

**'Nationalising highways a burden to gov't'**  
**Malaysiakini.com**  
**February 22, 2011**

The idea of nationalising highways is not only a bad business decision but will be a financial burden on the government, which could result in the nation being poorer and less developed.

Not only would the cost of acquiring the highways come from public money but the expenditure in maintaining them would also come from the government's consolidated fund, said former prime minister Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

"Since no tolls will be charged, the government will not earn money from it and there will also be no tax collected from the private companies that were running the road operations as they will not have a source of income.

"I suspect the quality of highways will also deteriorate (eventually)," Mahathir said, referring to the recent call for tolls to be abolished and for the government to take over highway operations in Malaysia.

toll booths smarttag and touch n go boothsBy nationalising highways, the government will also have to pay wages to employees to maintain the road, which will also come from its coffers.

"Government will earn nothing from nationalising these infrastructures, indeed its consolidated funds will continue to shrink," said Mahathir.

As a cyclic reaction, other services and projects would suffer due to funding cuts as the money goes to the costly running and maintenance of these highways, he said in his opening remark at the 1st World Congress and Exhibition on Infrastructure Asset Management in Kuala Lumpur today.

In short, the government will have less money to spend on other developments, which means the nation's growth will slow down and people will be poorer.

"(People) will also need to reduce the standard of living. We can forget Vision 2020 and being an high-income economy and remain a third world country."

Mahathir said whether a country has natural resources or not, it is the management skills of the government which determined the country's performance.

The people, too, must understand enough of how the economy works and that the government was not a charitable organisation with unlimited funds.

"If a government choose to be popular and disregard the essentials of good management, especially that of infrastructures, one should not be surprised if the nation fails to grow," he said.

- Bernama

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Source : <http://www.malaysiakini.com/news/156700>