

Mahathir hits out at the Viets and Americans

By KHAIRUDDIN HASSAN

^{N.S.I. - 5.11.1978}
KUALA LUMPUR Mon. — Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad today criticised the Vietnamese government for its indifferent attitude towards the refugee problem in Malaysia.

"I am very unhappy because the Vietnamese government has not done anything at all to help Malaysia solve it," he said.

Speaking to reporters here, Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir said the problem was discussed with Vietnam's Prime Minister, Mr. Pham Van Dong during his recent visit to Malaysia.

"Even after Mr. Dong left Malaysia to continue his visit to the other countries in the region, the problems were referred to the Vietnamese embassy here but we

have yet to see any action from them," the Deputy Prime Minister said.

He also criticised the policy of the United States government regarding the refugees.

Getting serious

"They built fences at their border to stop Mexicans whom they regard as illegal immigrants.

"But at the same time, they are telling us to accept the illegal immigrants from Vietnam. They want us to regard these Vietnamese as refugees but Vietnam is not at war and we cannot put them under the category of refugees," he said.

Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir said the Malaysian government would try its very best to get the Vietnamese out of the country and to stop their influx into the country.

"We will continue to persuade third countries to accelerate their programme of taking in immigrants.

"The problem was getting serious as the number of refugees has already increased to more than 45,000.

"We cannot permanently stop the people from being hostile towards the illegal immigrants.

"We want to take drastic action but there are limits to being

drastic. We cannot kill them; we are not murderers.

"If we were at war, we could shoot them but we are not fighting the refugees. And we also cannot bear to watch the children die," he added.

On the refugees who were unwanted by third countries, the Deputy Prime Minister said that the Government would try its best to get rid of them.

"We would not want any undesirable element to be left in our country," he said.

Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir also said that he was aware of some political leaders who have been trying to use the issue of refugees as political leverage.

"These people are only thinking of their political interests and they can embarrass the Government.

"The problem should be viewed in the national interest and not politically.