

Get serious with sexist remarks,

PM urged

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PETALING JAYA: The prime minister should take a serious view of sexist comments from Cabinet members and parliamentarians and put an immediate stop to them, the Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG) said.

Women's Centre for Change executive director Loh Cheng Kooi said that as chairman of the Gender Cabinet Committee, Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi should also ensure that all elected representatives attend regular gender sensitivity training.

Loh made the statement on behalf of JAG following a statement by Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu on Monday which drew a parallel between the dilapidated state of Parliament and the looks of a 50-year-old woman.

She noted that the dust had barely settled on the *bocor* incident, and already, a minister had made yet another gender insensitive statement.

"This is not the first time the minister has made such a statement," Loh said.

In October 2005, Samy Vellu was reported as saying in Parliament: "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."

Loh said Samy Vellu's remarks reinforce the stereotype that a woman's worth lies in her extrinsic attributes

that depreciate in value over time, and not in her intrinsic qualities as a human being.

She said such comments, including the *bocor* remarks about a DAP MP's menstruation by two Barisan Nasional MPs in Parliament earlier this month made a mockery of the Gender Cabinet Committee on Gender Equality, the Constitution, and the government's ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

In Penang, a backbencher maintained that his question on whether women should have a dress code to avoid sexual harassment was not sexist.

Shahbudin Yahaya (BN-Permatang Berangan) said in his debate on a motion of thanks for the Yang diPertua's speech that when he interrupted Tan Cheng Liang (BN-Jawi) on Tuesday during the debate, he was merely asking her whether there should be a dress code for women.

"I had no intention of

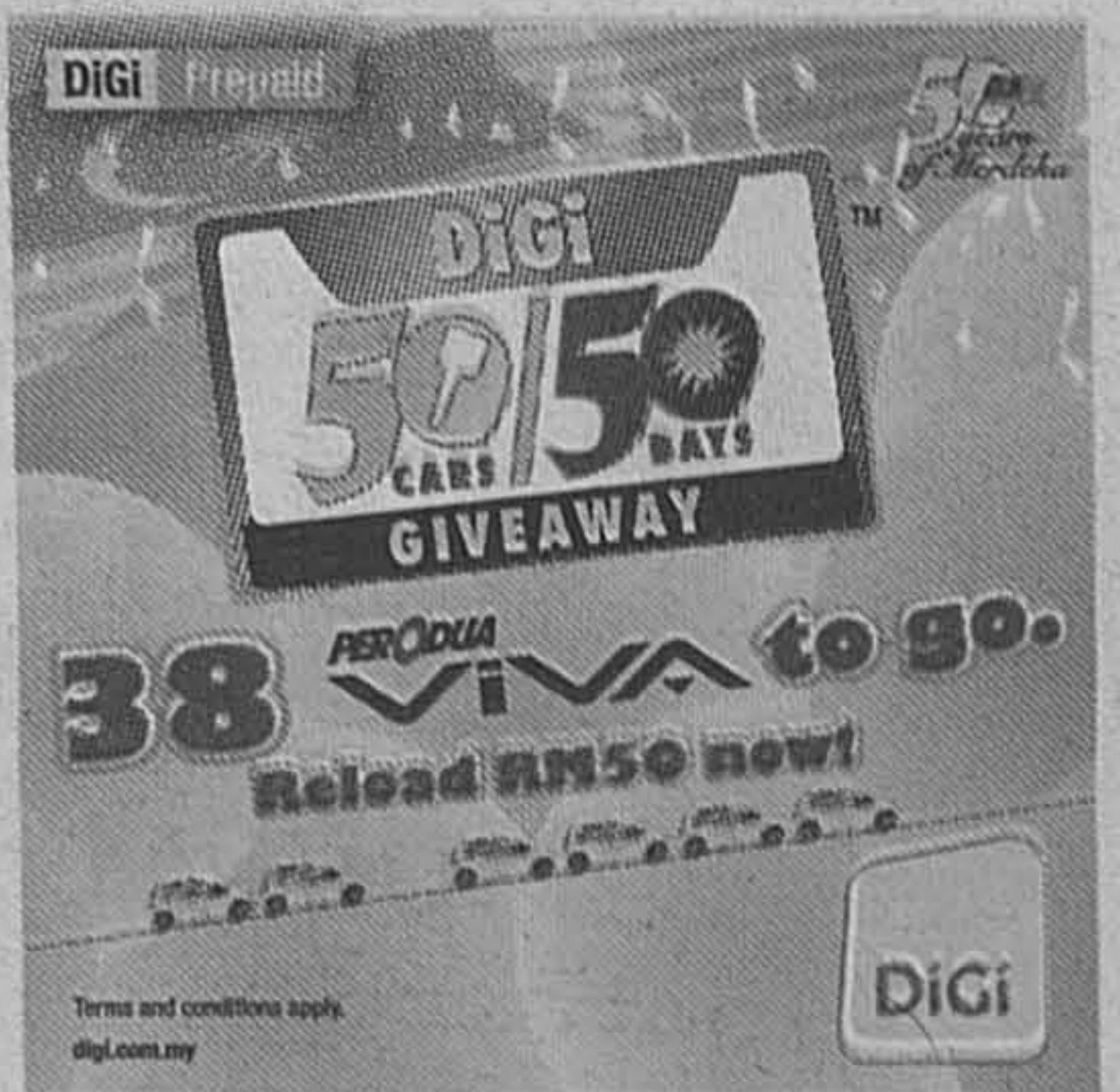
degrading women or making any sexist remarks at all," he said at the Penang State Assembly yesterday.

Shahbudin blamed the media for taking his statement out of context, and said he was merely expressing an opinion that women should dress decently in public.

His comment sparked a heated debate with two state executive councillors criticising him for attributing sexual harassment and violence to the way women dress.

"I don't agree with this view as evidence clearly shows that children and the elderly are among those who are raped and molested, and dressing is not related to the sexual crime at all," state executive committee member Datuk Dr Toh Kin Woon (BN-Machang Bubuk) said.

"The basis for sexual



harassment is unequal power relations between the sexes," he said.

To this, Shahbudin, who is also the state Islamic Religious Council president, said sexual predators do not just decide to

rape.

"They could be encouraged by their environment every day of seeing sexily dressed women. So I feel that it is better that women dress

decently," he said.

Tan interrupted Shahbudin, saying: "In the first place, it is the men who have to control themselves."

Jasmin Mohamed (BN-Sungai Dua) then stood up to question why it was wrong to suggest that women dress decently.

"Those who commit sexual crimes are mentally unstable and should either be treated or punished. The perpetrators are the ones who should be punished, not the victims," Ong Thean Lye (BN-Datuk Keramat) said.

Outside the state assembly, Shahbudin told the media his remarks were not sexist.

"I am just voicing my personal opinion that women should not dress indecently as this could create lustful feelings in men," he said.

He said women who dressed indecently were also sexually harassing men.

"The basis for sexual harassment is unequal power relations between the sexes."

- Toh Kin Woon