

PM: I will listen with an open mind

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PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will listen with an open mind whatever messages his Australian counterpart, Mr Bob Hawke, has to convey through his personal envoy who arrives here today.

The personal envoy is Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans who is scheduled to attend the Post Ministerial Conference (PMC) which starts on Monday.

Dr Mahathir said that the Australian Prime Minister had written to him with an explanation that Mr Evans would be his personal envoy. Dr Mahathir said he would meet the envoy without preconditions and preconceived ideas.

Dr Mahathir was asked whether he would meet Mr Evans for bilateral talks. Asked whether he was expecting an apology from the Australian Government, Dr Mahathir said: "No, I'm not looking for an apology or anything of that sort. We want to talk, that's all."

The Prime Minister, surrounded by a big group of local and foreign journal-

ists, fielded questions on the proposed East Asia Economic Group (EAEG), international trade issues, security and defence and Asean co-operation as a whole.

Asked to comment on Japan's apparent understanding of the EAEG concept, Dr Mahathir said that this was welcomed, adding that the Japanese were under the impression that the EAEG would be a trade bloc.

He considered the understanding as a "break-through of sorts" and that this may pave the way for eventual formation of the EAEG.

He believed that this was a step forward in greater economic co-operation.

Asked for his views on Japan's possible military role in the region, he said: "We don't think that Japan should have a military role in the region."

He, however, said that whether others like it or not, any action taken by the Japanese would have political implications, even if these actions were economic in nature.