

Lower toll rates possible, says Anwar

> 'Highway development costs could be lowered if managed effectively, but had instead risen due to leakage, corruption and high fees during approval process'

KUALA LUMPUR: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar said toll rates could be reduced if highway development costs are managed effectively without leakage or corruption.

Anwar said highway development costs could be lowered, but had instead risen due to excessive fees imposed during the approval process.

"This must stop. I believe that for the next project, the Works Ministry and the Malaysian Highway Authority should ensure a more expedited approval process. This can be achieved if everyone takes responsibility and recognises that this is for the people."

He was speaking when officiating at the Seremban southbound rest and service (R&R) area, the country's first sustainable highway R&R on the North-South Expressway yesterday.

Present at the event were Works Minister Datuk Seri Alexander Nanta Linggi, Deputy Works Minister Datuk Seri Ahmad Maslan, Chief Secretary to the Government Tan Sri

Shamsul Azri Abu Bakar and Malaysian Highway Authority chairman Datuk Seri Hasni Mohammad.

Citing the *Rumah Madani* project in Taman Desa, Kuala Lumpur, which he recently launched, Anwar highlighted how the approval process was expedited due to the urgent housing needs of the low-income group.

"If we wait two years for approval, costs rise and delays occur. By insisting on efficiency, ensuring compliance with rules and preventing exploitation, progress can be made if we maintain a clear stance."

He said the Seremban R&R area not only provides a range of facilities for highway users but also serves as a catalyst for socioeconomic development.

He added that it has created opportunities for over 500 SMEs, supported by thousands of local suppliers.

Anwar said the R&R's development is a significant step towards prioritising facilities

that benefit the public.

"I have travelled this highway for decades, and I have never seen an R&R as impressive and sustainable as this one. The people of Seremban and Negeri Sembilan are fortunate to have such a facility. It is a great start for both traders and the community."

The redevelopment of the R&R area located between the Nilai and Bandar Ainsdale interchanges, at the 274.6km mark, represents a significant investment of RM45 million aimed at meeting the growing needs of highway users while prioritising sustainable infrastructure development.

This newly redesigned R&R has achieved Green Building Index Gold Rating certification and incorporates sustainable building materials, Bernama reported.

It is the first in the country to feature green technologies such as solar panels, electric vehicle charging stations, rainwater harvesting systems, waste composting machines, fabric recycling bins and biodegradable packaging containers.

Additionally, the R&R boasts a food court nearly eight times larger than the original, accommodating over 500 visitors.

The *surau* has been redesigned for enhanced comfort, with space for up to 150 men and 150 women.