

Highways have benefited people, says PM

KUALA LUMPUR: Toll rate agreements made with highway concessionaires have brought about rapid development to new areas and economic opportunities for the people, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said.

He said the long-term benefits could not be measured in financial terms, and the highways would be declared toll-free when the concession period expired.

Abdullah said the road privatisation policy also helped reduce the increasing number of users on old roads, and motorists could now drive more comfortably on new highways.

He said the Government had looked ahead and decided to privatise highway development projects to hasten their construction.

The Government announced on

Thursday toll increases for the Damansara-Puchong Expressway (LDP), Kuala Lumpur-Karak Highway, Guthrie Corridor Highway, the Cheras-Kajang highway and the Kesas expressway from Jan 1.

"It's difficult for the Government to give approval to the toll rate increase, so we decided to subsidise the rates at RM2.6bil per year, which is a huge sum, to reduce the people's burden," Abdullah said after opening the People's Progressive Party general assembly here yesterday.

"If not, motorists will have to pay an extra 50 sen at least. I hope the people will understand."

Abdullah said the people must be able to use other approaches to reduce expenses and take measures to control inflation.

The authorities must also work to

The Star - 16/12/2006
create a more efficient public transport network, he added.

"If we don't have to use cars, we can use buses. We have to balance all these for the benefit of the people," he said. In **Jakarta**, Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak said the increase in toll rates for the five expressways was not something the Government was "passing merrily to the public."

"It is not something that we wanted, but the important thing to understand is that, for us to have world-class infrastructure, somebody has to pay for it," he explained.

"You can't have quality highways without being willing to pay for it. So we decided we had no choice but to go ahead. And it is on the basis of sharing the burden."

Najib is in the Indonesian capital

on a working visit.

In **Petaling Jaya**, Federation of Malaysian Consumers Associations (Fomca) secretary-general Md Sha'ani Abdullah said there must be transparency and accountability in all concession agreements.

"We urge the Government to revise all biased concession agreements so that consumers will not suffer the long-term effects of such privatisation," he said in a press release.

DAP secretary-general Lim Guan Eng suggested the Government buy over the five highway concessionaires by paying back the accumulated construction costs.

"Such a move will not only save billions in subsidy, but also avoid losses to toll operators and reduce the burden of consumers," he said.