

27 APR 2003

Samy-Jelapang

REMOVAL OF JELAPANG TOLL PLAZA PUT ON HOLD

SUNGAI SIPUT, April 27 (Bernama) -- The RM240 million project to remove the Jelapang and Ipoh Selatan toll plazas on the North-South Expressway (NSE) has been postponed indefinitely, Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu said today.

He said the ministry had to think twice about the plan, aimed at reducing accidents near the Jelapang toll plaza, because of the high costs involved and objections from many quarters.

"So many people are against it and on the other hand, we don't have that much money at the moment. So, we put the matter sine die," he told reporters after attending the Sungai Siput Umno Division delegates meeting.

In late October last year, the Perak state government and the ministry agreed to the controversial plan under a "win-win situation" that will see the existing 15km free-ride along NSE in Ipoh being maintained.

The project was announced by Samy Vellu following numerous accidents at the Jelapang plaza but was initially objected to by the state government, which had feared it would result in the abolishment of the free ride.

Under the proposal, a two-lane road parallel to the highway would be built to maintain the 15km free ride while south- or north-bound motorists can have a free journey without having to stop to pay toll as they are required to now.

It would also see the construction of 15 bridges crossing Sungai Pinji, Sungai Kinta, Sungai Pari, railway tracks, Kuala Kangsar road, Tasek and Ampang Baru as well as a quarter clover-leaf interchange near Jalan Kuala Kangsar.

The state government had made a counter proposal that the south-bound Jelapang toll plaza be moved to between Kuala Kangsar and Sungai Perak while the north-bound Ipoh Selatan be maintained at the present location, but it was shot down by Samy Vellu at that time.

Asked if the ministry would now consider the proposal made by Perak, which was cheaper and could be done faster, he said there was no such plan at the moment.

Samy Vellu, however, said the ministry's plan could be executed if the highway was widened in the future.

He, however, declined to comment when asked about the safety of motorists plying the route now and what kind of immediate measures would be taken to ensure there are no accidents at the plaza.

On an article in the April 5 issue of The Economist which was highly critical of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Samy Vellu said it was a wild accusation.

"They didn't get the true picture of what is happening in the country. They just close their eyes and accuse others....the magazine must apologise for this," he said.

He said Malaysia under the stewardship of Dr Mahathir had made tremendous progress and was peaceful.

-- BERNAMA

AR YBY