

Legislation alone won't curb sexist remarks
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The recent sexist remarks made in Parliament that resulted in many protests and some reluctant apologies probably stem from the manner of how different cultures view such remarks.

I have attended numerous meetings and seminars where speakers and heads of departments use words, phrases and sentences that convey double meanings and invariably most of the audience, including women, laugh at the 'witty' and 'saucy' jokes.

Those who have been in the government departments will know this well as this has been long accepted. Many speakers revel in this and consider themselves 'witty' and 'hilarious' speakers, and continue to do this despite the law on sexual harassment in this country.

I believe that this is the reason for the different level of protests from the different segments in our society on this matter. Those who are Western-educated and subscribe to women's liberation and equality, of course, can't stand such remarks, while those who are still traditional in their outlook consider these remarks as normal and harmless.

Even 'educated' women in official positions laugh along when such remarks are made, as they are so used to them.

Unfortunately, in this case, the remarks had been directed towards a non-Malay, opposition MP; it looks as though the non-Malays (with a small number of 'liberated' Malays) are taking the traditional Malays to task. Obviously, it has taken a twist as 'racial' and opposition-inspired. If we look at the tone of the Malay media on this issue, we'll see the truth of this interpretation.

Seen from this viewpoint, the reluctant apology to the women of this country - and not to the MP concerned - is probably a 'face saving' gesture just to appease the voters without being seen as having 'lost' to the opposition.

Hence, this will not be the last 'sexist' remark that we are going to hear from our leaders at any level. Only when such remarks are seriously opposed by the traditional Malay women themselves will this trend change in this country. Sexual harassment laws alone may not be enough.

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