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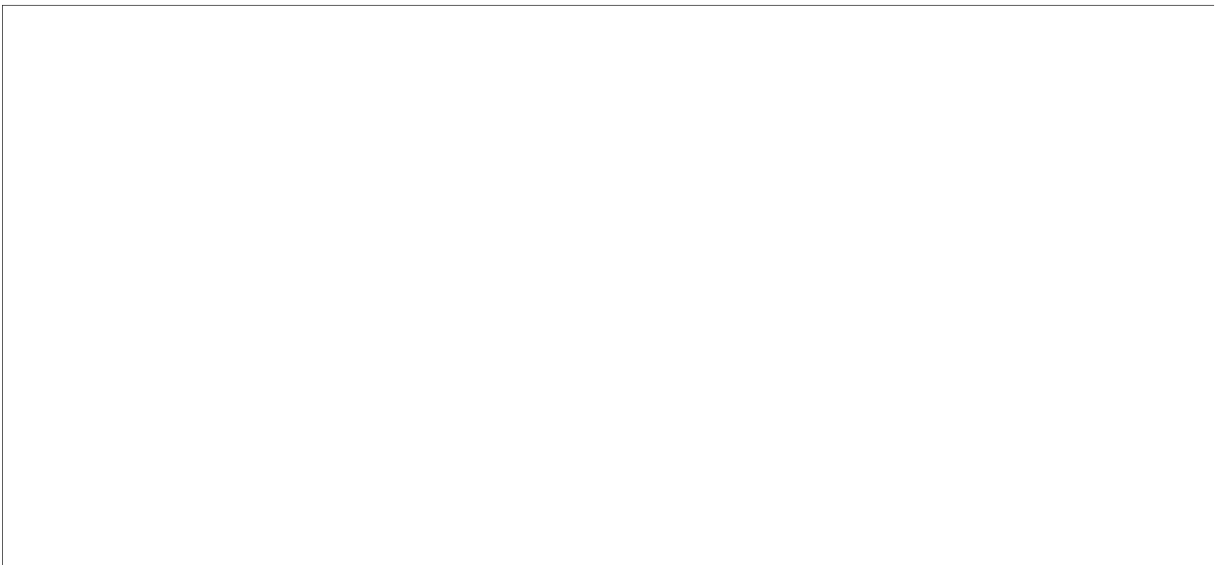
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MEXICO: Authorities had major successes against narcotics traffickers this month. (Page 15)



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MEXICO

Mexican authorities have had major successes against narcotics traffickers this month. From January 13 through 15 they seized 232 kilograms of raw opium gum, arrested 132 people--among them the head of a large network of growers and traffickers--and destroyed one heroin laboratory. The raw opium seized could have been converted into some 23 kilograms of pure heroin.

Roughly half of the opium was seized in highway interddictions from Guadalajara northward. Much of it is believed to have come from the southwestern states of Guerrero and Michoacan, where recent campaigns against the late Lucio Cabanas' guerrilla band had prevented authorities from focusing their full attention on the poppy growers.

A larger, more productive opium-growing area is located in the northwestern states of Chihuahua, Sinaloa, and Durango. [REDACTED] last spring and fall revealed almost 1,500 opium poppy fields in a 750-square-mile mountainous area. It is almost certain that many more fields exist in the countryside surrounding the inspected area.

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Mexico as a whole is the leading source of heroin smuggled into the US. Roughly 60 to 70 percent of the heroin seized or purchased clandestinely by narcotics agents in the US last year was of Mexican origin.

Large-scale seizures and arrests like last week's have not been the rule for Mexican authorities. Statistics in recent years show that arrests, drug seizures, and the amount of opium and marijuana crops destroyed in Mexico are up, but large quantities of drugs are still entering the US through sections of the border that are not patrolled. [REDACTED]

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US assistance in the form of training, equipment, technical aids, and helicopters should eventually help Mexico make inroads on the narcotics growing and trafficking. In the meantime, however, Mexico will remain a convenient country for traffickers to operate in-- interdiction efforts like those of last week notwithstanding. [redacted]

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[redacted] CIA

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