

We'll work hard to retain GSP status: Mahathir

KUALA LUMPUR, Mon. — The petitions to get the US Government to withdraw Malaysia's GSP status should be taken seriously, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister said it would be difficult to regain benefits under the Generalised System of Preferences once they are withdrawn.

"That is why we must take serious notice of the petitions," he told reporters at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport after sending off Indonesian President

Suharto, who was here to attend the first G-15 summit.

"We were successful (in countering moves to have the GSP withdrawn) in 1988. We must make more efforts now to ensure that the GSP benefits are retained," Bernama quoted him as saying.

In 1988, the American labour movement AFL-CIO filed a petition against Malaysia, but it was rejected.

In the petitions filed on Friday, the AFL-CIO and the International Labour Rights Research and Education Fund ac-

cused Malaysia of non-compliance with certain international labour standards.

The alleged violations include barring electronics workers from having a national union, the absence of basic minimum wages for a large number of workers and obstacles against strike action.

Dr Mahathir said the Government would explain to the US Government of the situation here.

He said the Human Resources Ministry would co-ordinate the efforts.

When asked if he was confident that

the GSP benefits would be retained, he said: "I cannot say I am confident because the decision is not with me... it is with the US Government."

The US Government is expected to announce on July 15 the countries whose GSP status would be reviewed because of petitions filed against them this year.

If the latest petitions against Malaysia are accepted, hearing will begin in October and a decision on whether the GSP status will be retained will be known next April.