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No alternative routes a last resort (HL)

Ramlan Said

PETALING JAYA, Sun. - Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said the Cabinet had not made a final decision on the fate of alternative routes as opposed to toll roads, but added that a situation may arise when the Government may have little choice but to provide toll roads only.

The Prime Minister said: "One day we might have no other choice but to build toll roads when alternative routes cannot be built, or they may no longer exist. However, this will be a last resort."

Dr Mahathir said: "We want to build comfortable roads but the cost will be high if tolls are not imposed. Everybody wants good roads but this will prove difficult if they are unwilling to pay."

The Prime Minister was speaking at Sultan Abdul Aziz Shah Airport in Subang upon his return from Saudi Arabia where he received the King Faisal International Prize.

He had been asked to comment on Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu's statement on Wednesday that there would be no alternative toll-free roads soon "even to go to Seremban" because the old road network was going to be privatised.

The Minister had said that toll-free alternative routes would no longer be provided on roads where traffic was heavy. He then stated that the Federal road from Kajang to Seremban would be privatised soon, while the Cheras-Semenyih route via Kajang had already been privatised.

The following day, amidst mounting criticism against his statement, Samy Vellu said the Cabinet had not made a decision on the matter.

Dr Mahathir then spent some time elaborating on the advantages of using toll roads against alternative routes.

He said many people had overlooked the fact that if one took into account the wear and tear on vehicles when travelling long distances on alternative routes the eventual cost would be same if one were to use toll roads.

Dr Mahathir said: "Toll roads are more comfortable, safer and faster as they shorten one's journey. The toll charges we pay are actually the same compared to the losses we suffer using alternative routes.

"Remember when the Seremban-Sungei Besi highway was built, some people opted to use estate roads to avoid paying the toll.

"As the roads were not in very good condition they soon realised that it was better to use the highway."

On whether the Government would abolish road tax if toll would be imposed on all roads, he said the money collected was not only meant for roads, but other services as well.

When asked to comment on the Cabinet's decision to allow an Israeli cricket team to participate in the International Cricket Council tournament in this country. Dr Mahathir said:

"Actually, we want to show the Israelis that people from various religions can live together... that Muslims can co-operate with others, as they do in Malaysia, without conflict.

"We want to demonstrate to youths from that country that Muslims do not oppress others," he said, adding that hopefully this would help change their thinking and support for the Israeli Government which had been oppressing the Palestinians.

On the move by the United States to use its power of veto, for the second time, against a Security Council resolution on the construction of

a new Jewish settlement in Arab East Jerusalem, Dr Mahathir said:

"Sometimes, we do not know whether the US is sincere or not. It criticised the Israelis for building the houses but when the world wanted to condemn Israel, it refused to allow this."

Dr Mahathir added that this was why he had always stressed that one could not rely on others for help.

"There are opinions that a US presence is needed in the Far East to help check threats from China and Japan. But will the US make a decision to help us if the matter has no bearing or effect on its own interests?"

Dr Mahathir said not all Israelis agreed with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's policy to build the Jewish settlement.

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