

PM: WE WILL DO IT STEP BY STEP

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Abolishing them will affect development projects, says Dr Mahathir

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THE government will not be able to implement any other development projects if it abolishes tolls at all highways and expressways.

Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said monies collected from taxes if used to buy over tolled highways and expressways would in turn reduce government expenditure for other projects.

He said the people must understand that if they did not pay for the roads, the government in turn would have to use money from its coffers on matters such as highway maintenance.

"The government pays from the people's taxes. In fact, the people are paying taxes through the government, including for the roads that need to be maintained."

He was speaking after launching Metrod Holdings Bhd's new copper plant extension at Bukit Raja Prime Industrial Park here yesterday.

Dr Mahathir said any move to abolish toll rates would prove to be too expensive and a burden for the government.

"If the government buys over the toll roads, necessary money needs to be raised and loans will have to be serviced.

"Therefore, the government plans to do this stage by stage and step by step," he said.

Dr Mahathir said this in response to public criticism after the government issued a statement on talks with Gamuda Bhd to take over four highway concessions that the company had a majority stake in — namely the Shah Alam Expressway (Kesas), Damansara-Puchong Expressway (LDP), Western Kuala Lumpur Traffic Dispersal System (Sprint) and the Stormwater Management and



Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad visiting Metrod Holdings Bhd's new copper plant extension at Bukit Raja Prime Industrial Park in Klang yesterday. PIC BY ROSLIN MAT TAHIR

Road Tunnel (SMART).

Among the criticisms were that the government did not take over the highway concession from PLUS Malaysia Bhd and that it planned to introduce "congestion charges" instead of the outright abolition of tolls.

According to a statement is-

sued by the Prime Minister's Office on Saturday, the government intends to abolish the existing toll mechanism when it takes over the concession of the four highways and expressways.

Based on the statement, a "congestion charge" will be introduced where users will need to

pay toll at the existing rate for six "peak hours" of the day.

During the off-peak period between 11pm and 5am, usage of the highways and expressways will be free.

For other "normal" times, users will enjoy a 30 per cent discount of the existing rate.