

HIGHWAYS

'REDUCE TOLL RATES BY CUTTING COSTS'

PM says well-managed development costs, elimination of corruption crucial

NOR AIN MOHAMED RADHI
KUALA LUMPUR
news@nst.com.my

LOWER toll rates are possible if the development costs of highways are well managed and free from leakage or corruption, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim.

He said the development costs of highways and toll rate hikes were valid concerns.

"When costs increase, toll rates also increase. However, if (the development) costs are well managed and there is no leakage or corruption, there is a possibility of reducing toll rates.

"This is how it works," Anwar said at the launch of the Seremban rest and service area (south-bound) yesterday. It is Malaysia's first sustainable rest area on the highway.

"I shared my experience with UEM (Group Berhad) at the early stages, where costs were unnecessarily increased, even though they could have been reduced.

"This was due to excessive payments made to secure approvals. This practice must be stopped."

Anwar, who is also the finance minister, said he hoped that Works Minister Datuk Seri Alexander Nanta Linggi, Malaysian Highway Authority chairman Datuk Seri Hasni Mohammad and PLUS Malaysia Bhd chairman Datuk Mohamad Nasir Ab Latif would ensure that approvals for future projects were expedited.

"This is achievable provided that everyone involved takes responsibility and views these pro-

jects (highways) as being for the people," he said.

Anwar said Nanta was paying close attention to ensure that the costs of highway construction were thoroughly reviewed to prevent any leakages.

Citing the recently launched Madani housing project in Taman Desa, Anwar stressed the urgent need for housing in Kuala Lumpur.

"People have been waiting for years, and they are from low-income groups such as M40 and B40. When approval processes drag on for two years and involve payments to various parties, costs rise and delays are prolonged.

"We push for faster approvals by ensuring all conditions are met and the company is responsible and compliant. I commended Kuala Lumpur City Hall for approving (the project) within 45 days.

"This demonstrates that expediting the process is possible when we adhere to regulations, prevent leakage and stop anyone from exploiting the situation for illegal gains.

"By doing so, the company's holding costs are reduced. If the approval process takes two years, the company incurs bank interest, which is ultimately passed on to buyers."

Anwar cited the Kerian Integrated Green Industrial Park (KIGIP) project, where the state government approved the land within three days, as another example of how expediting project approvals could help stimulate the economy.

"This demonstrates that processes can be expedited when it comes to developing the country effectively and prioritising actions that create job opportunities or providing water and electricity facilities, as well as training for children from poor families.

"This is why I believe it can be done if we maintain a clear and decisive stance."

*...processes
can be
expedited when it
comes to
developing the
country
effectively...*

**DATUK SERI ANWAR
IBRAHIM**
Prime minister