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Mahathir-Toll

DR MAHATHIR DEFENDS TOLL INCREASE

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 6 (Bernama) -- Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad has defended the 10 percent hike in expressway toll charges, saying it is a small increase compared to the goodies offered in the 2002 Budget.

The higher government spending for bonus and pay rise for government servants, the loss of income from lower taxes and the other benefits included in next year's budget are worth much more than what the people have to spend on highways and roads, he said today.

Dr Mahathir was asked to comment on the toll increase that would take effect on Jan 1, 2002 as announced by Works Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu yesterday.

Speaking at a press conference after tabling the Supply Bill (2002) in Parliament here, the Prime Minister said if not for the government subsidy on toll, expressway users would have to bear a 30 percent rise in toll.

"The toll concession companies are making losses, not profits. We are giving subsidy not for the companies but to reduce the toll charges," he said.

He pointed out that toll charges in Malaysia are one of the lowest in the world.

In addition, drivers do not have to pay toll if they do not use the entire stretch of some expressways, such as the Middle Ring Road and Damansara-Puchong Highway (LDP).

In fact, many highways in Malaysia are also toll-free, said Dr Mahathir, who is also Finance Minister.

"Even then people still complain. If we want to have good stuff for our use, we should pay a little bit.

"We don't use the expressway every day, not up to hundreds of miles. We only use a little and the toll increase is minimal," he said.

Asked whether there are other options so that the toll hike would not have to be absorbed by expressway users, Dr Mahathir said in jest that if highways were closed, road users would have to spend more time and money travelling on trunk roads.

-- BERNAMA

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