

# Obstacle to a common

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**PUTRAJAYA:** Political undertones and not religious connotations are the stumbling block to the country sharing a common weekend, said Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad.

He said the Opposition, particularly PAS, would make a political issue if the government were to declare Sunday, for instance, as the common weekend for all states in the federation.

PAS, he said, would claim the government was converting Muslims to Christians.

Currently, Kelantan, Terengganu and Kedah observe Friday as their weekend while the rest have a Sunday weekend.

"But actually in Islam, there is no weekend. We have a day of prayers or congregation."

He said the weekend was an artificial holiday and one could observe a weekend on any day.

"I think we should have a common weekend," he said when asked whether this should be done to effect greater efficiency.

Mahathir was also asked on why there was a need for Sabah and Sarawak to subject residents from the peninsula to certain immigration and work procedures as it has been 40 years since these two states joined the Federation of Malaysia and whether their fear of Peninsular Malaysians swarming all over them was justified.

The premier said: "I think our leaders (in Sabah and Sarawak) will eventually come around to accepting that we are all Malaysians. We (Peninsular Malaysians) don't discriminate against them."

The interview with Bernama also touched on other issues:

## **Pegging the ringgit to the US dollar**

"You do not lose anything by pegging but you can lose something by allowing for free float," he said. With a fixed exchange rate, he said, businesses could plan ahead and they would not be short-changed at the end of the day.



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"But with the floating rate, we have to hedge, and hedging costs money. So why do we want to increase the cost of doing business by floating the currency?"

He stressed that Malaysia would stay with the fixed exchange rate until a time when the move does not bring any benefit to the country.

## **The failure of Perwaja Steel**

It failed because its management did not fully understand the steel-making process and technology involved.

Its top managers also did not go down to the ground and its cost of production was higher than the price of the product.

"It was not the idea which was wrong, it was the failure of management."

Its top management was at one time running the operations from Kuala Lumpur although the steel plant was in Terengganu, he said.

He said even if there was demand, if the cost of production exceeded the price the product is sold, one would lose money.

"They (Perwaja Steel) were producing steel which they couldn't sell and the plant was breaking down. That was what happened to Perwaja Steel."

But in the case of Proton, Mahathir said, it initially did not do well and he had to bring in

Japanese experts to manage the company. "The Japanese put it back on track and today it is doing well."

## **A smart partnership in Cancun**

On the World Trade Organisation (WTO) meeting in Cancun where developing countries blocked certain lopsided proposals from the developed world, Mahathir said developing countries should not have stopped at that.

They should have proposed their own agenda instead to redistribute wealth more equitably.

He said Malaysia's ability to gar-

# weekend