

THE EX-PRESIDENTS



"It was alarming. How could a new member who had just joined for a couple of months, and whom we knew nothing about, be picked over someone who has been with Aware for more than 15 years?"

Former president Dana Lam



"I arrived at the meeting late and found out that I was No. 100 on the attendance list. I've been a member for 10 years, and never before has there been such a turnout."

Former president Tan Joo Hymn



"The building of an institution takes many years; building its value system is even harder. Why can't they come in and be part of the process, and build it together and in a more evolutionary manner? That way, the comfort level will be high for everyone."

Former president Braema Mathi

# Unknowns knock out veterans at Aware polls

Caught off-guard by big turnout, longtime members lose to fresh faces

By WONG KIM HOH

SINGAPORE'S best-known women's group, the Association of Women for Action and Research (Aware), has seen a dramatic changing of the guard - which some members are describing as nothing short of a leadership grab.

When Aware held its annual general meeting on March 28, everyone expected the usual: No more than 30 or 40 members would turn up at its Dover Crescent centre, and a prepared slate of candidates would be voted into office easily.

Instead, more than 100 people came, the majority of whom had joined Aware only in recent months.

And when the election of office bearers began, almost every position was challenged by new faces, who won by wide majorities.

In the end, nine out of 12 executive committee spots went to the newcomers.

One older member who won without a contest was Mrs Claire Nazar, a former corporate counsel nominated to be president by outgoing Aware chief Constance Singam.

But barely a week into her new term, and before making her first statement as president, Mrs Nazar quit suddenly this week.

She confirmed that she had resigned, but declined to say any more when reached by The Straits Times.

It is not known who will now become president.

Longtime members took two other positions: Chew I-jin as assistant honorary treasurer and Caris Lim Chai Leng was elected a committee member.

The election results have left longtime Aware members in shock.

Former president Tan Joo Hymn, 38, told The Straits Times the big turnout at the AGM surprised her.

"I arrived at the meeting late and found out that I was No. 100 on the attendance list. I've been a member for 10 years, and never before has there been such a turnout," said the former lawyer who is now a full-time mother.

Another former president, writer Dana Lam, 57, said: "There were many faces I had not seen before, and I found that very strange."

"In previous years, even if there were new members, they would be known to one or more of the older members."

The first indication that something was afoot came when Ms Chew, an Aware veteran, was challenged and defeated handsomely by new member Charlotte Wong Hock Soon for the post of vice-president.

Ms Chew was later elected unopposed as assistant honorary treasurer.

"It was alarming," said Ms Lam. "How could a new member who had just joined for a couple of months, and whom we knew nothing about, be picked over someone who has been with Aware for more than 15 years?"

Some of the older members immediately began checking the attendance list.

Ms Tan said: "We found that about 80 of the 102 who turned up were new members who joined between January and March this year."

Aware, a feminist group that has prided itself on being "all inclusive", has never vetted the people who apply to be members.

Men can join too, as associate members.

As it dawned on them that a leadership grab was imminent, some older members at the AGM tried asking the newcomers who they were, what they stood for, and why they wanted to be in charge.

They got only the briefest answers, they said.

Ms Lam said she tried suggesting that new members serve a stint on Aware's various sub-committees before standing for election to leadership positions.

But such suggestions went unheeded as the election proceeded, with more newcomers winning executive committee positions by landslide margins.

Ironically, the old guard at Aware had been working towards changing their Constitution to make it a rule that only those who have been members for at least a year would be eligible to join the ex-co.

There is currently no rule to bar a brand new member from seeking office, and that was what happened at the AGM.

Ms Tan said: "We were simply outnumbered. Technically, they got in legitimately."

She added that the way the election proceeded was so unusual, it was hard to imagine that the takeover was not a planned effort.

"It could not be pure coincidence," she said.

But little is known of Aware's new leaders, aside from the fact that they include women from the corporate sector, lawyers, company directors and academics.

Older members said the newcomers spoke well but would not elaborate on their plans for Aware.

"When asked if they believed in equality, they kept repeating they were there to support women and to make sure they got ahead and got all the opportunities given to them," Ms Lam said.

