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Central Intelligence Agency

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Washington, D.C. 20505

## DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

18 JUL 1986

MEMORANDUM FOR: See Distribution List

FROM:

Director of Global Issues

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SUBJECT:

Malaysia's War on Drugs

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1. The attached memorandum, Malaysia's War on Drugs, presents our assessment of the Malaysian counternarcotics effort. We judge that, despite a strong beginning, the effort faces some road blocks which are slowing progress.

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2. This memorandum was prepared by [ ] the Strategic Narcotics Division, Office of Global Issues.

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3. Questions and comments are welcome and may be addressed to the Chief, Strategic Narcotics Division, OGI, [ ]

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Attachment:

Malaysia's War on Drugs  
GI M 86-20168, July 1986,

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[REDACTED]

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SUBJECT: Malaysia's War on Drugs [REDACTED]

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OGI/SND/E/[REDACTED] (July 1986)

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SUBJECT: Malaysia's: War on Drugs 

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OGI/SND/E,  (July 1986)

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## DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

17 July 1986

Malaysia's War on DrugsSummary

In 1983, Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad declared drug abuse and trafficking Malaysia's number-one national security threat and launched an ambitious antinarcotics effort that has subsequently earned a reputation as one of the toughest programs in the world. Malaysia developed an intensive two-year rehabilitation program for heroin addicts, implemented a much needed reorganization and expansion of its government drug enforcement organization, and instituted a series of tough antidrug laws. After an auspicious beginning, however, the aggressive Malaysian antidrug effort now faces some serious road blocks that are slowing progress. Resources are increasingly a constraint, particularly in the face of a stubborn national drug abuse problem combined with the resilience of the trafficking organizations in Southeast Asia. We judge a few measures--such as units to analyze drug intelligence, beefed up marine enforcement, and a conspiracy law--could make a big difference in the effectiveness of Malaysia's counternarcotics effort. [redacted]

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] Strategic Narcotics/Eurasia-Africa Branch, Office of Global Issues. This analysis is based on information available as of 17 July 1986. Comments and queries are welcome and may be addressed to the Chief, Strategic Narcotics Division, Office of Global Issues, on [redacted]

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### Narcotics: A Recent Problem

Illicit drugs represent a new challenge for Malaysia. Neither narcotics abuse nor trafficking were major problems until the early 1970s, and drug addiction had been largely confined to older ethnic Chinese opium smokers. Proximity to the opium-producing countries of the Golden Triangle--Burma, Thailand, and Laos--made Malaysia a frequently used transit point for heroin and other opiates destined for Asian and Western markets, but such trafficking generally did not affect local society. As the pace of economic modernization quickened over the last decade, however, new and more intensive patterns of drug use and trafficking began to emerge. Malaysia now occupies a prominent role in the international drug trade, and along with other nations in Southeast Asia, is in the midst of what promises to be a protracted and difficult war on drugs whose outcome is very much in doubt. [REDACTED]

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### Drug Addiction Crisis

During the last 10 years, drug addiction in Malaysia has grown at particularly alarming rates at the same time that the country has been making the transition from a rural to an urban industrial society. According to a Government of Malaysia report, for example, the number of registered heroin addicts rose from 22,000 in 1976 to 104,000 in 1984. Kuala Lumpur now estimates the total addict population at some 200,000 to 300,000 out of a total population of 16 million--an addiction rate 12 to 18 times higher than that of the United States. [REDACTED]

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The sharp increase in drug addiction has primarily affected ethnic Malays--some 45 percent of the population--rather than the Chinese and Indian minorities already settled in urban areas. Malay youths migrating to urban areas in search of work lost the religious guidance and emotional support provided by the closely knit rural family. Many young ethnic Malays apparently turned to heroin, and the use of drugs among Malays--which was, unlike the Chinese, not a cultural tradition--mushroomed. The typical Malaysian addict is no longer an elderly Chinese opium smoker but rather a young heroin smoker, with Malays constituting the largest single group of drug addicts.<sup>1</sup> Over 70 percent of the

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<sup>1</sup> Heroin #3 is a low-cost, low-purity "smoking heroin" preferred by addicts in Malaysia. Heroin #4, the higher purity heroin which is injected by addicts in the United States, is a more expensive product and has few users in Asia. Within Asia, both products are almost exclusively intended for smoking. As drug prices increase, however, it becomes more economical to switch from smoking #3, in which some of the narcotic effect is lost in smoke, to injecting #4. [REDACTED]

