

Highway Concessionaires Robbing The Rakyat Blind... Yet Again!

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The Cheras-Kajang Highway, which spans a distance of 11.5km, is a crucial highway that links Kuala Lumpur city centre with Kajang. It was opened to public on 15th January 1999. There are two toll booths – at the 9th and 11th km of the highway.

The toll charges are RM1.00 and RM0.90 respectively. This is an extremely heavy burden on road users as the booths are barely 2km apart and a return journey costs commuters a hefty RM3.80!

The highway toll concession agreement was executed in 1995 for a term of 30 years commencing 19th September 1995 and expiring on 18th September 2025.

However in 2002, as a result of public protests, the federal government did not allow the highway concessionaire to raise the toll rates according to the abovementioned agreement and as compensation, extended the concessionaire's term by 2 years and paid them RM105.15 million.

At the same time, in order to avoid using the tolled highway, residents of Bandar Mahkota initiated a campaign to urge the government to open up the main road at Bandar Mahkota. Their struggle lasted a few years, culminating in a bloody incident in 2008 that attracted national attention. Happily, their efforts did not end in vain and the road was opened up for public use.

However, all is not well as the federal government has yet again granted an extension to the concessionaire, this time for 3 years. The original construction cost for the Cheras-Kajang Highway was RM282 million and until the end of 2010, total maintenance expenses amounted to RM147.3 million.

By the same token, until the end of last year, the toll concessionaire collected charges amounting to RM585.5 million. If one adds up the compensation amount and the profit from last year, the concessionaire stands to make a staggering RM261.35 million. This is only up to 2010. The people's nightmare will last for another 20 years before the concession period runs its course.

According to the written reply by the Ministry of Public Works, the toll charges for this highway will be revised again in 2013. If there are no objections, a return journey can cost up to RM5 or RM6. If there is widespread public protest, we can envisage that the federal government will yet again extend the concession period as a compensatory move. If the people do not protest, they lose. If they protest, they still lose. It is a lose-lose situation for the rakyat while the government's cronies reap huge profits from this lopsided deal.

This ridiculous situation has exhausted the patience of highway users and they are launching a signature campaign to petition for the toll to be abolished. Their target is to collect 100,000 signatures and submit the petition to the Prime Minister.

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