**Celebrate our 12<sup>th</sup> anniversary with ultra brilliant Samsung deals**

THE CHOICE IS YOURS. Pay nothing with Take3 or grab these phones at unbeatable prices.



**Samsung Ultra**  
Pay Nothing with SunMax Plan on Take3 OR \$298

- Brilliant AMOLED Display
- Full Touch with slide-out keypad
- FREE 8GB MicroSD Card

**Have your next 12 months' bills paid as a gift from us**

Surprise! You could be one of the 12 customers picked from our lucky draw to get your next 12 months' bills paid by us! Every month with M1 gives you 1 chance. Sunrisers get double the chances. The longer you've stayed with us, the more chances you have. It's our way of saying thank you for choosing M1.

**Enjoy 1-for-1 movie treat on us**

Here's a special treat for that special someone in your life. All M1 customers get to enjoy a 1-for-1 movie ticket offer every Sunday from 29 March till 19 April at any Cathay Cineplex.



**Limited Edition 12th Anniversary Phone**  
**Samsung L770S**  
\$0

- HSDPA Capability
  - Document Viewer
  - Google Mail & Search
  - FREE Exclusive WAP downloads
  - Additional battery cover
- Also available in Luxury Gold



**Samsung Pixion**  
Pay Nothing with SunSaver Plus Plan on Take3 OR \$198

- FREE With \$200 trade-in
- FREE 8GB MicroSD Card



**Samsung Omnia 8GB**  
Pay Nothing with SunMax Plan on Take3 OR \$298

- FREE With \$200 trade-in
- FREE 1GB MicroSD Card



Pay nothing with Take3 or at the above stated prices with a 2-year handset contract.

TAKE A PLAN THAT FITS YOU BEST TAKE A PHONE OF YOUR CHOICE AT NO COST TAKE IT BACK AND EXCHANGE FOR ANOTHER PHONE AT NO COST\*

To view the entire Take3 range, visit [www.m1.com.sg/take3](http://www.m1.com.sg/take3)

FREE Unlimited Calls to 3 M1 Friends#		FREE Incoming Calls		Per Second Billing
<b>SunLite</b> FREE \$16.05 bundle for any combination of Voice/Video calls, SMS/MMS, IDD and Data \$19.26	<b>SunSaver</b> FREE 100 mins Outgoing Calls FREE 500 SMS/MMS \$25.68	<b>SunSaver Plus</b> FREE 300 mins Outgoing Calls FREE 500 SMS/MMS \$48.15	<b>SunMax</b> FREE 700 mins Outgoing Calls FREE 500 SMS/MMS \$82.93	<b>Talk All U Can</b> UNLIMITED Outgoing Calls FREE 500 SMS/MMS \$201.16
<b>SunShare Plan</b> Share the main line's bundled talktime and SMS/MMS • Enjoy unlimited free outgoing calls within the group \$12.84 each				
<b>Extra savings of up to 35% with Multi-Line Saver:</b> 3 M1 Lines 25% off subscription 4 M1 Lines 30% off subscription 5 M1 Lines 35% off subscription				

Find out more about M1 Anniversary promotions at [www.m1.com.sg/12](http://www.m1.com.sg/12)

