

# PM: Increase in toll charges minimal

KUALA LUMPUR: The increase in toll charges is minimal compared to the benefits for the people in Budget 2002, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday.

He said the people enjoyed tax cuts while civil servants were given a 10% salary increment and bonus.

"One does not travel long distances everyday using the expressway," he said.

Speaking to reporters at the Parliament lobby, Dr Mahathir said PLUS, the concessionaire, had asked for a 30% increase in toll charges but the Government only allowed 10%.

"The Government is still subsidising PLUS," he said, adding that the toll rates were still the lowest in the region.

Dr Mahathir said PLUS was losing money and the Government was allowing it to be

exempted from servicing the loan interest to cut down its expenditure.

Asked if there were alternatives, Dr Mahathir said: "We close the expressway and let the people use the normal roads. The people will see how much time they have to spend on the road but it is free of charge," he said.

Dr Mahathir also said motorists need not pay any toll charges for the Middle Ring Road II and a portion of the Damansara Puchong Expressway.

Earlier, Dr Mahathir, who is also Finance Minister, tabled Budget 2002 in the Dewan Negara.

He said the government subsidy to maintain the diesel price was RM1.1bil a year.

"The Government is concerned with the appeals made by people from various sectors

especially the fishermen and those involved in transport services," he said.

Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu said the Government was considering several other requests from toll concessionaires wanting to raise their rates.

"We are talking to other toll companies. They have the right to raise the toll under the agreement," he said.

Speaking to reporters yesterday, Samy Vellu said the decision to raise the toll charges along the North-South Expressway was final.

"It has been approved (by the Cabinet)," he said when asked whether the Government would consider appeals on the matter.

He said the decision was made after a deal in which the Government need not pay any compensation to PLUS.

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