

UMNO General Assembly: Witty or just plain sexist?

10 November, 2007

HIS antics and witty remarks having kept delegates amused over the years, acting permanent chairman Datuk Badruddin Amiruldin again did not disappoint. Assuming his new role at this year's assembly, Badruddin -- presiding in place of permanent chairman Tan Sri Onn Ismail who is on medical leave -- was from day one in top form, seizing the slightest opportunity to interrupt speakers with his jibes.

Deputy party president Datuk Seri Najib Razak, in congratulating him for a job well done yesterday, said although Badruddin at times went overboard with his comments, he had succeeded in adding life to the assembly.

Party president Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi in his adjournment speech just after Najib, then said: "If Najib thinks he is keloloh, to me he is loqlak," he said to the laughter of delegates who understood both northern peninsula slangs for "buffoon".

Among Badruddin's first "victims" was Datuk Azimi Daim, also from Kedah and known to be equally sharp-tongued.

When Azimi, debating on Thursday, said housewives should not insist on renovating their kitchens when they received bonuses, Badruddin chipped in saying it was better for them to instead expand the bedroom.

Even Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein was not spared when Badruddin said the Umno Youth chief had a nose that could be used to peel coconut husk.

The sexual innuendos continued the next day when Badruddin interjected that Hishammuddin would be a "hot item" if he signed up as an organ donor.

Hishammuddin responded that his prized possession could in fact benefit two organ recipients.

At times, flirting with the risk of sounding racist and sexist, Badruddin left the audience shell-shocked when he made comments on appearance and physical attributes.

Dark-complexioned Kedah representative Kamal Saidin who was debating the motion on religion and social affairs was told that he looked like a Bangladeshi worker, to the roar of the floor.

"Did you bring along your work permit?" he said.

Delegates in the Merdeka Hall where debates took place, jeered and chuckled at Badruddin when he relented each time a Puteri Umno speaker gently asked him for more time to speak when the allotted period was up.

In defending his actions, Badruddin said this was because many of the speakers from the wing were inexperienced.

"I cannot be too harsh on them, we must give them a chance, especially when their input is actually good."

Badruddin who had previously been picked 19 times to speak as a delegate at the party's annual meeting, said he actually missed being on the other side of the stage.

However, he said seasoned debaters had to make way for upcoming talented orators who could serve the party well.

On his persona as a "funnyman", Badruddin, who said he used to ask the late Umno permanent chairman Tan Sri Sulaiman Ninam Shah for pointers, was quick to point out that he was no joker, but rather a person who strove to make his debates and speeches lively.

Badruddin said he had initiated a system to assess debators' performance. Through his grading system, the best speakers would be appointed as official Umno speakers during the party's ceramah nationwide.

Among the top speakers in his list were Azimi, Kamal, Terengganu information chief Datuk Ahmad Shabery Cheek and Datuk Idderis Kasim of Masjid Tanah, Malacca and a few others who made up the 55 per cent of this

year's debaters who got an "A" from Badruddin.

Yet there are those who may perceive Badruddin's remarks as bordering on sexism and racism.

On Thursday, when Penang delegate Datuk Musa Sheikh Fadzir spoke beyond the allocated time, Badruddin complained that it was difficult dealing with a mamak.

Musa immediately warned Badruddin: "Be careful using the term mamak. We are Penang Malays."

Yesterday, when Wanita Umno delegate Datuk Zaleha Hussin related a story about a friend of hers who boarded budget airline AirAsia, "who told me how uncomfortable it was looking at a seated stewardess with bare legs, thighs and calves", Badruddin interjected, saying that "yes, we can see a tunnel under her skirt".

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