

> DELAY OF THE SULTANAH BAHYIAH HOSPITAL PROJECT

Samy Vellu takes swipe at Health Ministry

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SEREMBAN: The blame game over the long-delayed Sultanah Bahiyah hospital in Alor Star continues.

The Works and Health Ministers have not let up on the tit-for-tat exchange that began after the project failed to be completed on time in December 2003.

Both ministers appear to be oblivious to the fact that the heated rhetoric is unnecessary as the hospital is scheduled to be handed to the Health Ministry in weeks.

Samy Vellu fired the latest salvo yesterday, taking another swipe at the Health Ministry over its alleged role in the delay.

In a blistering rebuke tinged with sarcasm, he accused the ministry of trying to absolve itself of all blame in the matter.

"Yes, we are at fault... the Public Works Department, the contractor,

sub-contractors, even the land owners, all of us are at fault over this problem.

"The Health Ministry is the only one that is right here," he said, before abruptly cutting short a Press conference and walking off in a huff.

Samy Vellu had earlier launched Eu-biq and GSS, a power outlet system developed by Seremban-based Lightning Technologies (M) Sdn Bhd.

Samy Vellu's lighter mood earlier changed after a reporter told him that Dr Chua had allegedly accused him of protecting contractors in the project.

The RM565 million hospital has been at the centre of a debate between the two ministries after repeated postponements of its completion irked numerous parties, including the Sultan of Kedah.

On Sunday, Samy Vellu had accused the Health Ministry of causing the

four-year delay of the 770-bed hospital, claiming that it had made last-minute changes to the project.

This drew a response from Deputy Health Minister Datuk Dr Abdul Latiff Ahmad on Monday that the delay was only to make sure that the building was safe for use.

Dr Abdul Latiff had also said that the Health Ministry had to make changes to keep up with the latest development in medical technology.

Later that day, Dr Chua reiterated that the delay was due to frequent changes in contractors.

Dr Chua had said that this had given the impression that the Works Ministry was protecting contractors.

He also clarified that the Health Ministry had only made a single change to specifications in the project carried out by MH Projects Sdn Bhd.

The project, which began in August

2000, was expected to be ready by December 2003 but saw the completion date extended several times, with the last being Dec 31 last year.

On toll collection along the Sungai Nyior phase of the Butterworth Outer Ring Road (BORR), Samy Vellu said the ministry was negotiating with BORR concessionaire Lingkaran Luar Butterworth Sdn Bhd, and that it would take another month or so to finalise arrangements.

"The Sungai Nyior stretch is now open to the public, but they prefer to use alternative roads," he said.

"We will be having a third meeting with the concession company and after that I will go back to the Cabinet for a decision."

Toll collection at the Sungai Nyior toll plaza has been deferred until further notice, pending a study initiated after protests from motorists.