

Protest held against sexist MPs
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Yoges Palaniappan and Ooi Kelly

'We want gender sensitive MPs!' This was among the slogans chanted during a protest outside the Bukit Perdana government complex in Kuala Lumpur today.

About 60 people, carrying placards and banners, participated in the hour-long protest, which started at about 11am.

A small number of uniformed policemen kept watch as the protestors voiced their objections to the sexist remarks made by Barisan Nasional parliamentarians Bung Mokhtar Radin and Said Yusof in Parliament last week.

The parliamentarians, during a debate, among others, on the lack of maintenance resulting in leaks in the Parliament building after heavy downpours, had attacked one of the opposition members who raised the issue.

"Where's the leak? The Batu Gajah MP leaks every month too," Bung said referring to DAP representative of the constituency, Fong Po Kuan [video clip].

The protest was organised by the Joint-Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG). Among those present at the protest were a number of representatives from MCA, a member of the ruling coalition.

A memorandum was presented to Women, Family and Community Development Minister Sharizat Abdul Jalil.

Suspension, pay cut

The memorandum, read out by Women's Development Collective executive director Maria Chin Abdullah, demanded a public apology from the two MPs.

She also urged Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who chairs the cabinet committee on gender equality, Sharizat's ministry and the parliamentary caucus on gender equality to end sexism and gender discrimination in Parliament.

"Any MP who ill behaves in Parliament should be suspended for a period of six months and his pay and allowances cut until the suspension is over," she added to applause from those present.

Sisters in Islam executive director Zainah Anwar said MPs who are gender insensitive must not be re-elected.

She cited five MPs - Bung, Said, Mohamad Aziz (BN-Sri Gading), Badruddin Amiruldin (BN-Jerai) and Abdul Fatah Harun (PAS-Rantau Panjang).

"We don't want them to be re-elected, because they have ridiculed their constituencies, parties, the Parliament and government," she said, vowing to stage protests in their respective constituencies should they stand for elections.

Don't get emotional

Meanwhile, Shahrizat said she will raise the matter during tomorrow's cabinet meeting.

"We (the government) are very sensitive, we're following this issue and will take (the necessary) steps.

"We expect everyone, from backbenchers to the opposition, to behave with decorum and dignity," she added.

However, the minister said there was no need to get overly emotional about the matter and ruled out the need to hold protests.

"I really don't think its necessary to hold this kind of gathering. Just give me the memo and we will see to it. But I admit you are NGOs and you are free to do it," she said.

Wanita MCA representative Felicia Ling (left) also urged the minister to take necessary action.

"We're all behind you, you have the nation's 50 percent population behind you. There's nothing to be afraid of," she said.

The protest was participated by representatives from various women's groups, rights groups and political parties.

What the rest had to say

S Arutchelvan, Parti Sosialis Malaysia (PSM) pro-tem secretary-general

The comments made by them is disgusting. The worst part is they made it in Parliament and they didn't show any remorse over it.

The matter must be exposed to the public as it would prevent them from making the same mistake again.

They must apologise and BN must take disciplinary action against them.

Sexist remarks uttered in Parliament

Name	Year	Quotes / incidents
Badruddin Amiruddin BN-Jerai	1995	"Like <i>wanita putus haid</i> ." (a woman reaching menopause)
Mohamed Aziz 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."
Bung Mokhtar Radin BN-Kinabatangan	2001	" <i>Boleh masuk sikit?</i> " (Can I come in a little?)
Deputy Health Minister Dr Abdul Latiff Ahmad	2004	Alleged sexual innuendo of 'big needles, small needles' to Chong Eng (DAP-Bukit Mertajam)
Badruddin Amiruddin 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).
Idris Haron BN-Tangga Batu Dr Mohd Hayati Othman PAS-Pendang Salahuddin Ayub PAS-Kubang Kerian		MPs who claimed that the 'sexy uniform' of Malaysia Airlines' female cabin staff would arouse the sexual desire of male passengers.
Abdul Fatah Harun PAS-Rantau Panjang	2006	Commented that women divorcees are <i>gatal</i> (randy).
Bung Mokhtar Radin BN-Kinabatangan Mohd Said Yusof 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

Y Kohila, grassroots movement Jerit

They will get angry if the same statements are made about their wives and daughters, but yet they did it.

Women have progressed and we make half of the nation's economic force. We must stop voting for them.

Lee Huat Seng, student movement Dema

There will be no equality until there is gender equality.

R Ragunathanan of Young Lawyer's Association

I'm embarrassed to be a man because of the two MPs. They must apologise and Sharizat must step down if she can't defend her fellow womenfolk.

Fong Po Kuan (far left), DAP MP

We're not here because we are emotional. We are here to stress that it is about time to stop the recurring of sexism in the Parliament.

I hope that after this incident, there wont be any derogatory remarks and gender discrimination in the Parliament.

Reactions to sexist remarks in Parliament

Politician	Date	Comments
Dewan speaker Ramli Ngah Talib	May 11	I regret this incident happened. I hope members will be careful with the words they use.
Parliamentary Gender Caucus member Fadilah Yusof (BN-Petrajaya)		That statement was never intended to humiliate women. I think he just said it as he was provoked. However, I do think that we should be more careful of what we say.
Parliamentary Gender Caucus member Idris Haron (BN- Tangga Batu)		I feel that she (Fong Po Kuan) is using this issue as a means of getting publicity for her own political agenda. When we say such things in Parliament, we take them as a joke, not as a personal attack.
Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Nazri Abdul Aziz		It is normal to play with words.
Mohd Said Yusof (BN-Jasin)	May 12	Apologise to Fong Po Kuan? What is there to apologise for? I did not mean to offend her or other women.
Women, Family and Community Development Minister Shahrizat Abdul Jalil		Even in jest, it should not have been done. I would like to request all MPs to show exemplary behaviour, especially on gender issues.
Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Nazri Abdul Aziz	May 13	Politicians must be able to take criticism and be thick-skinned about it.
Shahrir Abdul Samad (BN-Johor Baru)		I sympathise with the two DAP ladies (Fong and Teresa Kok) but they should have sought an apology and not politicise the issue.
Wanita MCA chief Dr Ng Yen Yen	May 15	It shows absolute disregard for decorum and vilifies the dignity of both our Parliament and women in general.
Deputy Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak		The remarks were not supposed to be taken seriously and that there were certain parties out to make a big deal of the issue.

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