

Freeways will add to govt's burden, says expert

KUALA LUMPUR: Toll-free highways will be difficult to implement in Malaysia, as the high maintenance costs will add to the government's financial burden, an economist said.

Universiti Putra Malaysia's Faculty of Economics and Business Associate Professor Dr Rusmawati Said said toll highways were regarded as a "private" product, while toll-free highways were seen as public property.

"Most toll highways are private. For convenience and to save time, people can choose the private option, but have to pay a bit more.

This is the situation with toll highways.

"This privatisation is to reduce costs on behalf of the government and improve efficiency. It is a good move towards becoming a developed nation," she told NSTP Business.

Rusmawati was commenting on Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad's statement that construction of highways without imposing toll col-



Dr Rusmawati Said

lection would not have been possible.

Dr Mahathir revealed that he disagreed with the toll-free highway pledge contained in the Pakatan Harapan (PH) election manifesto, and now felt it was a burden to accomplish some of the promises.

"The only way to free up the route and have no toll is to raise the price of petrol," he said at the Asean Leaders' meet-

ing in Bali, Indonesia.

Commenting further, Rusmawati said while the government might not be able to create a toll-free highway, there could be more effective ways to help those who use tolls so that the burden of expenditure for the toll could be reduced.

"Most of the people who use tolls are in the city. Various methods can be implemented after conducting a robust study and taking into account economic analysis such as costs and benefits. Addressing a problem or sector of the economy is not just

about the particular problem/sector but a chain of problems and sectors," she said.

Rusmawati also believed that it would not be an offence for the government to withdraw some of the promises in the PH manifesto if the outcome would be detrimental.

"In my opinion, it is not wrong to withdraw what is stated in the manifesto as it is still new and they can still make changes. Perhaps, at the time of creating the manifesto, they did not take into account proper cost and benefit analysis," she said.