

# Highway link must safeguard environment, says Dr M

*NST 12 AUG 1994*

TANAH RATA, Thurs. — Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad wants an environmentally-friendly concept to be adopted in the proposed highway project linking Cameron Highlands with Fraser's Hill and Genting Highlands.

He said the project, which will be privatised, will not come cheap — more so if there is to be minimal cutting of trees and levelling of hills.

Speaking at a Press conference after launching the Cameron Highlands Flower festival here, he estimated the project to exceed RM1 billion.

In order to safeguard the environment, he said, more bridges and tunnels had to be constructed in the project.

Tenders for the project had been opened and work would start as soon as the contract is awarded.

"We can't wait till the Government can financially afford it before we start building because even if we wait 50 to 100 years, the Government cannot afford it. That's why we are privatising the project," he added.

He said privatisation, however, would mean that users of the highway would have to pay toll, just like they do for the North-South expressway.

"But the highway would facilitate travel greatly. Just look at the North-South expressway...even Malaysia Airlines flights from Kuala Lumpur to Johor Baru or Penang are affected because many people prefer to travel by road now.

"Of course, many people will not be happy with the privatisation policy. But if we expect the Government to undertake all infrastructure projects, the development taking place won't be as rapid.

"And the spillovers from privatisation is also beneficial — the value of land increases. And if we privatise the inter-hill resort highway, it will pave the way for more people to open up land around the highway."

He said it has always been the Government's policy to develop the country but at the same time, the people must be prepared to work hard to reap the fruit of development.