

**World notes Southeast Asia**  
**www.time.com**  
**Aug. 05, 1991**

Australia came clean last week about a television soap opera that had offended Malaysia and damaged diplomatic and trade relations between the two countries. In Kuala Lumpur, Australian Foreign Minister Gareth Evans called on the show's main critic, Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, and delivered a letter from Prime Minister Bob Hawke that Malaysian officials described as a virtual apology.

The soap opera, *Embassy*, chronicles the goings-on at the Australian embassy in a fictional nation in Southeast Asia called Ragaan, which Mahathir contends is an unflattering version of his country. Since the program began appearing on television last fall, Malaysia has protested by reducing diplomatic and social contact with Australian officials and encouraging an informal "Buy Australian Last" campaign.

The daily *Melbourne Age* blistered Evans for "cringing and curtsying to mollify Mahathir." Evans denied using "the language of apology"; Hawke said he merely acknowledged that "some things" had caused offense. Meanwhile *Embassy*, a production of the government-owned Australian Broadcasting Corporation, will continue to air -- presumably to larger audiences than ever.

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