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registered addicts are now in the under-30 age group, and are drawn proportionately from both the Malay and Chinese communities, according to the US Embassy. The Malaysians report that the typical ethnic breakdown at Malaysia's drug rehabilitation centers is 60 percent Malay, 30 percent Chinese, and 10 percent Indian (see figure). [redacted]

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### The Emergence of Domestic Heroin Production

The rising Malaysian demand for heroin and the lure of higher profits derived from sales of the finished product of the poppy helped trigger changes in trafficking patterns. By 1980, the existing ethnic Chinese trafficking syndicates--already well connected to similar syndicates in producing and consuming countries and experienced in moving drugs through Malaysia--were refining heroin themselves. In addition to the higher profits associated with processing and selling heroin in the domestic market, these syndicates also found that moving compact morphine blocks into Malaysia for further refining was less risky than transporting heroin, which is about twice the volume of morphine per unit weight (see figure). The establishment of a domestic heroin refining industry was further encouraged by stepped up enforcement in Thailand. In the early 1980s, largely because of stricter controls by the Thai government, traffickers in the Golden Triangle were unable to obtain acetic anhydride--a controlled chemical that is essential to refining morphine to heroin. Malaysian traffickers, however, had easy access to this substance, which has many legal uses and is readily obtainable throughout the country. [redacted]

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According to the US Embassy, all of the heroin consumed in Malaysia plus some for export is now produced in-country. The production laboratories are primarily located in Pinang State--the major drug trafficking center--and in Johor, the state bordering Singapore. Reports from the US Consulate in Songkhla, Thailand over the past few years have indicated the presence of heroin refineries near the Thai border, much of which is not under complete government control. Although the evidence is inconclusive, we suspect heroin refining there may be widespread. In one example, a refinery was operating on the border inside Thailand during November 1985. [redacted]

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[redacted] The refinery, allegedly protected by Malaysian Communists, was converting raw opium to heroin base. [redacted]

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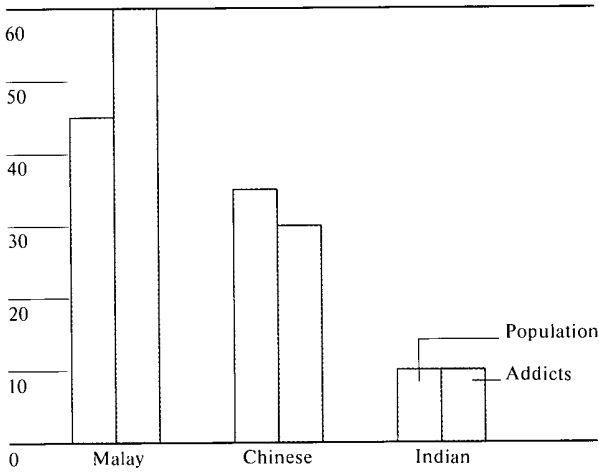
The US Embassy estimates that Malaysian refineries produce between five to ten metric tons of heroin each year, an amount more than large enough to supply the Malaysian market. Most laboratories are mobile and operate intermittently, processing morphine or heroin base into heroin #3, the drug of choice in Malaysia. We judge Malaysian laboratories are also processing raw opium, although Malaysian officials maintain that all opium entering Malaysia from southern Thailand is either consumed by local Chinese smokers or transshipped to other Asian markets. [redacted]

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**Addicts in Rehabilitation Centers  
Identified by Ethnic Group**



The remaining 10 percent of the population consists of other indigenous groups. Their level of drug abuse is unknown.

