



The reluctant politician

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WAN ISMAIL'S POLITICAL

CAREER WAS NOT A MATTER

OF CHOICE. THE KEADILAN

PRESIDENT AND LEADER

OF THE OPPOSITION TELLS

R. NADESWARAN AND

TERENCE FERNANDEZ THAT

DESTINY DICTATED WHAT PATHS

SHE WOULD TAKE IN LIFE.

You have come a long way from First Lady-in-waiting to wife of political prisoner and now Opposition Leader. It must have been one heck of a ride.

I'm basically a calm person, and whatever happens, I just take what comes my way. Sometimes I get flustered, but there were changes and there are changes still coming. I never read politics well, so when my husband was unceremoniously sacked and detained, I had no time to reflect on it as there were so many things going on. I had to deal with so many situations. But I had help. I wasn't this heroic woman going through the battle field.

Your priority at that time was your six young children. It must have been a traumatic experience with the police barging in like that and arresting your husband in front of your children. Of course! I sometimes think it was part of my training as a doctor which saw me through it. You know, you have to put on a calm face and save the situation, so to speak, so

that was what happened then. It was not "Oh God, I'm going to be killed!" It was frightening.

I did not know until years later when my kids related to me that my second child, who had just come back from a tuition class, was hit on the back with the butt of an M16 as she rushed for her father. My son, too, had the barrel of a gun at his neck as he ran for his father.

Under these circumstances, would you describe yourself as a "reluctant" politician? Yes. I never expected it. I married a teacher. Anwar was teaching at a school for dropouts and I was looking forward to the simple life, have kids ... My career was stuck for awhile while his was flying.

But Anwar was ambitious even then and surely you would have foreseen his designs and psyched yourself up for it. Ya lah. Once you get married ... vows, you know (*laughs*). It is a commitment. It is his choice and I have to support him. I must agree with it, if not he would not

have come this far.

You started off as a crusader to save your husband, but now there is a bigger picture - the future of this country. I saw the bigger picture because it is not just about me or Anwar. It is now about the people. You see so many people supporting you, so committed. At heart, I am still that little doctor in her cocoon, but I know I have big responsibilities.

So you'd still rather be attending to your patients and taking care of your children?

There is more satisfaction there! (*laughs*)

So you are holding these current positions in trust for your husband?

I would like to think that part of it was me, not just Anwar, but also my contribution. I grew a bit into the role. But of course, I understand that he is a better politician, a better leader. I truthfully think and accept the fact that he is a better leader. I will never be like him. But in my own role, I believe I have appeal. I won three elections!

Tell us about your first. Of course there was a *reformasi* wave and it was easier because of the anger and resentment at how Anwar was treated. But by the time 2004 came, there was a change of prime minister, and Malaysian politics is a pendulum - five years this and five years that ... then it was an *imam* who stood against me and in Umno there is a vacuum of such candidates. That particular one had a clean image like mine and I liked him. He used to give sermons on Fridays when he was the Masjid Negara *imam*.

I like what he says about "what good you do will be reflected in