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PM: Pay a bit more to enjoy better facilities

KUALA LUMPUR, Thurs. - Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today the people must be prepared to pay a little bit more to enjoy better facilities, like expressways.

He said the people had been given various benefits as announced in next year's Budget which were a lot more compared to the additional cost they had to fork out because of the toll hike.

"Various tax exemptions have been given, bonus, pay rise and a host of other things which are much more than the extra cost for using the highway," he said on the increase in toll rates from Jan 1 for the North-South Expressway..

"Moreover, we do not use the highway everyday, or travel for hundreds of kilometres. Therefore, the extra burden is very small compared to what we have been given."

Speaking after tabling the Budget 2002 at the Dewan Negara, Dr Mahathir, who is also Finance Minister, said it was unfortunate people could only see their losses and not their gains.

Although the increase was supposed to be 30 per cent, he said the Government only allowed a 10 per cent hike.

Dr Mahathir said in Malaysia, many expressways were not tolled, and where toll was imposed, the rates were the low compared to other countries.

"This we also complain about. If we want better things, we have to pay a little bit more."

The Prime Minister said negotiations were carried out with the expressway concessionaire to ensure the rates could be maintained or there would only be a slight increase.

The Government, he said, provided subsidies and other assistance to the company to help it cut cost to ensure rates could be reduced.

On whether there were other ways that could be taken instead of raising toll charges, Dr Mahathir said one option was the use of old roads.

"Then, you will know how much you are are going to pay, how much time taken, the wear and tear and so on."

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