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### The Government Reacts

Alarmed by rising levels of drug abuse and trafficking, the Malaysian government finally declared "war" against drugs in 1983. Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad admitted the severity of Malaysia's narcotics problem and, with great fanfare, launched an aggressive national enforcement campaign. The government reorganized its enforcement bureaucracy and enacted some of the toughest drug laws in the world, including the death penalty for trafficking--with warnings displayed throughout the country and announced to all incoming travellers (see figure). Although the scope and effort of this campaign is unprecedented in the region and is widely acclaimed as both tough and effective, there are indications that Malaysia's record in its war on drugs has yet to match its rhetoric. [REDACTED]

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### The Structure and Thrust of the Antidrug Program

Mahathir is most concerned, in our view, with drug trafficking, probably in the belief that cutting off or reducing the flow of narcotics into Malaysia would help reduce abuse levels. When kicking off the control program in 1983, he called drugs Malaysia's number one threat to national security and has since focused the government's program on combatting the criminal aspects of the drug trade. [REDACTED]

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The linchpin of Mahathir's current strategy has been the complete reorganization of the government drug enforcement machinery (see figure). In 1983 Malaysia created the Antinarcotics Task Force--an interagency body under the National Security Council--to initiate, coordinate, and monitor the antinarcotics activities and operations of the various implementing agencies and private organizations involved in drug control. The reorganization placed clear authority for narcotics matters in the hands of the Deputy Prime Minister. As Chairman of the National Security Council's Narcotics Committee and Home Affairs Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister had control over both enforcement and rehabilitation programs. Until his sudden resignation from the government in mid-March, Musa Hitam held this key position. He considered narcotics one of his top priorities and kept the drug issue in the foreground of domestic and foreign politics. Mahathir has since taken over the Home Ministry and named a temporary Deputy Prime Minister from his party. [REDACTED]

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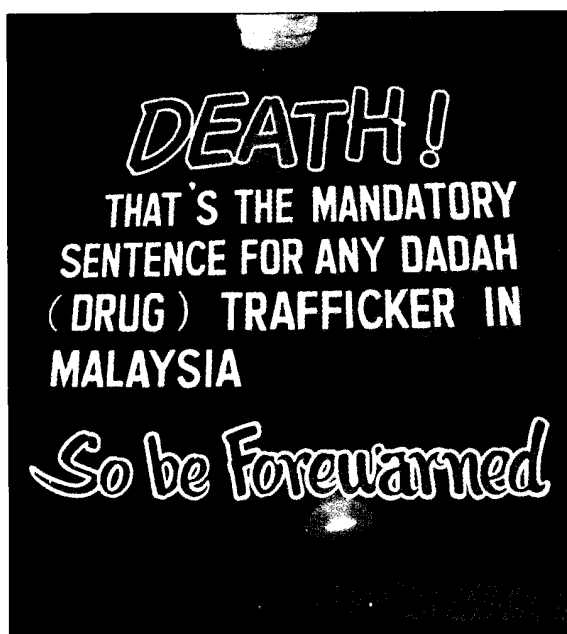
Other measures soon followed:

- o The government initiated a massive expansion of the Royal Malaysian Police's (RMP) Antinarcotics unit--Division 8 of the Criminal Investigations Division and the lead narcotics enforcement element. From a total of 37 inspectors and detectives in 1979--all based in Kuala Lumpur and able to handle only one narcotics investigation at a time--the unit

