

'HIGHWAY TAKEOVER TO BE DONE IN STAGES'

NST
- 25/2/2019
Pg. 4

It will be carried out based on govt's capability, says Dr M

M. HIFZUDDIN IKHSAN
AND HAMZAH OSMAN
LANGKAWI
cnews@nstp.com.my

THE takeover of highways will be carried out in stages and based on the government's financial capability, said Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He said talks with Gamuda Bhd to takeover the four highway concessions in the Klang Valley was the first step by the government to fulfil Pakatan Harapan's 14th General Election (GE14) manifesto pledge.

He said the takeover of the highways would involve a huge cost.

"We are focusing on what we can do, namely the highways in Kuala Lumpur, but we will be expanding to other tolls in other areas.

"We are doing it according to

our capability."

Dr Mahathir said the takeover of highways would see a need for a specific charge to be imposed for their maintenance.

"This (the takeover) is not a mere suggestion.

"It had been agreed to by the government and will involve the closure of several tolls.

"However, we still need to impose ordinary toll collection, reduce tolls by 30 per cent or make them toll-free at certain periods due to the need for maintenance work.

"The tolls collected will be used to expand, lengthen and construct new highways in the future."

Dr Mahathir said this after launching the national-level "Kampungku Sihat" programme at the Langkawi parliamentary constituency service centre here yesterday.

Since taking over the government, he said PH had been thinking about how to fulfil its promises.

"I admit that when we made the (election) promises, we did not possess all the relevant information.

"Now that we are the govern-



Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad launching the 'Kampungku Sihat' programme in Langkawi yesterday. With him is Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr Dzulkefly Ahmad (left). BERNAMA PIC

ment, only now we possess the full information on the cost involving highway construction, which is quite huge."

On whether Gamuda had been informed of the takeover involving the four highways, Dr Mahathir said the negotiations involving the matter were undertaken by Finance Minister Lim Guan Eng.

In **Kuala Lumpur**, Economic Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Azmin Ali gave his assurance that the government's move to take over the concessions of four highways will not affect other projects involving the people's interests.

"This is our commitment in GE14, but negotiations and discussions are being carried out so that the acquisition can be made in stages.

"We have to ensure that it will not affect other economic developments.

Azmin said this after accompanying Sultan of Selangor Sultan Sharafuddin Idris Shah and Tengku Permaisuri Selangor Tengku Permaisuri Norashikin, who visited Tamu Hotel and Suites in Kampung Baru.

Azmin said the expected takeover costs were in the negotiation stage and the ministry concerned would issue a statement as soon as an agreement was reached.

"Our commitment is clear... but all cases need to be refined as we do not want this to affect other matters."

The government, on Saturday, had said it would commence negotiations with Gamuda to take

over the concessions of the Damansara-Puchong Expressway (LDP), Sistem Penyuraian Trafik KL Barat (Sprint), Shah Alam Expressway (Kesas) and the Stormwater Management and Road Tunnel (SMART).

The Prime Minister's Office, in a statement, said the government had begun negotiations with Gamuda to take over the four highways in which the company had a majority stake.

It said the government aimed to abolish toll collection in stages after it took over the four expressways.

However, it said a congestion charge would be introduced, where commuters would pay only a fee equivalent to the existing tolls for six hours of "peak" period a day.