

DBS exec is Aware's new head

Josie Lau appointed despite employer's advice not to run

By TAN DAWN WEL, WONG KIM HOH & YEN FENG

BANK executive Josie Lau, 48, was appointed the new president of the Association of Women for Action and Research (Aware) last night at a meeting of the new team in charge.

She is vice-president of consumer banking group cards and unsecured loans for DBS Bank.

But shortly after she announced that she was president, posed for pictures and made brief comments to reporters, her employer expressed unhappiness that she had taken the top post at Singapore's best-known women's group.

DBS Bank said it had told her just before last night's Aware exco meeting that it did not support her running for president. The bank said it supported employees' participation in community work, but they needed approval before taking on external appointments.

And Ms Lau did not have the green light to be Aware president.

"We believe that as a vice-president in DBS, she already has a challenging job with many responsibilities, and the role of president would demand too much of her time and energy," a spokesman said last night.

Ms Lau could not be reached to comment as the new team wanted media queries to be channelled via the Aware office.

Checks by The Straits Times revealed that she is married to Dr Alan Chin Yew Liang, who owns several clinics under the Lifetime Medical Group. They have two teenage daughters, and Ms Lau is also listed as director and shareholder in some of her husband's clinics.

A beaming Ms Lau refused to take questions from reporters when she emerged from last night's exco meeting which lasted nearly four hours. But she said she was pleased and delighted to be president.

"Together with the new exco which was duly elected under the Constitution, I will build on the good work of the past Aware members who advanced the causes for women in all areas of society through advocacy, research and community work," she said.

Yesterday's events were the latest in a series of dramatic moves at Aware.

At its annual general meeting on March 28, a large number of newly regis-



Aware's new team include (clockwise from left) Catherine Tan (exco member), Maureen Ong (honorary treasurer), Peggy Leong (exco member), Jenica Chua (honorary secretary), Charlotte Wong (vice-president), Lois Ng (exco member), Sally Ang (assistant honorary secretary), Chew I-Jin (assistant honorary treasurer), Irene Yee (exco member) and Josie Lau (president).

ST PHOTOS: MUGILAN RAJASEGERAN



Aware veteran Chew I-Jin (left) and former president Constance Singam (centre) after the appointment of the new president was announced. With them is honorary treasurer Maureen Ong.

tered members turned up and a list of unknowns knocked out Aware veterans who had expected to form the new leadership.

Within days, Ms Claire Nazar, who had been elected president unopposed, quit unexpectedly.

A group of 160 veteran members has also called for an extraordinary general meeting, possibly to table a vote of no confidence in the new leadership.

Last night, Ms Lau was chosen leader from the exco members who did not already hold a position.

The evening was not without drama. Immediate past president Constance Singam had come for the meeting, but The Straits Times learnt that she walked out just as it began.

Three hours into the meeting, exco member Caris Lim, a long-time member and volunteer, also walked out.

Red-eyed and voice trembling, she said: "I'm very disillusioned. I don't like what's going on inside, so I'm walking out."

She would not say more, and left hurriedly.

That left only one Aware veteran, assistant honorary treasurer Chew I-Jin, with the rest of the all-new team.

Despite repeated attempts by the media, including last night, the new women in charge of Aware have refused to disclose who they are, how they are connected, or what prompted them to launch a takeover of the association.

After midnight, Aware issued a press release announcing Ms Lau's appointment as president.

It acknowledged the contributions of Aware and its past members and pledged to build on their work. (See statement below.)

The new team did not indicate what they intended doing differently from the previous leadership.

Nor did they deal with the buzz over their takeover of Aware, in particular concerns expressed about their conservative views on sexuality.

Approached to comment on Ms Lim's exit from the meeting last night, Mrs Singam said: "We are not resigning. It's an organisation we've been committed to for a long time."

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Who's on the exec committee

- **PRESIDENT:** Josie Lau Meng-Lee
- **VICE-PRESIDENT:** Charlotte Wong Hock Soon
- **HONORARY SECRETARY:** Jenica Chua Chor Ping
- **ASST HONORARY SECRETARY:** Sally Ang Koon Hian
- **HONORARY TREASURER:** Maureen Ong Lee Keang
- **ASST HONORARY TREASURER:** Chew I-Jin
- **COMMITTEE MEMBERS:** Caris Lim Chai Leng, Catherine Tan Ling Ghim, Irene Yee Khor Quin, Lois Ng, Peggy Leong Pek Kay

DBS to Lau: Don't run for top post

A STATEMENT issued by a DBS spokesman:

"The bank requires all employees to obtain approval before running for or taking on an external appointment, and many DBS employees are involved in community work and/or support various charity organisations in their own personal capacity.

"Josie was informed prior to the Aware election this evening that although the bank supports her involvement in Aware as council member, in her own personal capacity, DBS is, however, not supportive of her intent to run for president of Aware. We believe that as a vice-president in DBS, she already has a challenging job with many responsibilities, and the role of president would demand too much of her time and energy."



Exco member Caris Lim, a long-time member, walked out three hours into the meeting of the new team, saying she was "very disillusioned".

New team pledges to work for full equality of the sexes

THIS is the statement issued by the new team at Aware shortly after midnight. It included an updated list of the executive committee, but did not provide any details about the women in charge:

"Aware, Singapore's leading women's advocacy organisation, is delighted to announce that its new president is Ms Josie Lau. She is joined by a dynamic, fresh and committed group of women forming the executive committee, who hail from diverse professional backgrounds drawn from the business, banking, finance, legal, education, management, human resource and social service sectors.

2009 marks the jubilee of our nation (50 years of self-government). In this period, the cause of women has made many great strides in many respects. The new team at Aware wishes to remember and honour the work of past Aware members for their vision and endeavours to advance the cause of women in all areas of society through advocacy and community work.

The new team intends to build on the solid foundations laid by the founders of Aware and will continue to promote the participation of women, on equal terms with men, in the political, social,

economic and cultural life of our society. The goal remains to bring about full equality of the sexes and to end all forms of discrimination against women.

Aware will build on existing advocacy, research (eg. attitude and policies towards singles) and education to empower women to deal with various forms of discrimination, raise their awareness of rights and responsibilities, and promote their welfare in tandem with the standards in the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (Cedaw). In 1995, Singapore became a party to Cedaw which contains benchmarks against which to measure the elimination of discrimination against women on a national basis.

Singapore has made much progress in areas like education and health but can do better in other respects. In particular, the new team will seek to promote the role of women in politics and public life as Article 7 of Cedaw affirms. We endorse the Cedaw committee recommendation that women's participation in public life should reach a minimum of 30 per cent to 35 per cent, sharing the conviction that this will revitalise political and public life.

The new team will, as a paramount objective, seek to empower women to be

leaders in our society, in politics, business, the professions and in all areas of endeavour which will benefit our nation.

President Josie Lau says: "In these challenging times, the new team will actively seek to collaborate and align Aware with other women's organisations with outreach to girls and women who are affected by the current economic downturn.

"The new team aims to empower women who have been retrenched and equip them with new skills. In this context, we will work with training agencies and launch a series of programmes of practical assistance, such as grooming, budgeting, finance and debt management, career planning and management of change. We will continue to provide emotional, psychological or legal support for women."

We call on all women of Singapore to rise to the challenge of taking on leadership roles in our nation. We invite volunteers to help make Aware a positive agent of change for the beneficial transformation of our society, where all people, regardless of race, religion or sex, are valued and have a place under the sun."

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