

KL-Canberra ties back to normal

From HARDEV KAUR: Harare, Oct 18
MALAYSIA and Australia have put their "soured" bilateral relations behind them. Reconciliation was reached at an hour-long meeting between Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad and his Australian counterpart, Mr Bob Hawke.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir told the Malaysian press that relations are back to normal "barring the usual shyness on the part of the people who are reconciled".

Mr Hawke will make a public statement (to disassociate his Government from the press) if there is an occasion to do so. Malaysia will



CHOGM

ZIMBABWE 91

16-22 October

also make a similar statement if there is an occasion to do so.

The Prime Minister said, he explained the problem to Mr Hawke and the action taken by Malaysia. However, when Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans was in Kuala Lumpur in July he had 'promised that the Australian Government would make a public statement to "disassociate itself from any lies on

Malaysia".

This was all Malaysia wanted, according to Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir. But that was not forthcoming and "since we did not hear this, we just kept quiet".

During the meeting, Mr Hawke gave an assurance that his Government will disassociate itself from any lies on Malaysia by the Australian

Cont'd Page 4, Cd. 6

KL-Canberra ties back to normal

■ FROM PAGE ONE

media. This is all that is required.

Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said he is aware that the media is free but if the Government keeps quiet than it appears it is supporting the media.

Even though trade was not affected by the "soured" relations, "perhaps only minor incidents", it is good that the Australian Government is conscious because by not caring at all about the kind of lies told about Malaysia it seems as if the Government approves of them.

"We believe in the freedom of the press, but at times the press can become irresponsible and tell lies. But that does not mean that we just keep quiet; we should openly say 'that's a lie'."

Asked whether it was the television series Embassy that sparked off the situation, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said it was a whole series of things over the years and the Embassy series was the "last straw".

"We could not put up with it anymore, especially when it came from a friendly country," he said.

The Prime Minister cited some of the incidents that led to the souring of relations. It included another television series called A Slow Boat to Surabaya, which was a deliberate attempt to put Malaysia in a bad light. Again when the Government took steps in 1987 to stabilise the situation the Australia media misrepresented the issue.

Three months later when the situation was back to normal the Australian television asked Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir how things were or words to that effect. The Prime Minister said he told them things were fine. However, in editing, the two scenes were juxtaposed and made it appear that Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir was lying.

"Why did that? I do not understand why you should do that? Da-

tuk Seri Dr Mahathir asked. Mr Hawke said the same thing happens to him, too. "But do not expect us to grin and bear it. So do not resent when we do it," Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir said.

Asked by a journalist from The Australian whether the Australian press should be restricted, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir hastened to add that "we are not asking for any restrictions". He explained that the Malaysian Government does not restrict the press though the impression is that "we restrict the press".

"The kind of things they (Malaysian vernacular press) say, if there were no press freedom they would have been put under detention. Some of the things reported are libellous and some very provocative and do things to disturb the peace.

"Well we have to put up with it as we are as liberal as the Australians. You may not believe it but we are," he added.