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**Drug Warning Poster**

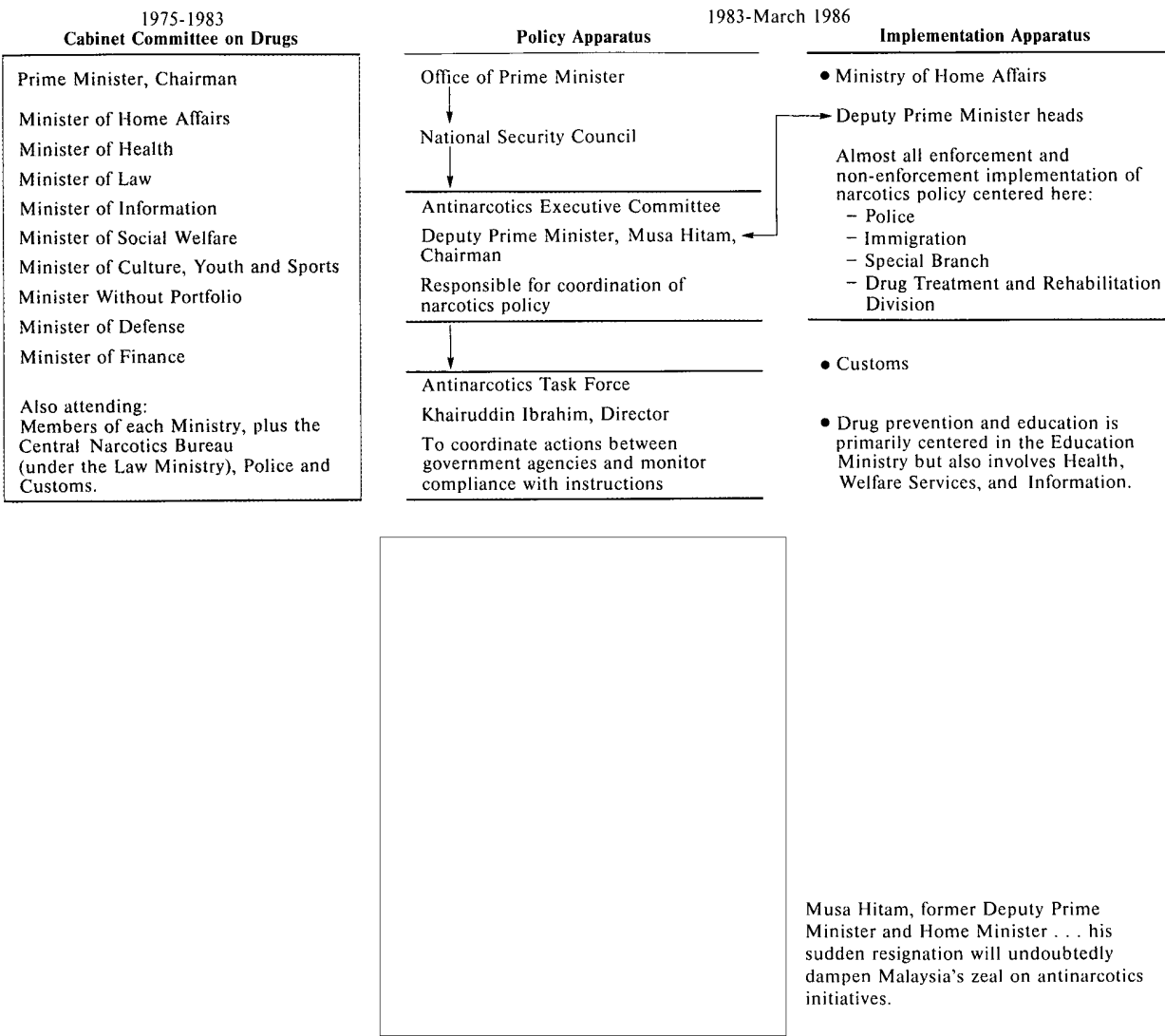


This hard-to-ignore warning greets travelers at Malaysian airports and is displayed prominently throughout the country.

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Malaysia's Antinarcotics Structure



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now has a strength of 1,500. In addition, the RMP established two police antinarcotics teams, each staffed by 20 people, at Ipoh and at Pinang, the heroin refining center.

- o To stem the flow of drugs into the country, the government tightened security at the Thai border, the primary entry point for Golden Triangle opiates, and set up a third antinarcotics team at Alor Setar. Malaysia built a chain-link fence along the border near Pedang Besar, with a parallel road and patrol towers set one kilometer apart (see map). The government also created a Border Anti-smuggling Prevention Unit under the jurisdiction of the National Security Council and staffed with personnel from the Police, Customs, Immigration, and the Rice Board. That unit is responsible for smuggling interdiction along the western segment of the Thai border.
- o The Parliament passed legislation providing for tougher punishment of offenders and giving enforcement officials more power in apprehending suspected traffickers (see appendix). The new laws enacted over the past two years included a mandatory death sentence for anyone caught trafficking in drugs; detention of suspected drug traffickers for an unlimited period of time; and controls on the importation of precursor chemicals. [redacted]

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Mahathir has chosen to approach addiction as a sickness rather than a crime, and the government inaugurated an ambitious rehabilitation program to treat the existing drug addict population. A law passed in 1983 provided a comprehensive legal basis for the treatment and rehabilitation of drug addicts and extended the minimum period of internment at existing government centers from six months to two years, to be followed by two years of aftercare. To date, Malaysia has seven rehabilitation centers around the country, including three which feature an innovative "one stop" approach modeled after a successful Singaporean program. The first of these one stop centers opened in May 1983 at Tampin, and its comprehensive, rigorous program is run by army personnel. This center provides the full range of services needed for treatment and rehabilitation, including "cold turkey" detoxification, stringent military-style training, therapy in work brigades and eventual job placement. The paramilitary regimen distinguishes this center and two similar ones that have since been opened from the other four centers. [redacted]

