

PM: Let's share toll hike burden

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■ **By V. Vasudevan and Leslie Andres**
news@nst.com.my

KUALALUMPUR: The burden of road toll increases is not on the public alone as the government is also absorbing it by providing a subsidy of RM2.5 billion.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the government had to allow the concessionaires to increase the toll as it was provided for in the agreement.

But despite this, Abdullah

said, the government had decided to subsidise the motorists to the tune of RM2.5 billion.

"It is a big subsidy. We are reducing the public burden. Let us share the burden together.

"If there is no subsidy, the motorists will have to pay more," he said after opening the PPP annual congress yesterday.

However, Abdullah said the government will not extend the concession agreements once they expired.

"When the concession ends we will take over. There will be no more toll."

Abdullah said the privatisation agreement for the building of the roads had made it possible for these roads to be built and help reduce congestion, which would have developed.

He said the five Klang Valley highways had also resulted in tangible benefits as they had brought development to the areas the roads cut through.

"There is development in the areas the roads run

through. Property and land prices adjacent to these highways have also appreciated."

Abdullah said the mechanism used to calculate the toll rate was the best method.

In Jakarta, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak said the increase in rates was not something the government wanted to do as a matter of choice.

Najib said the government had no option but to go ahead with increasing the toll charges.

"It is important for people to

realise that to have world-class facilities, somebody has to pay.

"There must be a sharing of burden. In this case, the subsidy that we have allocated would otherwise have been spent on development," he said.

Najib was speaking after the 35th Malaysia-Indonesia General Border Committee meeting.

He said without the government subsidy, the toll rates would have been higher.

For instance, the toll for cars

using the Damansara-Puchong Highway (LDP) would have increased to RM2.10 instead of the RM1.60 charge which will take effect on Jan 1.

Told that Malaysians were perhaps unhappy with the toll hike as they had only just been hit with the rise in petrol and diesel prices, Najib said the government understood their frustration.

"We are mindful of this, but this is the subsidy that the government could afford. It is a large subsidy, nonetheless," he said.