

## **Guan Eng wants debate with Nor on toll deal**

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**By Yow Hong Chieh**

KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 28 — Penang Chief Minister Lim Guan Eng today challenged Tan Sri Nor Mohamed Yakcop to an open debate on whether extending two toll concessions in exchange for a toll hike freeze on five highways would benefit the public.

Lim refuted the federal minister's claim the deal, which would see concessions for the Penang Bridge and Butterworth-Kulim Expressway (BKE) extended by 17 and 11 years respectively, was "win-win" for toll operators and the public.

On November 16, UEM Group Bhd and the Employees Provident Fund Board (EPF) announced a PLUS Expressway concession revision that would see toll hike freezes on five highways.

Rates will stay the same until 2015 for the North-South Expressway (NSE), NSE Central Link (ELITE), Penang Bridge, BKE and the Malaysia-Singapore Second Crossing (Linkedua).

Under the agreement, toll rates for the NSE, ELITE, Linkedua and the BKE will be raised five per cent every three years from 2016 compared to 10 per cent every three years as stipulated in the previous deal.

UEM and EPF also agreed to waive the government's outstanding balance of RM2.9 billion compensation to PLUS as at December 31 last year, as well as another RM3.6 billion in compensation for the five-year toll hike freeze between this year and 2015.

But Lim (picture) said Penang residents would be unfairly penalised by the revised terms as they would pay toll to use the Penang Bridge until 2038 and not 2021, as set out in the previous deal.

Similarly, those living in Penang would have to pay an extra 11 years of toll for the BKE until 2038, he pointed out.

"Penangites are unfairly penalised for the toll fare hike freeze for five years for the Penang Bridge, NSE, BKE, Linkedua and Elite.

"What is most unconscionable and unfair to the people is that toll operators are reaping obscenely high profits where they have more than recouped their original investments of construction cost," he said in a statement.

Lim pointed out that according to a written parliamentary reply, the NSE's toll operator had collected RM24.3 billion in toll receipts and federal compensation as at December 31, 2010 despite spending just RM5.9 billion to build the highway.

He questioned the need for continued toll on the NSE now that the operator had collected in revenue three times its original investment, and called for an immediate end to toll collection on the highway.

The situation was similar for the Penang Bridge (RM1.9 billion for RM944 million cost) and BKE (RM340 million for RM256 million cost), Lim said.

“And yet Tan Sri Nor claims that this revision deal benefits the rakyat by freezing toll hike when the toll hike remains but slyly disguised where its impact is not felt now, but the pain lengthened for another 17 years for the Penang Bridge and 11 years for the BKE,” he said.

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