

Samy Vellu 'to fight' EPU on toll issue

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DATUK Seri S. Samy Vellu, fed up of being blamed for toll increases, hinted yesterday that it was the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) that should be in the line of fire.

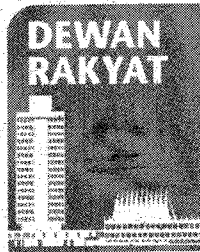
The Works minister said he would no longer accept decisions on tolls without questioning the EPU "on every single detail".

"It is time for new thinking on this. I am going to fight them from now on at every turn," he said to thunderous cheers from backbenchers and opposition members.

Samy Vellu said the EPU was the final decision-maker on tolls and concessions and that he had found himself at a disadvantage each time any announcement on toll was made.

"My ministry is just a tool of the EPU but I cannot allow this anymore. I will question them on every single detail," Samy Vellu told opposition leader Lim Kit Siang.

But Lim was not pleased



■ Reports by V. Vasudevan, Anis Ibrahim and R.S. Kamini

with Samy Vellu's reply, telling him that he should not be answering questions pertaining to toll matters if he and his ministry were "only the tools".

He said the prime minister, as the EPU head, should be present to explain the matter.

The move was unusual for Samy Vellu who has always accepted public criticism against his ministry on tolls.

His outburst came after he had answered a supplement-

ary question from Tan Lian Hoe (BN-Bukit Gantang) who asked if studies were done prior to the recent toll hike and the rationale behind it.

Samy Vellu replied that his ministry could not provide the rationale behind the increase as it did not get much information on the costs involved.

"The EPU compiles the report for the cabinet to approve but it is my ministry that feels the burden when people call

us heartless and stupid.

"I am going to question and check everything including whether the costs of construction as claimed by the concessionaires are accurate," he said, adding that every toll hike proposal would be fully reviewed.

To a supplementary question by Datuk Kamarudin Jaffar (Pas-Tumpat), Samy Vellu said the government had so far paid RM2 billion in com-

penensation to highway concessionaires.

"Our toll rates are not very high compared with countries like China, Japan, Thailand and Indonesia.

"If the government doesn't care, we would not have bothered to fight for the people."

He added that the government paid between RM300 million and RM500 million to each concessionaire when toll rates were restructured.