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## Driving licence fees reduced, refund offered

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim brought cheer to motorists today when he announced a reduction of the driving licence fees as proposed in the 1998 Budget.

In another development, he said the Government was looking into the possibility of re-negotiating several of the terms and conditions with Projek Lebuhraya Utara-Selatan, concession holder of the North-South Expressway, so that any toll increase would not burden users.

The private driving licence fee has been reduced from RM50 to RM30, making it an increase of RM10 over the old rate of RM20.

For probationary drivers, the fee has been reduced to RM60 instead of RM100 for a two-year licence while the increase for holders of licence for goods and public service vehicles has been lowered from RM50 to RM20.

Before Budget Day on Oct 17, the fee for private licence was RM20 a year, probationary licence (RM40) and goods and PSVs (RM10).

Those who have already made payments can claim a refund from the Road Transport Department.

"The decision to reduce the fees is made following calls and appeals from various quarters. This shows the Government is sensitive to the needs of the people," Anwar told the Dewan Rakyat when winding up on points raised by Members of Parliament who participated in the debate on the 1998 Budget.

He said the proposed increases were made as the Government thought the car-owning public could afford them.

"But we have noted that there is also a large number of licence holders who do not own cars, like drivers. Hence, the decision to reduce the fee."

Anwar said the revised fees should be accepted as the last increase was made in 1972.

Asked by the Opposition on whether the Government planned to also reduce charges for travel documents, Anwar said: "They have always called on us to take measures to address the economic problems, and one way of doing this is to discourage the people from travelling overseas."

To a suggestion that exit tax be imposed on travellers instead of increasing passport fees, he said it had been considered but was found to be unacceptable.

"Our neighbours might feel we are trying to prevent Malaysians from visiting their countries. It might result in them introducing a similar move."

On the request by PLUS for a toll hike, Anwar reiterated that only a marginal increase would be allowed.

"While we have to accept an increase, we cannot tolerate a steep one."

Anwar said the Economic Planning Unit and Treasury were looking at various possibilities that could be taken to offset any losses to PLUS as it would now not be allowed to increase the rates as provided under the agreement.

Elaborating, he said one area being looked into was allowing the development of commercial areas along the highway, which would benefit the company.

Anwar also took time to reply to queries on the investigation into the losses suffered by Perwaja Steel.

Lim Kit Siang (DAP-Tanjong) had wanted to know whether the slow progress and development in the case indicated an attempt by the Government to

cover up.

Chiding the Opposition for wanting to see immediate results without considering the various factors involved, he said: "The investigations are not over yet as the Anti-Corruption Agency has to gather evidence from various parties in Hong Kong, Japan and Switzerland.

"There is no attempt to cover up ... In fact, I have directed the ACA to speed up investigations. The political decision is to see an early completion to the case but the agency says channels and procedures have to be followed."

Anwar said it would be useless to take the case to court, only to see it thrown out due to lack of evidence.

On investigations against ministers for alleged corruption, he said: "Of the many cases pointed out by Lim (involving six ministers, two deputy ministers, one parliamentary secretary and eight State executive councillors) only three are still being investigated.

"The rest have been closed as the Attorney-General's Chambers decided that there was not enough proof to prosecute."

On investigations against former Selangor Menteri Besar Tan Sri Muhammad Muhammad Taib, he said everyone wanted to see quick action.

"This (prosecution) is not a political process but one involving justice. To act, we must have the information and proof.

"I agree the ACA must act swiftly on corruption cases to send a clear signal to everyone that we will not tolerate such acts, but we cannot give it any time frame to complete any case."

Anwar also responded to calls that the Government review the position of businessmen like Tan Sri Rashid Hussein who sits on the board of the Government's investment arm, Khazanah Holdings Bhd.

"The appointment was made by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad based on his (Rashid's) vast business experience and expertise which have helped Khazanah.

"It is not wise to ask him to relinquish his business interest just because he is a board member ... after all, it is a standard practice that requires him not to participate in any decision if it involves his business interest."

He said there was no truth to allegations Rashid was involved in short-selling activities during the height of the currency and stock market problems. The claims were more a case of jealousy among rival businessmen.

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