

Hawke admits TV series gave offence

KUALA LUMPUR, Tues. — Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke today acknowledged that damage had been caused to Malaysia by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's *Embassy* feature series.

Mr Hawke made the admission in a letter addressed to Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad. It was delivered to Dr Mahathir by the Australian Foreign Affairs and Trade Minister, Senator Gareth Evans, during a 50-minute meeting here.

The Australian leader also acknowledged that the damage occurred because it did not control or dissociate itself from the programme by not coming out and voicing its concern over it earlier.

In the three-point letter, Mr Hawke also explained his Government's position on capital punishment and proposed an extended exchange programme to enable Australian opinion-makers to understand Malaysia better.

Senator Evans told a Press conference that Dr Mahathir read the letter very carefully and appreci-

ated its contents. He said the meeting was conducted in a very cordial and positive atmosphere.

Dr Mahathir raised a number of specific aspects on the strained relationship and its causes

"We discussed this in a very positive and constructive way without any rancour or hate and in a way that was forward looking. The Prime Minister (Dr Mahathir) said he hoped and believed this will contribute

towards a better understanding of each other in future." Senator Evans said.

Senator Evans, who is Mr Hawke's personal envoy to meet the Prime Minister, said Dr Mahathir also appre-

ciated the contents of the speech he (Evans) made at the Malaysian-Australian Business Council dinner here last night.

"I reiterated that Australia wants to build a basis for better understanding in the future with Malaysia," he added.

Senator Evans told Dr Mahathir that Australia valued its relationship with Malaysia highly and that it was concerned over the deterioration in ties.

He told Dr Mahathir that Australia wanted to acknowledge fault where it was appropriate, as in the case of the television series.

Replying to a question, Senator Evans said he did not seek any specific answer from the Prime Minister, and was confident that ties would improve soon.

"For a start, there was a suggestion in a meeting with the Malaysian International Trade and Industry Minister (Datuk Paduka Rafidah Aziz) that a senior Australian Minister lead a major business delegation to Malaysia to improve ties.

"The Prime Minister appreciated the idea and I only

hope we can build on this new understanding to improve the relationship," added Senator Evans.

He said that at the meeting Dr Mahathir told him that he (Dr Mahathir) had himself been the target of the robust Australia Press.

"But in this case (*Embassy* series), there was manifestly an offence and Dr Mahathir said some dissociation by the Government was necessary," he said.

Senator Evans dismissed a suggestion by an Australian journalist that Australia had given in a great deal to Malaysia's demand.

"What we have done is to acknowledge that things have happened that have caused offence to a neighbouring country with a culture that is very different from ours," he said.

He said all that Malaysia asked was for Australia to recognise and understand the sensitivities and feelings of Malaysians, adding that it was not an unreasonable request.

He said he took full responsibility for the way the issue was handled.