

**The Linda Tsen candidacy: Where did it come from?**  
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COMMENT On the day Linda Tsen would have celebrated her 26th wedding anniversary, she was at the Basel Christian Church of Malaysia in Likas, for her husband's funeral. None of us can even begin to imagine the range of emotions going through this young woman. Fewer still will want to contemplate the difficulties of her assimilation into her 'new' life.

For someone who was widowed a fortnight ago, Linda has shown remarkable courage. With four children, the youngest at 13 years-old, this lady has had to guide her family through a difficult period of mourning for her husband, Edmund Chong Ket Wah, the Batu Sapi MP.

During the eulogy for her father, 18-year-old daughter Steffi, said, "My dad was a romantic, who would hold my mum's hands or put his arm around her when they walked together. He took her to Paris on her birthday and last year they went to China for their 25th wedding anniversary. Today, is their 26th, but dad is not here to celebrate with mum."

Those words must have been very poignant and heart wrenching for Linda - to bury her husband on the day that would have been a joyous celebration.

For any woman or man, who has lost their spouse, the loss is unbearable. Some have described the pain as 'like losing a limb'. Others have described it as a 'great loneliness'. A few withdraw into themselves because the pain is too intense.

Linda's husband, Edmund, was the PBS treasurer general and a two-term MP for Batu Sapi, an area of 25,582 voters including 1,535 postal voters. They are roughly 54% male and 46% female, and made up of 59% (15,099) Muslim bumiputera, 38% (9,737) Chinese, 2.7% (689) non-Muslim bumiputera and 0.2% (57) 'others'.

Edmund was tragically killed in a motor-accident on 9 October and was buried on 14 October. A week later, the chief minister, Musa Aman, named Linda as the BN candidate in the by-election triggered by her husband's death.

Edmund's loss will be keenly felt not just by Linda and her children, but also the wider community where her husband was MP.

The question on everyone's lips must be, "Was Linda's decision to offer herself as the BN candidate her own or was she manipulated into running by the party seniority?"

If it was the former, then we should respect her decision to do so. Maybe this is her own way of coping with her grief, to immerse herself in the people whom her husband, whose duty it was, chose to serve.

Going to the ground, to capture the hearts and minds of the voters in the same way her husband did, may be a form of therapy and diversion for her. Maybe she is trying to recapture the spirit of her husband, by involving herself in activities that were familiar to him.

If Linda feels she has made the right decision to offer herself for candidacy, then so be it. We must leave her alone and respect her own reasons for doing so.

However, if her decision was because BN finds it convenient to manipulate a grieving woman during the most difficult time of her life, then Linda should not be party to their machinations and political skull-duggery.

If this is the case, then BN is wrong to 'use' Linda because they are 'piggy-backing' on the memory of her husband. Maybe Musa Hassan should search his conscience and think hard about this grieving woman and her family. Is he asking her to run because she wants to do it, or because it is politically expedient for Musa and BN?

Maybe, at the end of the day, it is Linda who has to ask herself these difficult questions.

Bereavement is difficult and to bring up a young family is not an easy task. She will need time to reflect and think about her future. Linda will be wondering how to face up to the responsibilities and the social isolation, with her new identity.

However, she is currently denied doing all that as she has been swept into the mad euphoria of canvassing for votes and meeting the electorate. All this seems unnatural that one wonders, when we observe her face on television and in the papers, if she is stage managing all her emotions just for the benefit of the public. A closer scrutiny of her face reveals the fragile and thin veneer between her public mask and true face.

There are moments when her distant looks and her hesitancy in responding to questions fielded by the hungry press-pack, belies how she really feels. Is it fair of BN to manipulate her for the party's gain?

One minute she is a housewife, devoted mother and part-time piano teacher; the next minute she is projected as the 'giant' and superwoman, who will restore BN's glory. They are expecting far too much of her in such a short, concentrated space of time.

BN knows that once the fuss and rigorous schedule are all over and an MP is selected (whether or not it is her is immaterial), Linda will be on her own to contemplate her future moves.

This is the time she will start to properly mourn the loss of her husband, in private, after having to postpone the grieving period and set aside her feelings, just for the by-election.

This is potentially a dangerous time as the rawness of her husband's loss, returns.

Her children need her as much as she needs them. No one can understand the pain they are going through, individually and collectively. Grief is an isolating experience and only they can set the pace of recovering from their loss.

Maybe BN and the wider community should search their consciences and realise that Linda Tsen is first and foremost, a grieving wife and mother, and they should leave her alone to grieve in peace.

\* The views expressed herein are those of the writer and do not necessarily represent the views of Malaysian Mirror and/or its associates.

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