

**Lim dares Nor Mohamed to debate abolishing tolls**  
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**Hafiz Yatim**

Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng has challenged Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Nor Mohamad Yakcop to a debate on why road tolls cannot be abolished.

NONELim said he is prepared to debate Nor Mohamed (right), the minister in charge of the Economic Planning Unit, at any time and any place on why some of the existing tolls cannot be abolished.

"I am prepared to debate on the issue of 'Why the toll should be abolished, where the toll concessionaire have made pharaoh-like profits' or a second topic 'Is it true Malaysia will become bankrupt if we abolish tolls'," he said.

"Nor had said no, I say yes. Let us debate based upon facts. I hope that Nor is not afraid to debate on an important issue involving the economy as this would ease the burden of the people and reduce inflation if we remove tolls. I can debate anywhere as long as there is television coverage."

Lim said that is why during the Pakatan Rakyat convention over the weekend, he had proposed that should Pakatan form the next government, we would move to abolish tolls.

He said the toll concessionaire for the North-South Expressway, PLUS, had spent RM6 billion to construct the highway, but had already collected RM24.27 billion in tolls and compensation paid by the government as of Dec 31, 2010.

"This represents a 308 percent profit from the costs. Why should our children and grandchildren be made to suffer to pay further when these toll concessionaires had received huge bounties and 'pharaoh-like' profits," he said.

PLUS has been given permission to collect toll for 50 years.

Lim, who is also Bagan MP, said he had obtained the data from Works Minister Shaziman Abu Mansor, following his query in parliament and the information given was towards Dec 31, 2010.

Lim said besides PLUS, the Metramac Highway was built at a cost of RM45 million, but its toll collection and compensation had amounted to RM439.65 million, which represents a 877 percent revenue over costs.

Metramac is well known for its legal protracted battle between the original contractor Fawziah Holdings Bhd, and former Finance Minister Daim Zainuddin along with tycoon Abdul Halim Saad and his partner Anuar Othman.

Remaining four highways

Besides the two highways, others named were the KL-Karak Highway which was built at a cost of RM451 million and its toll collection and compensation amounting to RM1.363 billion, representing a 202 percent revenue over costs.

The Damansara-Puchong Highway was built at a cost of RM1.08 billion, and collected RM2.7 billion; the Cheras-Kajang Highway cost RM286.5 million, and collected RM690.7 million; and the Penang bridge which cost RM943.54 million, had already gathered RM1.858 billion.

Lim added that there are another five more highways that have reaped huge profits.

Asked about DAP chairperson Karpal Singh's suggestion that a candidate should contest one seat only in the coming election, Lim said a decision has yet to be made by the party's central executive committee.

"The DAP's CEC will discuss that. No decision has been made yet. I find myself in an uncomfortable position as Karpal had said I am the only one who should be exempted (from holding both the state and parliamentary seats).

"Because of my position they need to get things done with the federal government. I do not want to make any comments until this is discussed. Let us discuss at the CEC," he said.

Najib's Chinese facebook is artificial

Asked about Prime Minister Najib Abdul Razak having a Chinese Facebook page and whether his reform efforts would upset Pakatan's plans, Lim said it was merely a political propaganda as the Facebook page is run by his aides.

"Najib does not understand Chinese so how will he interact with the fans. It is only done by his media handlers, the spin doctors. It is not a direct interface. If you look at Najib's Malay and English, he may interact with his fans.

"But Chinese one I don't think no. It is a spin doctor and it is only political propaganda," he said.

Adding that Najib's interaction in Chinese Facebook was artificial, Lim said if he wants he can also have a Facebook page in Tamil and another in Arabic.

"That is not genuine and sincere. I can appoint some company and they can do the spin doctoring for me. I do not think that is what Facebook and other social media is for, as they are for direct engagement," he said.

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