

Vote out boorish MPs
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A public forum yesterday found both Mohd Said Yusof and Bung Mokhtar Radin guilty of sexual harassment against DAP MP Fong Po Kuan by uttering sexist remarks in Parliament last week.

The forum also agreed that these two BN backbenchers had brought shame and dishonour to Parliament, the Malaysian women and the nation's reputation internationally.

And as a penalty, the DAP-organised forum recommended that the offending duo are given a six-month suspension as MP, during which time they would have to do community service with women groups.

Other penalties that were put forward included seeking a full apology from Fong and all Malaysian women, failing which their suspension to be extended to 12 months.

Speaking at the forum were Opposition Leader Lim Kit Siang, DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng, Fong, Sisters in Islam executive director Zainah Anwar, Bar Council president Ambiga Sreenevasan, Women's Development Collective executive director Maria Chin Abdullah and Salehuddin Hashim, who represented PKR adviser Anwar Ibrahim.

The two BN MPs got themselves embroiled in a controversy after uttering sexist remarks at Fong during a debate in Parliament last week.

While a debate was going on over a leak in the Parliament roof, the two backbenchers had remarked, "Where's the leak? The Batu Gajah MP leaks every month too," referring to Fong who is the DAP representative of the constituency. [video clip]

This remark caused an uproar among the DAP MPs, as well as several citizen's groups in the country, prompting calls for apology as well the suspension of the two errant MPs.

Mohd Yusof (BN-Jasin) and Bung Mokhtar (BN-Kinabatangan, today finally offered their apologies to all the women in Malaysia.

There is a limit

Speaking at the forum last night, Zainah condemned the remarks by stating that "the sexism in Parliament reflects sexism within".

"If our leaders cannot provide leadership, we the people will provide it for them," she said.

Another speaker, Salehuddin - who is Anwar's chief-of-staff - narrated how his breakfast was ruined on the day the papers reported the remarks by the duo.

"My wife was toasting my bread and I read the article out loud. She just sat still and threw the bread at me... without it being toasted," he said.

He felt that sexist jokes are still commonplace, but there are limits.

"I'm a mature Malay man of the old school. We do joke about women. I am not coming up here and talk on a moral high ground, but there are boundaries, not just on gender sensitivity. But gender sensitivity in an august House in Parliament [should be observed]."

Vote wisely

Salehuddin however said public uproar over the remarks is unlikely to change to mindset of the MPs.

"Those two guys are more than shocked that we are shocked," he exclaimed to laughter among the 200-odd audience members.

"Do you realise now that the BN MPs are totally unaware [of public opinion]. They exist in their own twilight zone. If you notice the way the BN MPs talk in Parliament, it is as though they are in a twilight zone," he said.

"And you see them on tv ... Let me share with you from my personal experience, that's how they also fight for their projects. Aku!? Aku!? Aku bagaimana!? Aku bagaimana! (Me! Me! How about me!)" exclaimed Salehuddin, with his arms waving.

Despite a sexist outlook, Salehuddin said MPs could still be elected to power.

"Sadly, ladies and gentlemen, if you take the orangutan out of the jungle... I'm sorry I said that. It was in the heat of the moment."

"... if you put them up [for election], they would still win the election! ... Why doesn't [public outrage of sexist remarks] translate to the choice of people they elect?"

"You must understand one thing, they have no respect for anybody but the hand that feeds them the gold. Sadly speaking, the man who feeds them the gold is there because of your vote.

"No amount of forums, no amount of signatures will matter to these bandits ... the [only time it matters] is when you get your pen and cross it; as long as it is not the dacing," he said.

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