

**Putrajaya to take over EDL, as BN mounts defence of Johor
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KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 30 — The federal government will buy out the controversial Eastern Dispersal Link (EDL) in Johor Baru from concession holder Malaysian Resources Corporation Berhad (MRCB), in what appears to be a move to prevent the proposed toll for the Causeway that would have made it six times as expensive for roundtrips to Singapore and becoming fodder for Pakatan Rakyat (PR) in the Umno bastion.

Minister in the Prime Minister's Department Tan Sri Nor Mohamed Yakcop said today that details of the takeover will only be discussed later after talks between both parties.

MRCB had proposed a RM9.10 toll in each direction for passenger vehicles using its RM1 billion EDL highway from the Causeway to the immigration post.

However, the Umno-linked company is using an open toll system that charges the full fare at the new Custom, Immigration and Quarantine (CIQ) checkpoint regardless of where motorists exit or enter the highway — the latest facility for the ambitious Iskandar zone that celebrates its five-year anniversary this weekend.

The rest of the 8.1km stretch leading to the Pandan interchange of the North-South Highway will be free to local motorists.

Local business leaders had express concerns that, with the new CIQ already taking Singaporean tourists away from downturn Johor Baru, the EDL will see them skip the more inland Tebrau area as well.

Taxi drivers also called for an exemption as it would otherwise be unfeasible to ferry passengers across the Causeway.

The EDL opened on April 1 without any toll collection after being delayed from a scheduled first quarter launch.

In a visit to Johor in March, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Razak had promised a solution to the controversy.

Over 50,000 vehicles cross the bridge daily, mostly Malaysians living in and around the state capital who commute to the island republic to work.

Johor Baru's economy is also heavily reliant on Singaporeans who cross the Straits of Johor to enjoy cheaper prices there.

Putrajaya set up the Iskandar zone five years ago to turn Johor Baru and its surrounding region into an economic growth area catering to the spillover from Singapore.

Cars and lorries exiting Singapore and heading into Johor now pay RM2.90 and RM5.50 respectively to use the bridge while motorcycles, which make up more than half of traffic across the Causeway, are exempt from the toll.

Singapore's Straits Times reported in 2008 that rates will be raised every three years of the 30-year concession and will peak at RM14.60 for passenger vehicles and RM29.20 for lorries.

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