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NSE toll to cost 0.74 sen more per km after Chinese New Year

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KUALA LUMPUR, Wed. - Private car owners will have to pay an additional 0.74 sen per kilometre in toll when using the North South Expressway after the Chinese New Year holidays.

Toll rates for the new Damansara-Puchong Expressway (LDP), which has been the subject of protests, would be reduced from RM1.50 to RM1.

In announcing this today, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said no decision has been made on new toll rates for three other highways - Elite, Kemas (Shah Alam-Klang) and Kulim-Butterworth.

The toll rate increase for the 848km North South Expressway means that motorists will have to pay 11.24 sen per kilometre as opposed to the 10.5 sen they are paying now.

Motorists will have to pay RM34.20 (RM32 now) for a trip from Kuala Lumpur to Skudai in Johor and RM35.80 (RM33.40) from Kuala Lumpur to Penang.

Dr Mahathir said the Government would have to pay Littrak, the concessionaire for the LDP project, RM85 million a year as compensation for reducing the toll from RM1.50, as had been agreed earlier, to RM1.

If Projek Lebuhraya Utara Selatan Berhad, the concessionaire for the NSE, had been allowed to increase toll rates according to its agreement with the Government, motorists would have been required to pay 11.9 sen per km.

The Prime Minister explained the rationale behind the toll increase and the compensation the Government had to pay if a rate increase was not approved.

"Previously the Government used to build highways and there was no toll. The Government, among others, used to collect road tax, petrol tax and tax from vehicle sales.

"However, the Government could not build quality roads with the collection from taxes. And when we did build roads, the process took a long time," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Government felt it was unfair to increase road tax and petrol tax as some motorists were not frequent users of expressways and only used roads in town centres.

"We felt it was unfair to increase these taxes to build highways as not all motorists frequently used the roads," he said.

Dr Mahathir said in the United States, motorists were required to pay an additional five cents for every gallon of petrol they purchased.

"If we adopt a similar approach, then those who do not use the roads will also have to pay (when buying petrol) to enable others to use the roads.

"This, we feel, is unfair."

Dr Mahathir said motorists have failed to realise that they were actually saving money and time when they used the highways instead of trunk roads.

He said if previously it took six hours to travel from Kuala Lumpur to Penang, it now took only three hours.

"They are saving on petrol, wear and tear of their vehicles and travelling time. But they have failed to realise this.

"Imagine how much one saves in petrol if the engine is kept running for six hours compared to three hours," he said.

Dr Mahathir said the Government also encouraged the construction of

highways as this could help reduce road accidents and fatalities.

Statistics received from the police showed that of the 210,946 accidents reported last year, only 6,689 or 3.2 per cent occurred on the NSE.

The report also stated that of the 5,744 fatalities reported last year, only 255 or 4.4 per cent took place on the NSE.

"I don't make statements just like that. I am very concerned over the high number of accidents and fatalities on the trunk roads as compared to highways," he said.

Dr Mahathir said it was also very costly to build highways. He said at certain expressways, it could cost up to RM25 million to build one kilometre.

"The roads are built straight and if there are bends, they have to be gentle so as not to endanger road users.

"At certain stretches, the highways are built with three lanes to allow motorists to overtake with ease. Then, there are also rest areas to allow motorists to rest if they are tired. Sometimes the concessionaires have to build very long bridges to avoid high hills which could block the view of motorists.

"I am saying all this as sometimes we fail to understand why the cost to build roads is high."

Dr Mahathir said in a democratic country, it was normal for the people to protest or threaten the Government by saying that they would withdraw their support.

"If you do not submit to demands of certain groups and sometimes the Press, we (the Government) will stand to lose support.

"Sometimes even political parties, including those in the Government, will protest against the Government as they fear losing support of the people."

Dr Mahathir said concessionaires were also not spared as they were often accused by the foreign Press of being Government cronies.

"No company would want to build a highway if they cannot make reasonable profits," he said.

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