

# Abolition of tolls ruled out

**Move beyond govt's financial ability, says PM**

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**PUTRAJAYA:** Any hope that commuters will get to use the many highways in Malaysia for free has effectively fizzled out.

Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad said yesterday the government will not accede to any request to abolish tolls for now.

"The people may be happy if they don't have to pay toll, but the government just cannot afford it."

He said abolishing tolls is part of the Pakatan Harapan manifesto but it is beyond the government's financial ability to keep that promise.

Therefore, it will not be implemented, he added.

"If we were to buy the PLUS highway, it would cost the government RM30 billion.

"It would be better if that money is used to pay down the government's debt.

"This will help to reduce the government's debt burden," he told a press conference after attending the National Finance Council meeting.

Mahathir said there have been proposals put forward by the private sector to reduce the toll but the percentage has not been decided.

He was commenting on Council of Eminent Persons chairman Tun Daim Zainuddin's proposal that toll rates be reduced by 25%.

He said it was decided during the council meeting that the government would write off state government debts amounting to RM3.8 billion.



Mahathir and Finance Minister Lim Guan Eng attend the National Finance Council meeting yesterday.  
- BERNAMAPIX

He said this debt is specifically the money borrowed by state governments from 2001 to 2018 for their water restructuring plans.

"All state-based water companies must complete their restructuring programmes by Dec 31 this year to qualify for this," he said.

Mahathir said this is to help the states

provide higher quality water services to rural areas.

On the call to give bumiputra contractors 20% of the East Coast Rail Link construction contracts, he said the government has agreed to give 40% of the contracts to locals but it has yet to decide on the bumiputra quantum.