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Damansara-Puchong toll rate cut by 50 sen

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TOLL for private cars using the Damansara-Puchong Highway (LDP) will be reduced by 50 sen to RM1 after the Chinese New Year effective for a year, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"Based on the pressure (from the public), we cannot reduce the toll fare to 50 sen but instead, have decided to reduce it to RM1," he said.

In addition, the toll rate for the North-South Expressway (NSE) operated by Project Lebuhraya Utara-Selatan will be increased by 0.75 sen a km effective after Chinese New Year as well. Hence, road users will pay 11.25 sen a km from the current 10.5 sen per km for the use of the 848 kilometre highway.

"The increase is only by 0.75 sen, less than one sen per km. It is not that we want to increase the toll that much," he said. In addition, the increase in toll fares for the NSE will take place once every seven years as opposed to once every year as earlier agreed upon in the concession agreement.

The LDP toll rates were implemented on Tuesday at RM1.50 for cars. The toll rate had caused a stir among residence who felt the rate was too high.

The 50 sen toll reduction for road users of the LDP will cost the Government RM85 million a year in subsidies, said Dr Mahathir.

Last week, the Government announced that toll rates at four highways - NSE, Elite Expressway, Kemas Highway and Kulim-Butterworth Highway would be increased after Chinese New Year. The announcement had received numerous protest from the general public.

As for the other three highways apart from NSE, Dr Mahathir said negotiations are still going on between the Government and these highway operators.

"I understand that we are facing a crisis, but if the cost is high, we can always use the road that is less comfortable and cheaper," he said, adding however that the cost of doing so eventually may be even higher. He added that no company would want to operate a highway if it is a loss-making venture. Companies will only feel encouraged to do so if they can make a profit, "... not very much, but enough to cover cost and maintain roads."

Dr Mahathir said he had to get involved in the toll issue as "there was a boiling political sentiment that not very long there will be an election and the Government may lose, if it does not reduce the toll fare."

"I am aware that in a democratic country, the Government can be exposed to threats. If you don't submit to demands of certain groups, then you will lose support," he said, adding that such pressures can lead to the Government acting in a populist way which does not necessarily benefit the country.

Dr Mahathir was referring to the LDP, which he said has become such a political issue and threat to the Government.

He pointed out that road users can actually travel quite a distance (about some 6km) of that road without having to fork out a sen until they reach the barrier and then need to pay RM1 to use the road until the next toll gate.

"Payment is very minimal and only 34 per cent of road users pay toll on this highway and the rest dont, simply because they do not reach the toll collection point but instead get off the road before this point," he said.

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