

Samy joins ranks of sexist politicians
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Just as the dust was about to settle over the sexist remarks made by two parliamentarians, a senior minister has kicked it up again.

Veteran politician S Samy Vellu yesterday drew a parallel between the dilapidated state of the 43-year-old Parliament House to the looks of a woman of 50 years.

"A woman may be pretty but after 50 years she would not be pretty," he was quoted as saying at a press conference yesterday after officiating an engineering exposition.

A women's group today ticked Samy Vellu off, saying that it was inexcusable that one of the country's longest-serving ministers chose a sexist comment to make his point on the need for renovation works on the Parliament House.

"His remarks reinforce the gender stereotype that a woman's worth lies with her extrinsic attributes (looks) and not with her intrinsic qualities as a human being," said Loh Cheng Kooi from the Joint Action Group for Gender Equality.

"His statement and comparison are demeaning and an affront to women of all ages as they reduce women to objects of beauty, depreciating in value over time."

Samy Vellu's sexist remarks came hot in the heels of the furore over those made by two parliamentarians - Kinabatangan MP Bung Mokhtar Radin and Jasin MP Mohd Said Yusof - early this month.

The parliamentarians, during debate on the lack of maintenance resulting in leaks in the Parliament building after heavy downpours, had attacked a woman opposition representative 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.

The duo have since apologised following intense criticisms from the public.

Samy did it before

Loh lamented that it was not the first time for Samy Vellu to make such sexist remarks - in October 2005, the works minister was quoted to have compared "toilets to new brides".

He was reported to have said: "Toilets are like new brides after they are completed. After some time, they get a bit spoiled. Even if you do not use them frequently, you need someone to clean them every 25 minutes."

"For far too long, elected representatives have repeatedly made derogatory remarks against women, ranging from comments on their bodily functions to statements on their physical attributes, and have gotten away with such sexist language.

"These comments show a complete lack of gender sensitivity and reflect a deeply ingrained

culture of patriarchy as well as a total lack of respect for women.”

She called on Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, who is chairperson of the Gender Cabinet Committee, to take this matter seriously and put an immediate stop to sexist comments from his cabinet and Parliament.

If not, Loh said that Malaysians should then send a clear message at the ballot box.

“Gender insensitive leaders should just be voted out.”

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