

Dr M: It's too costly now

If the price is right then ECRL may go ahead, says PM *13.2*

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KLANG: The cost of building the East Coast Rail Link (ECRL) is too much for Malaysia under the current circumstances.

Given this, Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said, there were two options for the country, which was either to bring down the cost and proceed when the price was right or to postpone the implementation of the project.

"If the price is right then we will continue, but at the moment we have not agreed on the price," said Dr Mahathir.

He said Malaysia hoped to spend less money on the project, as it was too costly for the country at the moment.

Dr Mahathir explained that the RM55bil cost would take Malaysia 30 years to repay the loan for it.

"And we will be saddled with a lot

of interest which in the end will amount to RM140bil.

"It's not because we don't want to build but it is a bit early for us because we don't have the money," he said.

Dr Mahathir added Malaysia had to be careful about how it spends as the country has a lot of debt.

"Other than the ECRL, we have debt owned by 1MDB and all that.

"This was incurred by the previous government and now of course they are telling us how to run the country, but when they were running the country, they didn't do such a good job.

"They incurred so much debt that the country has to spend all the income that we have to pay off the debts or else we might be sued for bankruptcy," said Dr Mahathir.

Last week, Finance Minister Lim

Guan Eng said he believed Malaysia and China could arrive at a deal to revive the ECRL projects by April this year.

Lim had also said negotiations were ongoing with China for a reduction of the project's cost and a decision would be made by the time Dr Mahathir visits the country in April.

On another matter, Dr Mahathir sought the public's understanding on the challenges and costs to take over the highways from the current concessionaires.

"The government has to buy the highway with the money from tax collected from the people.

"The roads must also be maintained, which will also have to be borne by the government," he said.

He added this also means that the government will be deprived of

money for other projects, which are also important, as some of the taxes collected would be used to maintain the roads.

Dr Mahathir was responding to a question about public criticism on the Pakatan government's unfulfilled promise to abolish tolls.

Earlier, the Prime Minister's Office announced that talks are being held with Gamuda Bhd on the acquisition highways, which the company has a major stake.

The highways are Lebuhraya Damansara Puchong (LDP), Sistem Penyuraian Trafik KL Barat (Sprint), Lebuhraya Shah Alam (Kesas) and the SMART Tunnel.

Watch the video
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