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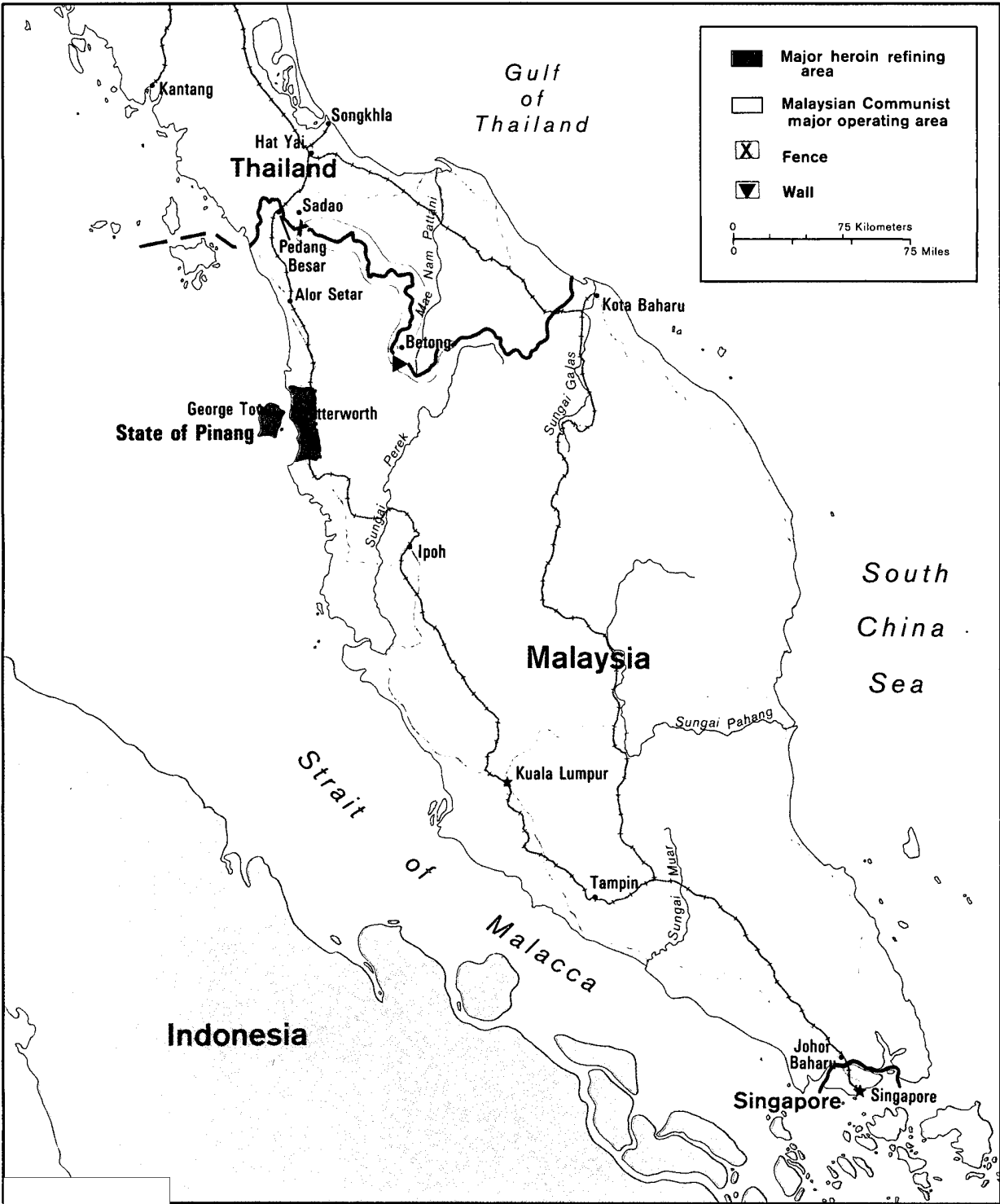
To discourage the development of new addicts, Kuala Lumpur also launched a drug education program aimed at informing the public about the dangers of drug addiction and bringing about attitudinal changes among users, potential users, parents, and the community. The current training program includes preventive education for school counselors and teachers and drug counseling as part of the graduate and post-graduate curriculum at Malaysian universities. [redacted]

