

Samy will not agree to toll hike in JB
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Works Minister Samy Vellu said today that the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) has proposed a toll hike in Johor "but I will not accept it".

He explained in Parliament that the Works Ministry is just a tool to implement toll hikes which are decided by the EPU. The unit is under the Prime Minister's Department.

"EPU will send the proposal to cabinet to be sanctioned and once it is completed, it will be sent to me."

"My ministry is only a tool to implement the hikes," Samy Vellu said in reply to a query from Tan Lian Hoe (BN-Bukit Gantang).

He reiterated to Tan that toll hikes are not his decisions and he is not to be blamed.

Samy also said that in future he will not accept EPU's decision to increase toll charges.

"I have a new idea. I will not accept any decision from EPU to implement toll hikes without conducting my own study," he said.

"There is a new proposal from EPU for toll hike in Johor Bahru, and I'm not going to accept it."

Won't burden public

Earlier, the minister explained that the government has considered all factors before deciding on the recent toll hike on expressways in the Klang Valley.

"We have taken into account the payment and maintenance factors. A toll hike will only be implemented after we have made sure that it won't burden the public.

"However, before the hike, we have done a complete restructuring after taking into account the burden it will pose on the public. The current toll is already the lowest," he added.

The routes affected by the recent toll hike are the Lebuhraya Damansara-Puchong (LDP) Expressway, North-South Expressway (Plus), Shah Alam Expressway, Kuala Lumpur-Karak Expressway and Cheras-Kajang Expressway.

In the House later, Samy refused to respond to a supplementary question from Lim Kit Siang (DAP-Ipoh Timur), saying that the opposition leader has gone 150% out of topic.

Lim had questioned Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi's absence from Parliament and stated that as the PM, he must be present to answer questions regarding toll hikes if Samy's statement that the Works Ministry is just a tool that implements the cabinet's decisions on toll hikes is true.

"He (Abdullah) should be here to answer these questions, but he is never present," said

Lim.

To this, Samy replied that PM has many other important tasks and he (Lim) cannot expect him to sit in Parliament from morning to evening.

"Ministers and deputy ministers cannot do that. I've never seen a country like that. Next time, ask only relevant question and don't beat around the bush," the minister said.

On another supplementary query from Kamarudin Jaffar (PAS-Tumpat) as to whether the government will consider taking over profit-making toll concessionaires, and if so, will the government freeze all previous hikes until the matter is solved, Samy said that "everyone must listen when he is providing answers".

"I have already said that the government cares for its people. The government has considered the matter three times and we have already paid RM450 million to LDP," he said.

"Our toll rates are not as high as other countries like China, Thailand and Japan and yet, they don't ask questions there. Here, people ask questions, and we answer."

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