expected to make way for her husband after mid-April by relinquishing her Permatang Pauh parliamentary seat - which she held since 1999 - and allow Anwar to make a comeback to Parliament.

But she hinted in the interview that she may not do so after all, as Anwar may seek to contest elsewhere, where the party's MPs are ready to give up the seat for the PKR de facto leader.

There is also another possibility that Anwar will contest in a seat which is not held by the opposition at the moment, if BN's victory is successfully challenged via election petition.

"I did mention I was going to step aside for Anwar but there are some views that is just one option. There are other views why don't we get another seat for Anwar and he may not take just Permatang Pauh," said Wan Azizah.

wan azizah interview 270308 01The ever soft-spoken politician is also set to make a record with her impending appointment as the first female Parliamentary Opposition Leader when the new Parliament session commences, succeeding DAP supremo Lim Kit Siang.

By convention, the opposition party with the highest number of seats is named the Opposition Leader in the House.

In the March 8 general election, Wan Azizah's PKR won 31 seats, DAP 28 and PAS 23. The multi-racial based party had only won one parliamentary seat - held by Wan Azizah - during

the 2004 election.

PKR, DAP and PAS leaders have agreed to make Wan Azizah the next Opposition Leader until Anwar wins a parliamentary seat.

Wan Azizah described her new role as an "honour for Malaysian women".

"I thank them (the three parties) for the trust but I also feel the burden in that sense filling in the shoes after Lim Kit Siang, Ustaz Fadzil Noor, Ustaz Abdul Hadi Awang and Asri Muda before that," she said.

Always known for her non-confrontational approach in parliamentary debates, Wan Azizah quipped that she will try to be more outspoken in assuming her new role.

She has unveiled a five-point ambitious agenda to boost economic growth and fight corruption earlier as the nation's first female Opposition Leader. She also hoped her new role will help to inculcate more gender sensitivity during parliamentary debates.

"When they see me, they will have a little bit more restrain, it comes naturally because when you have a motherly image, men tend to be a bit more well-behaved," she noted.

'Mommy's love can't be questioned'

Meanwhile, Wan Azizah said she did not encourage her children to be in active politics.

"I don't encourage them but I give them a choice. They make their own choices and if they like to, I won't stop them, I support them," said the mother of six, whose eldest daughter Nurul Izzah is the newly-elected MP for Lembah Pantai.

nurul izzah 050407 smileNurul Izzah, who contested for the first time, defeated the popular ex-minister of women, family and community development Shahrizat Abdul Jalil.

Wan Azizah conceded she "wasn't very happy" at first with her daughter's plan to take on the well-known and "giant" Sharizat.

"But she made her choice and once she made her choice, being a mom, you support your daughter, because mommy's love is something that you can't question too much," she stressed.