

Penang CM dares BN to protest against toll extension

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by Susan Loone

Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng has turned the tables on Barisan Nasional, asking why the coalition has not spoken up against the extension of toll collection on three highways affecting the rakyat.

The extension is part of a deal that sees the highway concessionaires waive RM6.5 billion in compensation from the federal government.

Lim asked why Barisan Nasional leaders have not spoken up for the interests of the people but instead allowed the extension, which spans 12-17 years for two highways, to take place.

Lim is challenging his opponents as he is often lambasted over various public issues in Penang.

“We do not agree to the extension of the toll charges as it would affect even our generation.

“It is not enough that we are paying the toll but our children and grandchildren will, too,” he lamented at a press conference today.

“This is unfair to Penangites. Actually we should not be paying toll and the amount should not be increased,” he added.

Penangites worst hit by extension

Lim was referring to the toll concession on the Elite Highway (due to end on May 31, 2030), Butterworth-Kulim Expressway (BKE) (ending June 27, 2026), and the Penang Bridge (Dec 31, 2021), for which the period of concession has been extended to 2038.

The worst hit by this new agreement, said Lim, are the BKE and Penang Bridge, which clearly indicates that Penangites are being punished, Lim said.

The new owners of PLUS Expressway’s assets - UEM Group Berhad and the Employees Provident Fund - announced on Wednesday they had waived their right to some RM6.5 billion, in replacement for extensions to the concession periods up to 2038 for the three highways.

Although the companies said that toll increases for the North-South Expressway will be lowered from 10 percent every three years to five percent at the same intervals, and the Penang Bridge will see no increase, Lim said “this was nothing special”.

“We still have to pay toll for an extended period, so actually there is an increase,” he pointed out.

This new deal came about as the federal government owed PLUS billions in compensation when it decided not allow toll hikes which were in the earlier concession agreement, until 2015.

Gerakan speaks out against extension

Despite Lim’s earlier statement over BN’s silence in the matter, Gerakan has come forward to speak in

unison with the former against the unpopular highway toll extension.

Gerakan Youth secretary-general Dr Dominic Lau expressed his disappointment on the revised on the three highways.

He protested the extension period, saying it is a “burden” for the rakyat.

“This is especially blood-boiling for Penangites and those frequently using the Penang Bridge.

“The concession for the Penang Bridge was supposed to end in 2021, yet now it has been extended to 2038, which is a whopping 17 years of extension,” he said.

Lau lamented that despite making profits each year, the highways in Malaysia are still not satisfactory.

“There are still a lot of accidents taking place on highways, for which the companies should partly be held responsible because the conditions of the roads are not up to mark,” he said.

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