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Penang bridge was a case of foresight, says Dr M

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PENANG, Thurs. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad pointed to the Penang bridge and the toll highways as examples of why the Barisan Nasional Government needs a strong majority to push for unpopular but crucial infrastructure for the good of the nation.

Articulating his thoughts on why these projects are crucial, he said the bridge, when it was first built 15 years ago, was met with criticism that it was a waste of funds and unnecessary.

The bridge was built at a cost of RM800 million.

However, if it is calculated at current cost, it will cost RM2 billion.

"When we were building it, I was made a target of slander that the bridge was wasteful and the ferries were still useful.

"But now, we see that even the bridge, the longest in Asia, cannot cope with the heavy traffic either on the island or mainland."

He said this at a meet-the-people-session at the Penang International Sports Arena tonight.

Dr Mahathir pointed to the Barisan Nasional's vision of being able to see what was needed by the country in the decades ahead.

He cited the example of a cat which would only dig a hole when it was about to excrete.

"If we use this attitude, to build only when it is needed," he said, "then we will face massive losses in the future when such infrastructure is truly needed."

Dr Mahathir said it was now obvious that the bridge had spurred great economic growth in Penang which led to rapid industrialisation, the skyline filled with skyscrapers and people able to carry out their economic activities comfortably.

"On this accord, the people should not be swayed by criticisms from the opposition parties.

"The opposition parties have no vision, the furthest that they can see is only the elections," he said.

"After the elections are over, they don't know what to do."

Dr Mahathir also chided those who demonstrated against toll highways as being insensitive to the safety needs of motorists.

"Studies have shown that traffic accidents on toll highways are one-tenth of the accidents that occur on regular roads.

"This means that the toll highways have contributed to traffic safety besides reducing fatalities," he said.

Dr Mahathir reiterated their cost-effectiveness and how economical using the toll highways has been for Malaysian motorists.

"Already we have the lowest toll rates in the world," he said.

"Malaysian motorists will have to pay the equivalent of RM300 to cross a bridge shorter than the Penang bridge in Japan, as compared to only RM7.

"What I am saying tonight may sound like an election campaign but I have to say it to remind the people why the BN should be retained and a more than two-thirds majority is crucial.

"This also demonstrates why a strong Government is needed," he said.

(END)