

# Mahathir: Toll pacts badly drafted

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**PUTRAJAYA:** Acknowledging that the government during his time may have erred in signing toll concession agreements, Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday urged the present administration to be more careful before agreeing to toll increases.

He also advised toll concession companies to be open to the idea of renegotiating the terms, especially if they are doing well financially.

"This is one of the things that we need to correct. What you have is a cabinet which is not very knowledgeable all the time because it is not made up of experts but politicians (and) some politicians like myself can sometimes be stupid," he said when told by reporters that all the five tolled expressways were constructed during his 22-year tenure as the prime minister.

The former premier said the agreements were drafted by officers and submitted to the cabinet and usually the small print was not there.

"The cabinet merely gave approvals in principle and never really studied the implications in some parts of the agreements," he said.

Citing the purchase of a battleship, he said: "The agreement stated that if there is a delay, the company compensates the government. If the delay is more than six months, the company does not need to compensate the government.

"The delay was two years. We

# Mahathir condemns Saddam hanging

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need to have a checklist."

He said when the toll concession agreements were signed, the government had very little experience about growth and reaction of the people.

"Civil servants don't think of reaction of people as much as politicians. They (civil servants) think it is a reasonable agreement and the cabinet okays it and now the government is stuck," he said.

"There is a provision in the (toll) agreements that if there is an increase in traffic and the company collects more than the projected amount, the government gets a share.

"If the traffic volume is lower than projected, the government has

to compensate. It works both ways. Currently we don't have any figures.

"From what I see on the road as I drive, they collect quite a bit of money. The roads are jammed up even to pay toll as there are too many cars and in some places toll booths are increased," Mahathir said after holding a press conference on the upcoming Perdana Global Peace Forum.

On other issues, he condemned British Prime Minister Tony Blair and US President George W. Bush over Iraq and the execution of Saddam Hussein.

He also resumed his criticisms of the administration of Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi.

### 'Blair a war criminal'

He called Blair a "war criminal"

and slammed him for not saying a word about the way the hanging of Saddam was carried out.

"Mr Blair has not said a word but whether he says a word or not he is the culprit," said Mahathir.

"He is as much a war criminal as he accuses Saddam of being.

"The Americans and the British and possibly this little country in the south called Australia, they are also behind this hanging," he said.

"I am disgusted at these people because they tell us the death penalty is bad but they actively promote the death penalty."

He called the Saddam trial a travesty of justice and said the latter went to his hanging with great courage.

Mahathir is promoter and

patron of the Global Peace Forum, the third of which will be held in Kuala Lumpur from Feb 5 to 7.

### 'Turkish yachts beautiful'

Responding to various questions on local matters, Mahathir said he had kept quiet in the last few months not because he didn't have anything to say but because he did not have the forum to do it.

"I had a small heart problem but my heart has been repaired, but I didn't have any forum to say anything so I appeared to be very quiet," he said, adding that his brain was still ticking away.

He went on to talk again about Proton, saying the company needed a few management more than a new partner.

Other matters he touched on

included Khairy Jamaluddin, Scomi and allegation that the Turkish-built yacht that was reported by a Turkish newspaper to have been bought by Abdullah (Mahathir) by a Malaysian tycoon.

"Actually I am quite interested if I could buy, but I don't have the money," he said.

"Turkish wooden yachts are beautiful and I thought we could bring them here to Langkawi (so) I asked someone who has the money to bring the yacht to Langkawi as it will look nice, (but) he said no (because) wooden boats won't last in Langkawi."

He added: "If anybody wants to bring a wooden yacht to Langkawi, I am for it but don't ask me for the money, I don't have that kind of money."