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2,000 projects under Eighth Malaysia Plan carried forward

[Jason Gerald, Arman Ahmad, Irdiani Mohd Salleh and Audrey Kam](#)

KUALA LUMPUR: Many public amenities approved more than five years ago under the Eighth Malaysia Plan remain uncompleted. Work on some has not even started.

These projects, numbering more than 2,000, are being carried forward to the Ninth Malaysia Plan (2006-2010). The major ones include an Islamic complex in Pahang, a veterinary complex in Perlis, three major water supply projects in Kedah, lower court buildings and public libraries in Penang, low-cost housing projects in Selangor and Egypt's Al-Azhar University campus in Malacca.

The Auditor-General, Tan Sri Ambrin Buang, in his 2005 report, said that in most cases, projects were delayed or failed due to lack of allocations, delay in receiving loans, and land and site problems. While the public may see this as failure by the authorities to manage taxpayers' money, civil servants said the projects were not abandoned but merely brought forward.

Yet a number of officials declined to furnish details of these projects, saying it could be embarrassing to both agencies and contractors. But for Works Minister Datuk Seri S Samy Vellu, the problem was real. He said contractors were not the only cause of the problem. It was also due to inter-agency conflicts, especially when it came to removal of utilities.

"We can never remove utilities such as underground pipes and electrical cables. We cannot simply build something on top of the land," he said. "For all these removals, you have to ask various agencies to do it. We are not allowed to remove things. The problem is when we ask them to remove the utilities, they take their own sweet time.

"And then, there's the problem of payment. If we ask for a pipe to be removed, we will say 'you remove the pipe' but the agency concerned doesn't have money to remove it. So I've to raise this in the Cabinet as to when we want utilities to be removed."

The cost was high. For example, the Klang-Banting road project in Selangor cost the Government RM178.8 million just to remove water pipes and telecommunications cables. While Samy Vellu's ministry and the Public Works Department do not handle all government projects such as the construction of buildings and roads, they are responsible for a substantial number of them.

And the ministry has its share of delayed projects. Among those that are being carried forward to the 9MP are the RM250-million highway linking Jalan Kewajipan in Subang

Jaya to the Federal Highway in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, the RM280-million road upgrading project from Gemas, Negri Sembilan, to Ayer Hitam, Johor, and the RM140-million Johor Baru-Kota Tinggi road interchange. Samy Vellu was willing to accept the reality that some projects were delayed and some abandoned.

And he said the Government is serious about changing the current system to ensure immediate improvements. Some, such as Selangor Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Khir Toyo and Kedah Menteri Besar Datuk Seri Mahdzir Khalid, have chosen to question the Auditor-General's report, claiming there were discrepancies and wrong information. For Samy Vellu, he is looking forward, trying to find ways to improve the situation, especially with the 880 development projects announced by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi recently, and those carried forward.

"This time, we will ask all ministries and agencies about their projects and the cost and the money they have. "We will co-ordinate this through our new monitoring committees at the ministerial and state level. "For example, in the past, the Government paid money for removal of utilities. But, in between, I don't know who made the decisions not to give any money.

"Now we also have to work with state governments to get squatters removed. I'm confident we can deal with the contractors," he said. For the 880 projects, Samy Vellu said 104 could go for immediate tender. The rest would have to wait because some sites had yet to be given approval while there were also areas without access roads.