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Thai-Malaysian Border



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### The Score Card

In our view, the Malaysian program has made impressive initial progress, and ranks far above most other Third World antinarcotics efforts. Treatment and prevention programs are staffed and operating, and public awareness--an obvious prerequisite for success--has grown apace. The reorganization largely ended interagency turf battles, substantially improving enforcement capabilities countrywide. More importantly, government enforcement personnel have not been subverted by the extensive corruption that has thwarted drug control in other Third World countries. Nevertheless, when measured against its objectives--eliminating drug trafficking and reducing the high levels of drug abuse--the Malaysian program does not fare so well. [redacted]

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### Drug Addiction Still High

A general lack of facilities is hindering any major progress in Malaysia's drug rehabilitation program. The US Embassy reports that the police conduct raids to ferret out addicts only to find no centers available for treating those they find. The seven rehabilitation centers now in place have a combined capacity of only 2,050 patients, and all have long waiting lists. In the ten years ending in 1984, Malaysia was able to treat a total of only 10,000 addicts [redacted]

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[redacted] The number of aftercare facilities and personnel are even more inadequate; overworked medical officers routinely handle over a hundred cases at a time. Physicians, hospital assistants, and occupational therapists are often poorly motivated and trained. At some centers, none of the employees have any academic training in treating drug addiction. Not surprisingly, rehabilitation jobs are seen as "dead-end" positions and are very difficult to fill. According to the US Embassy, the three paramilitary centers have had a number of special difficulties including a series of escape attempts and allegations that inmates were physically maltreated. [redacted]

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Problems such as lack of training and facilities can be remedied over time, but we judge Kuala Lumpur's basic approach to remedying drug addiction also has intrinsic deficiencies. The drug abuse prevention program currently is targeted at parents and young adults--not at the adolescents and pre-adolescents who are most likely to try drugs. In addition, since Malaysian youth are increasingly sent away to school, parental influence itself is becoming more tenuous. [redacted]

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[redacted] the increased awareness and information about narcotics have yet to motivate the general populace. Community involvement in drug abuse programs remains limited, and efforts to mobilize parent groups, village leaders, and Islamic clergy have been slow in getting off the ground. [redacted]

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It is too early to judge whether Malaysia's approach to curing drug users will work. The first group of addicts who began Kuala Lumpur's new two-year rehabilitation program have only recently been released, and no statistics on their recidivism are available. In any case, less than 1 percent of the estimated addict population can now be treated each year. Thus, the program is clearly not able to keep pace with the growing number of addicts--which, based on new cases reported to the government over the past three years has grown by 32,500--and is not likely to cut significantly the pre-1983 national recidivism rate of approximately 80 percent. Moreover, the newly-cured drug addicts almost inevitably return to the social settings which caused their problems initially and have available only limited aftercare to help them maintain their drug-free status. Rehabilitated addicts--despite the "vocational training" received at the centers (typically iron work, furniture building, farming)--face tough competition for jobs. Malaysian employers--like those in other countries--are likely to choose an equally-skilled job applicant over a former addict.

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#### Trafficking Control: Some Limited Success

Stepped up law enforcement was initially successful in disrupting the narcotics trade, but trafficking organizations have quickly adjusted to the new, less permissive environment. Traffickers in Malaysia, for example, are now ordering heroin base rather than morphine to avoid using the controlled substance acetic anhydride in the refining process,

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The use of sea routes to move narcotics from southern Thailand to Malaysia is also becoming more common as traffickers seek to avoid crossing the Thai border by land. Kuala Lumpur's plan to begin constructing a 25-kilometer wall along the border in the Betong area, although directed primarily against Malaysian Communists, may also encourage traffickers to switch to sea transportation.

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The reorganization of the government's antidrug apparatus, coupled with the massive expansion of the police, has resulted in some moderate success at the street level. According to police statistics, heroin seizures increased from 46 kilograms in 1981 to 243 kilograms in 1984, causing the street price to rise during 1985. Preventive detention of traffickers without trial is proving to be a particularly useful tool for police seeking to keep suspected traffickers off the streets. The US Embassy estimates that about 900 drug suspects are now in detention in Malaysia.