**12 Months Bill Rebate Promotion:** For details, terms and conditions, visit [www.m1.com.sg/12](http://www.m1.com.sg/12). **1-for-1 Movie Treat:** Offer is valid from 29 Mar till 19 Apr 2009, for the first 500 M1 customers every Sunday from 10am. M1 customers are required to present their latest M1 bill or show the M1 logo on their phone at the Box Office to enjoy this offer. For full details, terms and conditions for all 12th anniversary promotions, visit [www.m1.com.sg/12](http://www.m1.com.sg/12). **Phone Promotions:** Free Unlimited Calls to 3 M1 Friends is not applicable for SunShare, SunLite and Talk All U Can Plans. \*Customers who are on a Take3 contract are not eligible for any handset re-contract discount. Customers have a choice of either a Take3 contract or a 2-year handset contract. **For Take3:** Customers can exchange their Take3 handsets at no cost after 20 months into their 2-year Take3 contract. Relevant charges apply for exchange done from the 10th month onwards. See [www.m1.com.sg/take3](http://www.m1.com.sg/take3) for full details. For 2-year handset contract, phone offers are valid till 11 April 2009, unless stated otherwise; not applicable to Zero Plan, SunSurf 10 Data Plans, SunShare and DIY Plans, unless stated otherwise; customers with no handset contracts have completed 20 months of their existing contracts are eligible to re-contract at the advertised price; additional \$100 applies on the phone offers for customers who have completed at least 11 months of their handset contract; additional \$100 applies on the phone offers for customers on SunLite Plan; gift with purchase is available while stocks last; for list of trade-in phones at M1 Shops, visit [www.m1.com.sg](http://www.m1.com.sg). M1 reserves the right to vary any term and condition without prior notice. TAC NO.: PRNEQ-G1298-2008, PRNEQ-G0221-2009, PRNEQ-G2003-2008, PRNEQ-G0972-2008

**M1 SHOPS:** Paragon #B1-228/29 • Plaza Singapura #B1-05 • Bugis Junction #B1-01/02 • Change Alley 30 Raffles Place, #01-27/28 • Changi Airport T3 65 Airport Boulevard, #B2-366 • Cold Storage Causeway Point Shopping Centre, #B1-22/31/32 • Compass Point #01-39 • IMM #01-20 • Parkway Parade #02-22A/24 • Sun Plaza #01-09 • Tampines Mall #03-01 • West Mall #01-16/17 • Sembawang Shopping Centre #B1-01 M1 Shop **Hotlines:** 1800-843 3383 (toll-free) 6843 8383

**M1 EXCLUSIVE DISTRIBUTORS:** Arrow Communication Pte Ltd 1, Jelapah Road, #03-19, Bukit Panjara Plaza • Blk 727, Ang Mo Kio Central, #01-425A • Blk 221, Boon Lay Place, #01-136, Boon Lay Shopping Centre • Blk 201E, Tampines Street 23, #01-76 • Blk 183, Toa Payoh Central, #01-258 • Blk 106, Yishun Ring Road, #01-159 • Blk 201B, Tampines Street 21, #01-106/9 • 90, Hougang Ave 10, #B1-33, Hougang Mall • 53, Ang Mo Kio Ave 3, #02-30, Ang Mo Kio Hub • 6, Raffles Boulevard, #02-010B, Suntec City Mall • Tronng Bahru Plaza #01-49 • Blk 811 Hougang Central #01-194 • Blk 762 Jurong West St 75 #01-332 Gek Poh S.C. • Northpoint, #01-26 • Handphone Shop 3, Temasek Boulevard, #02-054, Suntec City Mall • 1, Jurong West Central 2, #03-19, Jurong Point • Blk 449, Clementi Central, #01-263 • Blk 726, Ang Mo Kio Central, #01-416/2 • Blk 211, New Upper Changi Road, #01-747 • Blk 101, Yishun Ave 5, #01-49 • Blk 190, Lorong 6 Toa Payoh, #01-548 • Blk 399, Yung Sheng Road, #01-47, Taman Jurong Shopping Centre • 1, Queensway, #02-44, Queensway Shopping Centre • 2, Tampines Central 5, #04-14, Century Square • 3, Simei Street 6, #03-11, Eastpoint Mall • 1, HarbourFront Walk, #02-56, VivoCity • 1, Hougang Street 91, #01-05, Hougang Point • 1, Kim Seng Promenade, #02-36, Great World City • 1, Pasir Ris Central Street 3, #03-22, White Sands • 2, Handy Road, #01-10 Orchard, The Cathay • 10, Sinaran Drive, #B1-111, Novena Square 2 • 252, North Bridge Road, #B1-39, Raffles City Shopping Centre • Blk 214, Bedok Central, #01-161 • 1, Pasir Ris Close, #01-107, Pasir Ris NTUC Resort • Junction 8 Shopping Centre, #02-30, Bishan Central • West Coast Plaza #B1-03 • Kallang Leisure Park, #01-20 • 1, Jelapah Road, #01-03, Bukit Panjara Plaza • Mobile World Blk 809, Hougang Central, #01-172 • Blk 178, Toa Payoh Central, #01-232 • Blk 712, Ang Mo Kio Central, #01-405 • Blk 213, Bedok Street 1, #01-127 • Blk 205, Hougang Street 21, #01-129 • Blk 135, Jurong East Street 13, #01-325

