

A BULLY

5 15 Jul 1990.

TACTIC: PM

By Paul Gabriel

KULIM, Sat. — Malaysia will not be intimidated by the latest attempt to get its GSP status withdrawn, Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad said today.

The Prime Minister described a bill being proposed by US Republican Research Committee chairman Duncan Hunter as "a threat which Malaysia would not succumb to."

The proposed bill recommends that the United States cut off aid and deny preferential trade preferences to Malaysia unless it reinstated its first asylum status and stopped its policy of redirecting Vietnamese boat people away from its shores.

The Prime Minister said every-

one knew that the United States was a superpower that could "twist anyone's hands," but added: "Malaysia has the right to decide who enters the country, and who can't. The US can't force us ... we will not bow to such imperialist tactics."

Dr Mahathir said he was saddened by the issue because such threats involved the livelihood of the country's 130,000 electronics workers.

"It (the threat) is not going to affect me, nor the Government, but the workers will suffer," Dr Mahathir told reporters after addressing some 4,000 Barisan Nasional members and residents at the Sekolah Kebangsaan Malau grounds here this evening.

Dr Mahathir said the United States should not forget that the refugee problem was a result of

its own actions in the Vietnam War.

"America is solely responsible ... they withdrew from Vietnam. The refugees had to come here because of them," Dr Mahathir said.

"We have nothing to do with it, but still we accepted nearly a quarter million of them, and our people had to bear the burden."

Dr Mahathir said Malaysia was prepared to accept even one million Vietnamese refugees if the United States could give an assurance that every refugee was "here on transit, en route to America."

But he added that the United States was only prepared to accept a handful of them.

Asked why the Vietnamese problem was being linked to the GSP issue, Dr Mahathir said: "It

shows that the US is prepared to exploit just about everything (to deny us the GSP)."

Dr Mahathir said the United States should "bear the refugee burden more," because it had a population of 270 million compared with Malaysia's 17 million.

Asked how Malaysia intended to argue its case, Dr Mahathir said he had already replied to a letter from President Bush over the refugee problem.

Dr Mahathir said he had explained to President Bush that Malaysia had not only to contend with Vietnamese refugees, "but we had also accepted 700,000 refugees from the Philippines and Indonesia."

"I added that we did not fight with anyone and did not look forward to anyone's help (in accepting the refugees)."