

**Government begins toll talk with Gamuda Berhad to take over highway concession -
Dr Mahathir**

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KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 23 (Bernama) -- The government has commenced talks with Gamuda Berhad to negotiate the acquisition of highway concession on four highways where the company has a majority stake, said Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

The highways are the Lebuhraya Damansara Puchong (LDP), Sistem Penyuraian Trafik KL Barat (SPRINT), Lebuhraya Shah Alam (KESAS) and SMART Tunnel, he said.

In a statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office today, Dr Mahathir said the government intends to abolish the existing toll mechanism upon successful takeover of the highways.

"Pakatan Harapan has promised in its election manifesto to take steps to acquire highway concessions and abolish toll collection in stages, in accordance with the terms of the concession agreement," he said.

The Prime Minister said in its place a 'congestion charge' where commuters will only pay a 'congestion charge' equivalent to the existing toll for 6 hours of "peak" period a day, will be introduced.

"During the "off-peak" period between 11pm and 5am, commuters will travel on the highway for free. At other 'normal' travelling hours, commuters will enjoy discounted rates up to 30 percent compared to existing toll rates," he said.

Dr Mahathir added that revenue collected from the 'congestion charge' will go towards the operations and maintenance of the highways and repayment of borrowings, while any surplus collected will then be channeled into a public transportation fund to improve the

quality of public transport in Malaysia.

He said further details on the proposed exercise will be announced by the Finance Minister at the appropriate time.

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