CONTINUED ON PAGE A19

THE NEW TEAM



THE Straits Times understands that the following were elected to Aware's new committee on March 28, 2009.

- **President:** Claire Nazar (left)
- **Vice-president:** Charlotte Wong Hock Soon
- **Honorary secretary:** Jenica Chua Chor Ping
- **Assistant honorary secretary:** Sally Ang Koon Hian
- **Honorary treasurer:** Maureen Ong Lee Keang
- **Assistant honorary treasurer:** Chew I-Jin
- **Committee member:** Caris Lim Chai Leng
- **Committee member:** Catherine Tan Ling Ghim
- **Committee member:** Josie Lau Meng Lee (near right)
- **Committee member:** Lois Ng (centre right)
- **Committee member:** Irene Yee Khor Quin (far right)
- **Committee member:** Peggy Leong Pek Kay



But new president Claire Nazar has just quit her post. She confirmed this, but declined to comment further when contacted by The Straits Times.

Of the other committee members, only Ms Chew I-Jin and Ms Caris Lim are longtime members of Aware.

Ms Chew had been nominated by the Aware old guard for the vice-president's post but she was trounced by newcomer Charlotte

Wong, and had to settle for the assistant treasurer's position, which she won without a contest.

The Straits Times e-mailed Aware this week requesting interviews with members of the new committee, but did not receive a reply.

The newspaper also tried contacting some of the members - Jenica Chua, Josie Lau and Lois Ng - on their mobile phones, hoping they

might shed light on who they are, how they are connected to other newly elected office-bearers, or what they are planning to do now that they are in charge.

Ms Lau and Ms Ng could not be reached.

Ms Chua confirmed that she was on the new executive committee and said Aware would be releasing a press statement in "the next few days".

But she flatly refused to take any more questions.

The Straits Times also contacted two other new members who were at the AGM: Ms Angela Thiang, who spoke up in support of the newcomers who stood for election, and Dr Alan Chin, who helped to count the votes.

Ms Thiang said she would return the call, but did not. She could not be reached subsequently.

Dr Chin confirmed that he was an Aware member but, like the others, refused to answer any questions.

New guard: No comment, for now.

FROM PAGE A18

Older members were keen to know if the newcomers shared Aware's vision and values, including equality for all regardless of race, religion or sexuality.

But one outspoken new member from the floor, who identified herself as Angela Thiang, said questions about the new office bearers' religion and their stand on homosexuality were not relevant.

Former Nominated Member of Parliament (NMP) Braema Mathi, a two-term president of Aware, told The Straits Times that she, like many other members, was concerned.

"If you are keen to serve, you don't challenge every position. We do not know who they are," said the former journalist who is now in Bangkok doing consultancy work for international women's group Unifem.

"It is very troubling, more so because I've heard the new president has resigned."

Almost a fortnight into their new roles, the new leaders of Aware were not entertaining calls from the media this week.

New honorary secretary Jenica Chua Chor Ping told The Straits Times a press release would be issued "in a few days" and added that until then, the committee would not answer any questions.

A check showed that some of those at the AGM and on the new committee have appeared in The Straits Times Forum Page.

Ms Chua, Ms Thiang and Dr Alan Chin, a male member of Aware who attended the AGM and supported the newcomers, all wrote letters to this newspaper between August and October 2007.

In a letter on Oct 17 that year, Ms Chua said NMP Siew Kum Hong had overstepped his non-partisan role and advanced the homosexual cause by tabling a petition in Parliament to repeal Section 377A of the Penal Code which criminalises homosexual sex between consenting men.

