

09 OCT 1997

MTUC-Toll

MTUC URGES GOVT NOT TO RAISE TOLL RATES

KUALA LUMPUR, Oct 9 (Bernama) -- Toll rates should not be raised indiscriminately especially at a time when the country's economy is experiencing serious uncertainties due to depreciation of the ringgit against several major foreign currencies, the Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) said today.

Its president Zainal Rampak said the present tight monetary situation being experienced by the people was already compelling them to tighten their belts, and any increase in toll rates would only burden them further.

Toll rates have been revised several times over a period of less than three years with across-the-board gross increases of more than 30 per cent when compared with the published rates in 1994, he said in a statement.

" We do not see any reason for toll concessionaires like Projek Lebuhraya Utara Selatan (PLUS) to increase toll rates during critical times like now.

" We call upon the government not to accede to the requests of the companies which are only out to make quick bucks at the expense of the people," he said.

As a national trade union centre, Zainal said the MTUC stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the government in the true spirit of patriotism to ward off all challenges posed by external forces with vested interests.

He said MTUC accorded full support to the government, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his deputy Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim for their efforts to strengthen the country's economy during difficult times.

In IPOH, the Federation of Malaysian Consumer Associations (Fomca) said it considered as "mad talk" the announcement by Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu that PLUS would increase toll rates as scheduled on Jan 1.

Its deputy president Abdul Rahman Said Alli said Samy Vellu's statement came at a time when the country was facing economic problems.

It was untimely and contradicted an earlier call by the government asking the people to save, he told reporters.

Samy Vellu's statement was illogical that PLUS would not be able to collect the targeted amount under the concession agreement if the rates were not increased, he said.

" An important project like the Bakun hydro-electric project can be deferred and a salary review for government employees can also be postponed, why should PLUS be exempted just because the concession agreement says the rates must be raised," he said.

Samy Vellu was reported to have said yesterday that toll rates would be increased from Jan 1 although the government announced earlier that the current rates were being reviewed.

Abdul Rahman said among the decisions taken by Bank Negara at a special meeting which he attended two weeks ago were to ask the people to save but how could they when they had to pay more for the increase in cost.

He said Fomca also questioned PLUS, which built the 848km highway, whether it was running at a loss and unable to service its loans.

"From what we know, it is making profit but whether big or small, the toll charges are still a burden to road users," he said.

He said PLUS had raised the rates three times previously which means additional burden for the people but the government had always maintained that the rates were the lowest in the world or in this region.

" If the rates are increased on Jan 1, Fomca is left with no choice but

to conduct a nationwide campaign to tell the people that the government's privatisation policy is a failure," he added. -- BERNAMA  
LAT HAR TS