

Mahathir: More can be done at small meeting

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SUVA, (Fiji), Wed. — Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad who arrived here this evening to attend his first Commonwealth conference, said he believed that more could be achieved at a small meeting.

The Prime Minister told reporters at a Press conference at Nausori Airport: "I always believe in smaller numbers. When there are far too many people, you can't talk.

"You know, people don't really get to know each other in the short space of time we are here. And of course, you

can't get down to business."

Replying to a question on how much more important is the Commonwealth Heads of Government Regional Meeting (CHOGRM) than the full Commonwealth conference, he added: "I am not in a position to judge how much more or less because this is the first time I am attending CHOGRM."

He was also asked about a bet being taken that after attending this CHOGRM meeting he would be convinced that

it would be useful to attend the Commonwealth summit in New Delhi next year.

Said Dr Mahathir: "Well, I don't know whether I will be convinced or not. I come with an open mind. I want to do something positive in the way of co-operation.

"So if it is worthwhile, I might go, if it is not worthwhile or if I have some other commitments, I still won't go."

The Prime Minister reiterated his reason for attending the meeting — to meet leaders of the other 16 nations from the Asia-Pacific region, particularly the small nations in the South Pacific.

"To me, this is not just

a case of discussing principles or attitudes but maybe we will find something that we can do together. That's why I come here."

On specific proposals for the conference, Dr Mahathir said he had none but "what I did is to bring along a number of Malaysian businessmen to explore the possibility of co-operation between Malaysia and Fiji in trade and industry." The businessmen included prominent members of the business and banking community.

This is Dr Mahathir's follow-up visit to Fiji. He last visited the country in June.

On protectionism, Dr Mahathir said he was quite sure that many of

the leaders would attempt to put pressure on Australia to ease its restrictions on trade.

"I've had my bout with Mr Fraser (Australian Prime Minister). So if I am asked to lend weight to other people's argument, of course, I will do so."

On whether Malaysia is particularly concerned about those countries, including the U.S., which have yet to sign the Law of the Sea Convention, Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was certainly not happy.

"It is very necessary that we reached agreement among all nations about how the resources of the sea-bed can be exploited.

"I think it is not fair for the strong nations to hold back simply because they can do more for themselves."

On speculation that the leaders may informally discuss Pakistan's re-entry into the Commonwealth, the Prime Minister said Malaysia had no objection to it being discussed. She was not against the re-entry.