In another letter on Oct 25, she took issue with a Straits Times report which said NMP Thio Li-Ann had been "visibly distraught" when she opposed Mr Siew's petition vigorously.

Ms Chua said Ms Thio had dealt with several points succinctly, with humour and passion.

Dr Chin and Ms Thiang both wrote letters to caution against the risks of promoting the homosexual lifestyle.

Meanwhile, news of Aware's AGM has spread among older members who did not attend the meeting, as well as civil society groups.

The most frequently-asked questions: Who are the new women in charge, why do they want the leadership, and what are their plans for Aware?

Ms Mathi said: "The building of an institution takes many years; building its value system is even harder."

"Why can't they come in and be part of the process, and build it together and in a more evolutionary manner? That way, the comfort level will be high for everyone."

Former newspaper editor and media consultant Peter Lim, a longtime associate member of Aware, said he was very surprised to learn what had taken place.

Asked why he thought a group of newcomers would want to take control, he said he did not know if it was an orchestrated effort.

But he thought Aware would be attractive to those seeking to be in charge of an established institution. Setting up a new outfit would take too much time and trouble.

"Aware has built up its credentials over the years and achieved more than a few things," he said.

Three former Aware presidents - Ms Claire Chiang, Dr Kanwaljit Soin and Ms Mathi - have served as NMPs.

"Aware is a brand name and most people regard it as the leading voice of the feminists and modern women in Singapore," said Mr Lim.

kimhoh@sph.com.sg

# CONCOURSE SKYLINE




SELECTED UNITS FROM

## \$822K

FOR A LIMITED PERIOD ONLY



## LIVE...

- Spectacular sea and city views
- Designed by award-winning architect Philip Cox
- Link to upcoming Nicoll Highway MRT Station

## WORK...

- Located just outside Central Business District
- Islandwide connectivity using the ECP and AYE
- One MRT station away from Suntec City





## PLAY...

WITH BREATHTAKING EASE.

- At the centre of Singapore's new action zone
- Two MRT stations away from upcoming Marina Bay Sands Integrated Resort and one MRT station away from upcoming Sports Hub

Visit our show suites at The Concourse, 300 Beach Road, #38-01, from 10am - 6pm daily or call 9648 8480/9180 0051 [www.concourseskyline.com.sg](http://www.concourseskyline.com.sg)

DEVELOPER: HONG FOK LAND LTD (REG. NO. 19790455C) • DEVELOPER LICENCE NO: C0329 • TENURE OF LAND: 99 YEARS LEASEHOLD FROM 13 MARCH 2008

• EXPECTED TOP DATE: 31/12/2013 • EXPECTED DATE OF LEGAL COMPLETION: 31/12/2016 • LOTS: 1040T AND 1043N TS 13 AT BEACH ROAD • BUILDING PLAN APPROVAL NO. AND DATE OF BUILDING PLAN APPROVAL: A0985-00404-2007-BP01 DATED 01/02/2008 & A0985-00404-2007-BP02 DATED 20/05/08

MARKETING AGENTS




DEVELOPER



HONG FOK LAND LTD  
(Member of Hong Fok Group)

EXTRA FREE GIFT FOR SENIOR CITIZENS ★

THE MATTRESS CENTRE

Selling Mattresses Since 1982

LARGEST SELECTION

MATTRESS	Extra Firm - \$100 x 6mths Inst	Queen Size \$599 per set
Single	\$148	FREE Mattress Protector
S/Single	\$168	
Queen	\$198	
King	\$328	

3 in 1 Pull-out Bed \$499 per set  
3'6 Super Single Size

Mattress & Storage Bed  
Queen \$888  
King \$1088

FREE Pillows and Bolster

\*Buy Queen or King Mattress from \$399

TRADE IN Old Mattress Up to \$200

8 Jalan Ismail (off Jalan Eunos)

Mon-Sat 10am-8pm Sun/PH 11am-7pm Tel: 6744 2333

★ 0% INSTALLMENT FOR HSBC, OCBC, UOB, DBS CARD HOLDERS ★