

**Kit Siang: Where were BN women?**  
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Barisan Nasional (BN) women members of Parliament "owe Malaysians an explanation as to why they chickened out" of defending the dignity of women in relation to sexist remarks made in the Dewan Rakyat last Wednesday.

Parliamentary Opposition Leader Lim Kit Siang levelled this accusation following the failure of any BN MP to register protest in the House when two of their counterparts directed the remarks against DAP MP for Batu Gajah, Fong Po Kuan.

He claimed that a woman BN member had even left the chamber when she heard Fong tabling a motion to refer Mohd Said Yusof (Jasin) and Bung Mokhtar Radin (Kinabatangan) to the privileges committee.

"When Po Kuan stood up in the House (on Thursday) morning...and tabled a motion to refer them to the Committee of Privileges, why didn't any BN woman MP stand up to support her?" he said in a statement issued over the weekend.

"Instead, one BN woman MP quickly scurried out of the Chamber when she heard Po Kuan raising the subject of the sexist conduct of the two BN MPs. I will not name her now, but if BN women MPs dare to deny and challenge me to name names, I would be glad to do so."

Lim also pointed out that, when the Speaker Ramli Ngah Talib returned to the House at 2.30pm and announced the rejection of Po Kuan's privilege motion on a technical ground, all the BN women MPs had conspicuously stayed away.

"They should have made it a point to attend to show support and solidarity for Po Kuan as they had more than four hours' notice of the Speaker's ruling," he said.

He said it is now up to ordinary Malaysians to do what MPs and ministers have failed to do - by condemning the conduct of the two MPs "to the prime minister, cabinet, the country and the world".

In this context, the DAP has launched a public campaign in support of Fong and to condemn the remarks.

The party kicked off a series of ceramah (political talks) on Saturday in Pasir Pinji, Ipoh, which recorded "unanimous support by a show of hands" for a four-point resolution that calls for action to:

- Condemn Mohd Said and Bung Mokhtar for their derogatory, crude, vulgar, sexist and gender-offensive remarks against Fong;
- Urge all Malaysians to stand united in demanding the most severe punishment for the two MPs for bringing shame and dishonour to Fong, the Parliament and Malaysian women;
- Express regret that not a single BN MP supported Fong when she tabled a motion to refer Mohd Said and Bung Mokhtar to the Committee of Privileges; and
- Ask Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi to honour his 2004 general election pledge to act on the truth by taking severe disciplinary action against the MPs concerned.

## Worrying situation

In a related development, the All-Women's Action Society (Awam) said it was shocked to read about the incident and that the matter has been handled "so dismissively".

"The statements are worrying because they reflect the disrespect of women by lawmakers," it said in a statement signed by president Judith Koh-Loh.

"The fact that the august body allowed the 'joke' to be made without sanctioning the two men marks another low point in the history of parliamentary debates. The remarks smack of sexual harassment."

"Most shockingly, members of the Parliamentary Gender Caucus were oblivious to the distress these remarks have caused. Provocation should never be an excuse to humiliate Fong in particular and women in general.

She questioned why Mohd Said and Bung Mohktar have been let off without a reprimand and why they have not been made to apologise.

"It sends the signal that sexual harassment of women is acceptable," she said, adding that Awam reiterates the call for a Sexual Harassment Bill which would bring in provisions for swift redress in instances of violation.

## Wanita MCA's protest

Meanwhile later in the day, hours after Lim had asked as to why BN women had been quiet over the matter, Wanita MCA chief Dr Ng Yen Yen issued a statement criticising the two BN MPs for their "offensive" remarks.

"It shows absolute disregard for decorum and vilifies the dignity of both our Parliament and women in general. They should never have uttered such insensitivities anywhere, not even in their private conversations let alone in full view of the public," she said.

"MCA as a party and on behalf of Wanita MCA, I want to voice my firm protest against such crudity. It is offensive even to the simplest of minds that we speak like this about anyone regardless of their gender, in this 21st century."

"I have spoken to YB Dato' Seri Sharizat Abdul Jalil, Minister for Women, Family and Community Development and I have also expressed my view over this vulgarity and crude behaviour. Malaysian women from all walks of life will not tolerate this kind of insult."

Ng said that she was happy to hear that Shahrizat would be raising the matter during the cabinet meeting on Wednesday.

## Sexist remarks uttered in Parliament

Name	Year	Quotes / incidents
<b>Badruddin Amiruddin</b> BN-Jerai	1995	"Like <i>wanita putus haid</i> ." (a woman reaching menopause)
<b>Mohamed Aziz</b> BN-Sri Gading	2000	"It's unusual for women's issues to be touched by men. But women are supposed to be touched by men."
<b>Bung Mokhtar Radin</b> BN-Kinabatangan	2001	" <i>Boleh masuk sikit?</i> " (Can I come in a little?)
<b>Deputy Health Minister Dr Abdul Latiff Ahmad</b>	2004	Alleged sexual innuendo of 'big needles, small needles' to Chong Eng (DAP-Bukit Mertajam)
<b>Badruddin Amiruddin</b> BN-Jerai	2005	Asked a fellow parliamentarian if he knows how long Fong Po Kuan's (DAP-Batu Gajah) marriage would last (during a debate on rising divorce rates).
<b>Idris Haron</b> BN-Tangga Batu <b>Dr Mohd Hayati Othman</b> PAS-Pendang <b>Salahuddin Ayub</b> PAS-Kubang Kerian		MPs who claimed that the 'sexy uniform' of Malaysia Airlines' female cabin staff would arouse the sexual desire of male passengers.
<b>Abdul Fatah Harun</b> PAS-Rantau Panjang	2006	Commented that women divorcees are <i>gatal</i> (randy).
<b>Bung Mokhtar Radin</b> BN-Kinabatangan <b>Mohd Said Yusof</b> BN-Jasin	2007	" <i>Mana ada bocor? Batu Gajah pun bocor tiap-tiap bulan juga.</i> " (Where is the leak? The Batu Gajah parliamentarian leaks every month too)

Azlan Zamhari / Malaysiakini