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Mahathir-Weekend

POLITICAL OBSTACLES HINDER COMMON WEEKEND MOVE, SAYS PM

PUTRAJAYA, Oct 15 (Bernama) -- Political undertones and not religious connotations are the stumbling block towards 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 exploit the situation in the coming general election by claiming that the government was converting Muslims to Christians.

"PAS will make an issue of this and say that we have become Christians and the Muslims therefore should not vote for people who take Sunday and not Friday as their weekend," he said in an interview with Bernama here yesterday.

The 70-minute interview was conducted by Bernama chairman Datuk Kalimullah Hassan, editor-in-chief Jaafar Hussin, and executive editors Datuk Azman Ujang and Yong Soo Heong.

This was the reason why in many instances the authorities could not effect a common weekend due to political problems and not religious considerations.

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

Dr Mahathir said the idea of weekends was relatively new to this country as hitherto the people did not have any weekends.

"But the British came here and introduced Sunday as the weekend. Obviously, Sunday is a kind of Christian holiday."

Following this, states outside the Federated Malay States reacted and introduced Friday as their weekend, he said.

"But actually in Islam, there is no weekend. We have a day of prayers or congregation. 'Jemaah' means congregation. It is clearly stated that after your prayers, you go about and do your work."

The Prime Minister said some Muslims thought that if you pick Sunday as the weekend, "then you are doing something Christian."

However, he said, the weekend was an artificial holiday and one could observe a weekend on any day, "maybe Sunday, maybe Monday or whatever."

He said "even if we have it on Sunday, it has no religious connotation."

Citing an example, he said that by having a Deepavali holiday does not mean that Muslims in Malaysia are celebrating a Hindu festival although they may visit their Hindu friends.

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

"But PAS is just waiting for an opportunity to pounce on any issue and make it into a political issue," he said.

Dr Mahathir was also asked on why there was a need for Sabah and Sarawak to subject residents from Peninsular Malaysia 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 Prime Minister said they still had that fear although it may not be justified.

"We have to wait for them to overcome that feeling. I think that 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," he said.

Dr Mahathir said Sarawak companies were doing well in Peninsular Malaysia as they had been given contracts.

But companies from Peninsular Malaysia were facing some difficulties when operating in Sabah and Sarawak but their problems were slowly eroding and not as bad as before, he added.

-- BERNAMA

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