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According to the US Embassy, enforcement officials, however, seem to be making no progress against the major traffickers who control the production and transit of drugs through Malaysia and who must be shut down if Malaysia is to control the illicit trade. Many of the police officers added to the antinarcotics units are new, and they still lack the leadership and experience necessary for detailed narcotics investigations. Thus,

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traffickers who are caught and subsequently charged with drug trafficking or held in detention without trial are, by and large, small time operators. At the same time, excessive reliance on detention may be leading to laziness and poor police work. Although the number of detainees is increasing, actual arrests on drug charges declined in 1985, an indication that the police might not be doing the investigative work that would result in trials and convictions. The death penalty, according to the US Embassy, is having little effect against major traffickers, who are rarely caught with drugs in their possession. [redacted]

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In our view, lack of follow-up enforcement of the law controlling acetic anhydride appears to be preventing any progress in reducing heroin processing in Malaysia. Although the law strictly controls the importation and use of acetic anhydride, few violators have been charged, and we judge the chemical remains easy to obtain. Indeed, some is deliberately mislabeled and goes through Customs without being checked. Because chemical shipments from countries known to produce acetic anhydride may be subject to greater scrutiny, traffickers are also transshipping it through second countries to avoid detection, according to the US Embassy. Once in Malaysia, acetic anhydride is very difficult to monitor and can be easily diverted to illegal use. [redacted]

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Although the Pinang State area is the major refining center in Malaysia, we judge the nearly exclusive attention by enforcement officials on that region is resulting in too little enforcement in other areas. The lawless and remote jungle at the Thai-Malaysian border is an ideal location for an illicit activity such as heroin refining. Thai traffickers may already be relocating their heroin production facilities there to avoid enforcement and competition in the Golden Triangle area. The area also could quickly become a safe haven for Malaysian traffickers. [redacted]

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#### Prospects For Improvement

On balance, Malaysia's slow progress is more a result of limited resources and know-how than lack of will. Resources are likely to remain a constraint; the economic downturn in 1986 will probably prevent any sizeable increases in the funds available for narcotics control, particularly enforcement. There are no signs that Malaysia's willingness to take on the drug problem is diminishing, although Musa Hitam's withdrawal from the government because of personal conflicts with Mahathir may temporarily slow Malaysia's impetus. Musa Hitam's personal interest in solving Malaysia's drug problem and his advocacy of expanded antinarcotics cooperation with the United States will be hard to replace. Nevertheless, Kuala Lumpur has not wavered in the face of criticism from international human rights groups about the use of the death penalty and preventive detention. This determination was highlighted recently when Kuala Lumpur hanged two Australians convicted of trafficking and given the death penalty. [redacted]

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Drug abuse prevention is generally less resource-intensive than rehabilitation or enforcement, and Malaysia is considering improvements we judge will make the prevention program more effective. Kuala Lumpur is looking into drug prevention education in secondary schools and has signed an agreement with the US to develop a parent group/private sector drug awareness program. Prime Minister Mahathir's wife, Dr. Siti Hasmah, a widely respected physician, was spurred into action by Mrs. Reagan's conference on drug abuse last year and has taken a personal interest in promoting drug awareness in Malaysia. She sponsored a national conference to launch a "Parent's Movement"--modeled on the US group, "PRIDE"--to fight drug abuse in Malaysia in October 1985, which will be followed by a similar conference at the regional level. Although in the near term, the total number of drug addicts may continue to rise as a result of the expected economic slowdown in Malaysia, the rate of growth of new addicts may already be slowing. The number registered during 1985 was about half that registered in 1984, according to the US Embassy. [redacted]

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Drug trafficking and refining are more intractable problems in a resource-poor environment, and Kuala Lumpur has yet to find an effective way to tackle the major traffickers and users. The traffickers' use of sea routes is virtually unimpeded because of Malaysia's limited maritime enforcement capability, and a shortage of trained personnel almost guarantees slow progress in interdicting narcotics at sea and on land. [redacted]

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In our view, a number of additional measures could make a big difference in helping Malaysia break what is essentially a stalemate between the enforcement community and the drug trade:

