

**Najib's 'new' plan to abolish tolls merely a GE14 promise to be broken again**  
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LETTER | During a forum on Budget 2018 earlier this week, Prime Minister Najib Razak said that tolls should be abolished, adding that wherever possible he would look into unravelling the legacy problems caused by toll concession agreements.

Malaysians shouldn't fall for the empty promises of the PM whose track record has proven that he has zero commitment to abolishing these tolls.

It isn't the first time Najib promised to abolish tolls or lower toll rates. In Barisan Nasional's manifesto for the 13th general election, Najib promised the gradual reduction of intracity tolls within five years. Yet, five years on, not only has this promise failed to be delivered, he delivered the exact opposite.

In October 2015, 18 tolls operated by 11 concessionaires were allowed to increase their fares with some even going up RM2.30 overnight. These included toll routes such as the LDP, SMART Tunnel, MEX, AKLEH and NPE in the Klang Valley as well as the Senai-Desaru Highway in Johor and the Butterworth Outer Ring Road (BORR) in Penang.

In response to this, Najib turned around and said the government had no choice but to allow the toll fares to increase because preventing it would require massive compensation payments. The PM went on to threaten Malaysians that taxes would have to be increased if the government were to abolish tolls.

Najib's threats have proven true because when the government did remove certain tolls, they paid an exorbitant compensation equivalent to the amount of toll these concessionaires would have collected anyway!

When the Batu Tiga, Sg Rasau, Bukit Kayu Hitam and Eastern Dispersal Link (EDL) tolls were removed last year, the government will be paying RM2.2 billion for the first three tolls. For the EDL, the government will reportedly be paying a yearly compensation of RM70 million.

The above means that whether Najib "abolishes tolls" or not, the BN government would always ensure the profits of the concessionaires. Malaysians would either have to pay for the tolls directly or pay for them via taxes paid to the government.

Most hypocritically, the PM had only recently on Dec 3 criticised Pakatan Harapan's plan to eliminate highway tolls and reintroduce petrol subsidies will increase air pollution in the country. So did Najib temporarily change his mind to fish for votes in the impending GE14, just as he did in 2013?

Harapan believes in the rule of law and the sanctity of the contract signed between the government and the toll concessionaires. The provisions of the contracts allow for the government to expropriate or buy back the concessions at cost, subject to a minimum return for the concessionaires for the past years of operations.

Barring exceptions, the agreements do not at any point in time require the government to compensate these concessionaires for future profits. Why is the BN government so adamant in ensuring these toll concessionaires are paid their future profits at the expense of Malaysian tax-payers?

All this is proof that Najib's 'promise' to abolish tolls is just another empty promise by a Prime Minister and a government desperate to hold on to power. Malaysians should not fall for these empty promises and should not forget the government's own inability to deliver on the same pledge that it had made five years ago.

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