

I'm not a bad boy, Samy Vellu tells critics

NST-12/2/2007

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KUALA LUMPUR: Are the vociferous criticisms about toll hikes taking a toll on Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu?

The veteran politician who takes on the toughest attacks and has withstood many a challenge, yesterday lamented the blistering criticisms levelled against him.

"Many people think I'm a bad boy as if I decide on the tolls, as if I put people in trouble, that I go for blood and all that.

"I'm a minister of the government and I implement the decision made by the Cabinet.

"It's not my decision to raise the toll or to reduce it," said the agitated minister.

Samy Vellu said toll rates were decided by the government and the Economic Planning Unit (EPU).

"Privatisation is purely an EPU decision. It is then approved by the Cabinet and the Ministry of Works takes over. The ministry has to announce the toll rates, has to carry all the burden and has to face all the scoldings," Samy Vellu said after presenting cash awards to 580 Tamil pupils who scored 7As for the UPSR exam last year.

Citing the Damansara-Puchong Highway as an example, Samy Vellu said the toll rate was originally set at RM1.80 but was brought down to RM1.60.

"I took it to the Cabinet and explained to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi that RM1.80 is not something that is acceptable to many people.

"I suggested we charge RM1.60 and pay RM150 million compensation to the concessionaire in two instalments. When the prime minister and the Cabinet agreed, we made the announcement."

Responding to a question on the Smart Tunnel toll rates, Samy Vellu said it would be announced after discussions with the EPU and after a Cabinet meeting.

He lashed out at certain quarters who said they would buy up the toll companies if they were in his position.

If all the toll companies were taken over, said Samy Vellu, it would cost the government nearly RM500 billion.

"I can see the standard of polit-



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*Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu
Works Minister*

ical argument going down very low. Politicians should be mature enough to understand what is happening."

He said demonstrations over toll hikes were instigated by small groups of interested parties.

"The ordinary man is paying the toll and travelling. If (opposition leader) Lim Kit Siang and his son Lim Guan Eng don't like it, it's not their decision.

"Only if the people don't travel on this road and the user capacity comes down will the government look into alternatives," he said.

On Tamil schools, Samy Vellu said Education Minister Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Hussein had agreed to rebuild 16 schools to the tune of RM18 million.

He said he was proud of the number of straight-A students in the UPSR examination from Tamil schools. The number had increased from 45 in 1999 to 580 last year.