- o Kuala Lumpur badly needs special analytical units able to sift raw intelligence on narcotics activities and provide the police with information such as profiles of typical traffickers, methods of operation, and smuggling routes. At present, Malaysian enforcement officials, for example, focus on interdicting narcotics entering Malaysia largely because they do not have good finished intelligence on routes through and out of Malaysia. Though police get impressive interrogation reports. [redacted]

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[redacted] Such analysis would allow the RMP to target traffickers more effectively. [redacted]

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- o With the growing use of sea routes by traffickers, reorganizing the Malaysian maritime enforcement effort--which lacks a clear chain of command--becomes an

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imperative. According to the US Embassy, Malaysia already has an efficient system of vessel registration and some 200 marine patrol boats. Nevertheless, there are 14 agencies involved in maritime search and rescue, law enforcement, and piracy suppression, and coastal surveillance efforts remain ill-coordinated and ineffective, according to the US Embassy. Malaysia's Maritime Enforcement Coordinating Center lacks clear authority to direct the activities of these 14 agencies. Kuala Lumpur needs encouragement to undertake this reorganization as soon as possible, and will also need to find a supplier for the functional training, aircraft, patrol craft, communication sets, and night vision equipment needed to allow the Coordinating Center to carry out its maritime interdiction responsibilities. [redacted]

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- o If its police are to be effective against major narcotics brokers who operate behind the scenes, Malaysia will need to enact a conspiracy law that would allow for the arrest and prosecution of drug traffickers who are not in physical possession of drugs. Such a law would be unlikely, in our judgment, to become a vehicle for official abuse as the Mahathir administration has been relatively restrained in its use of controversial legislation such as detention without trial. [redacted]

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In our view, none of these improvements are likely to take place unless the government maintains strong leadership over the program. Musa Hitam's recent resignation dealt Malaysia's program a potentially serious blow. Restructuring the marine enforcement effort or guiding a conspiracy law through Parliament, for example, requires a full time and committed leader of national stature. Mahathir certainly has the stature and has demonstrated the commitment. He faces other equally urgent issues, however, and already has his hands full with pet projects. Unless he appoints a narcotics czar to oversee both policymaking and implementation of the program, we judge that some of the antinarcotics effort's initial gains could be reversed.

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## Appendix

### Recent Antinarcotics Legislation

Legislation enacted in the past two years includes the:

#### Dangerous Drugs (Amendment) Act

- o Provides for mandatory death penalty for persons caught trafficking narcotics. The law defines trafficking as being in possession of 15 grams or more of heroin, morphine, or a mixture of the two; 1000 grams of raw or processed opium; or 200 grams or more of marijuana. Since 1975 when the death penalty was first introduced in Malaysia, over 30 people have been hanged for drug trafficking with another 54 people appealing or awaiting dates for hanging. As a built-in safeguard against misuse, this law must be passed by Parliament again after five years.

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#### Dangerous Drugs (Special Preventive Measures) Act

- o Empowers the Minister of Home Affairs to order the detention without trial of suspected drug traffickers. The police must inform the detainees of their charges, but do not have to build a case against the trafficker for presentation in a court of law. Every two years an Advisory Board--a panel of six lawyers with half appointed by the Prime Minister and the other half appointed by the King--reviews the case and can extend the detention for an unlimited period if the offender is considered a "continuing security threat." Prior to the enactment of this law, suspected drug traffickers were detained under the 1969 Emergency Ordinance which allows the government to detain suspects for a maximum of two years, although upon release it can put them under "restricted residence" for an additional two years. According to the US Embassy, since the new law's enactment in May, 22 people have been detained with an additional 35 people detained under the Emergency Ordinance transferred to its jurisdiction.

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#### Drug Dependents (Treatment and Rehabilitation) Act

- o Empowers any Police or Customs officer with the permission of the public prosecutor to intercept, detain, or open parcels in the process of being delivered through the post; intercept messages sent or received through telecommunications; intercept or listen to conversations through telecommunications. This act authorizes the police to expand the use of wire telephone taps in narcotics investigations.

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Poisons Ordinance Amendment

- o Provides for imprisonment not exceeding 14 years and not less than three years with whipping of not less than six strokes for possession of acetylating substances such as acetic anhydride without a license. The law also calls for the monitoring of all legal imports of acetic anhydride from the time of entry to the time of use. [REDACTED]

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