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Mahathir-Toll

NEW HIGHWAYS ONLY IF PEOPLE ARE WILLING TO PAY TOLL- DR MAHATHIR

SEPANG, Feb 1 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the shelving of proposed new tolled highways will only be reconsidered if the people are willing to pay for the use of such roads.

Speaking to reporters at KLIA here on his return from Switzerland, the Prime Minister said, "We need to know whether road users are willing to pay toll or not as this involved a big expenditure."

"We do not want a situation where the highways have been completed...and then there are protests...they do not want to pay. This represents investment and no one will want to invest if he cannot get returns," he said when asked by reporters how long will they remain shelved and the request by Johor and Terengganu that the projects should go ahead.

The Government decided last week to shelve proposed new highways following protests over toll payment imposed by the highway builders. Some 20 proposed projects are involved.

However projects for which agreements had already been signed would be implemented.

The Prime Minister explained that quality highways would have to be built by the private sector because the government did not have enough allocation for such projects.

"If the people are not ready to pay tolls and insist that such quality roads be built by the government itself, they will have to wait for a long period until such time when it had enough money to build the roads," he said.

On the call by opposition parties that toll collection be abolished since the building of such infrastructure facilities were part of the government's responsibility, Dr Mahathir said if the government were to do this then it would have to compensate the companies which built the highways at a cost of billions of ringgit.

"With having to pay such a big compensation, we will not only have to postpone the construction of roads but also probably the payment of salaries to government servants as there will not be enough money."

Dr Mahathir asked, "Why must we allow people with cars, who are actually the well-to-do, to have free use of the roads?"

The Prime Minister said there were still many Malaysians who were poor and cannot afford to buy a car and they use public transport such as the bus and train services.

"In fact bus and train fares should be abolished as this services are used by people who are poorer than those who own cars. This is only fair....," he said.

Only the poor who did not own cars would suffer as no rural facilities such as kampung roads would be built as the government would be forced to channel money meant for this for payment of compensation to the highway builders, he said.

"I ask the opposition parties to pay the compensation...they have money and can pay...compensate."

On the call for a reduction in road tax to make up for the increase in toll rates, Dr Mahathir said, "We can reduce road tax, tax on oil and reduce all forms of taxes."

"After that we reduce the salaries of government servants and also stop building houses and there will also be no maintenance of government facilities," he added.

-- BERNAMA
HS AAM