

Pakatan wants toll debate in Umno stronghold

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Penang Pakatan Rakyat Youth secretariat is organising a debate between Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng and Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Nor Mohamed Yakcop on Pakatan's aim to abolishing tolls on highways in the country.

NONETo show its courage in defending the argument that highway tolls should be abolished for the benefit of the rakyat, Pakatan has chosen Umno's stronghold of Tasek Gelugor to hold the debate.

Nor Mohamed is the MP for Tasek Gelugor.

The Youth wing has proposed that the debate be held on Feb 29 at the Dewan Besar MPSP, Sungai Dua, Tasek Gelugor.

"This is to show Nor Mohamed that Pakatan has never been afraid to expose truth and will defend the rakyat, even in BN's stronghold," debate organiser Syed Mikael Rizal Aidid said today.

Pakatan made the proposal on abolishing highway tolls after realising "the madness" of the move to collect toll on Plus, the North-South Expressway, until 2038.

Lim previously agreed to debate with Nor Mohamed on the topic, but the minister did not respond to the offer.

NONESyed Mikael, who is state PKR Youth secretary, told a press conference that the topic would cover the possibility of Malaysia becoming bankrupt if highway toll collections were abolished.

He said highway tolls were created to settle the payment for construction and upgrading costs, and should not be collected for purposes other than those.

Madness to enrich PLUS

Defending the collection of tolls by profitable concessionaires when the rakyat faces a hike in cost of living is not an appropriate thing to do, he added.

NONETHis was made worse when the rakyat learned that Plus, the longest highway in Malaysia, has collected about 308 percent in profit," Syed Mikael (left) said.

"This is equivalent to RM18 billion net profit, after deducting the cost of the original project, which was only RM5 billion.

"This is no longer a question of politics, when the rakyat is squeezed to enrich Plus until 2038. This is madness," he added.

"Is it fair for millions of citizens to suffer just because Umno-BN failed to administer the country with trustworthiness?"

The debate idea came about after the profits earned by toll operators as at 2010 were revealed in Parliament last year.

According to Lim, who is also the DAP secretary-general, at least six highways should stop charging for toll.

These include Lebuhraya Metramac (RM45 million for construction cost, RM440 million earned from toll collection, RM395 million in profits, 877 percent in returns); North-South Expressway (cost - RM5 billion, toll - RM24.3 billion, profit - RM18.3 billion, 308 percent returns); and Karak Highway (cost - RM452 million, toll - RM1.362 billion, profit - RM912 million, 202 percent returns).

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