

# Asian syndicates now top target for liaison team

Kuala Lumpur — or as it is more generally known K.L. — is the longest established of the Australian Federal Police Liaison Posts, having been set up in 1973 by the former Federal Bureau of Narcotics.

At that time, Malaysia, and Penang in particular, was the main source of supply for heroin entering Australia. Today, Malaysia is still an important link between heroin produced in the Golden Triangle and the Australian market.

The K.L. Liaison Office, presently staffed by Chief Inspector David Schramm and Acting Station Sergeant Denis Gray, also has had responsibility for Singapore, Brunei and, prior to the opening of a liaison office there, the Philippines. When the Singapore office opens in the first half of this year, the strength of K.L. is expected to be reduced to one officer with a clerical assistant.

David Schramm believes that Liaison Officers in K.L. are probably more fortunate than those in some other areas. About 90 per cent of the liaison work in K.L. is conducted with the police and the balance with Customs and other agencies.

"Malaysia has a national police force which means rapport need be established with only two or three areas within the force to get access to the AFP's areas of interest," he said.

"The structure of the force is similar to other Commonwealth countries while the legal system is based on British law and is similar to that in use in Australia. It is not difficult to find points of common interest when talking to Malaysian police. Their methods of operation are similar to most Western-style forces.

"Malaysians also have a high regard for Australia and Australians and the personal relationships

Continuing our series on overseas AFP Liaison Posts.

which have been developed over the years have made the job easier."

Malaysia has a sizeable drug abuse problem and is at present mounting a national anti-drug campaign. Its drug laws are now among the strictest in the world with the mandatory death penalty for possession of more than 15 grams of heroin or 100 grams of cannabis.

To date, 26 people have been hanged for drug offences, but since the clamp-down on drugs began in mid-1983, the number of people charged, and facing the death penalty, is over 600. Two Australians are included in this number.

David said the nature of liaison work in K.L. had changed considerably over the past five years. Originally Penang was the focus of attention and liaison staff spent a good deal of time assisting Malaysian police by providing information about Australian criminals suspected of being involved in drug trafficking there.

In recent years the trend had moved towards greater involvement of Asian syndicates, rather than Australians.

"We now have to rely more heavily on information from the Royal Malaysian Police and our own investigations in Australia," he said.

Much time is spent in the office at the Australian High Commission. All information and requests to the Malaysian police are confirmed in writing and this often requires the



• Denis Gray, Sonny Tait of the Royal Malaysian Police Anti Narcotics Branch, and David Schramm compare notes at Police Headquarters in K.L.

preparation of briefing papers based on information provided from AFP Headquarters.

A good deal of time also is spent with the Anti Narcotics Division at Police Headquarters, and there are also regular visits to Penang and Singapore.

What is the most difficult part of running a liaison office in South-East Asia?

"The main problem is attempting to maintain reciprocity in our intelligence exchange," David Schramm said. "We are constantly asking host enforcement agencies for information and assistance. But we are seldom able to provide them with unsolicited information of benefit to their operations.

"Too often it is a one-way traffic, and we have to rely solely on goodwill. That is why it is important that our investigators in Australia are aware of the need to make sure that any information about foreign nationals or syndicates is forwarded to the International Division so that Liaison posts can be informed."

What does it take to make a good liaison officer in a place like K.L.?

"Firstly, the person must want the job very much, because it is a commitment not only for the officer but the family as well," David said.

"In addition to the investigative experience, the person must above all be adaptable and capable of mixing easily both within an Australian Mission and with Asians.

"Language is not at present a problem as all officer levels of police and Customs speak excellent English as well as the national language, Bahasa Malaysia. However, tuition in schools is now in Bahasa rather than English.

"The person must be prepared for a challenge and for a considerable settling-in period, both to the job and foreign living. It takes probably six months for a family to adjust and for an officer to be able to concentrate fully on the job.

"But once settled in, it can be very rewarding and is certainly experience that cannot be gained in Australia," he said.

K.L. has a typical tropical climate, with a temperature range of 23 to 33 degrees Celsius, and is situated in a valley 25 kms from the coast, tending to miss the cooler breezes of the coastal areas.

All major shopping centres, most motor vehicles and certainly the

High Commission are air conditioned.

Malaysia's population compares with Australia's — around 15 million. Fifty per cent are Malays, 30 per cent Chinese, 10 per cent Indian and the balance is made up of other ethnic groups.

Living conditions, by South-East Asian standards, are very good. The country has a stable economy and currency, and services such as telephone, electricity and mail all work efficiently.

The road system is generally good, although traffic in K.L. is becoming a problem.

David Schramm's wife Sandra found it particularly so.

"After Canberra, the thought of driving in K.L. was at first quite terrifying," she said. "However, I quickly realised that I would be spending a lot of time in the house if I didn't drive. We have two teenage daughters and we could not let them use the bus system or taxis on a regular basis. So I decided I should drive.

"It really is quite easy once you get used to the traffic, but you have to be careful of other drivers, particularly motorcycles of which there are thousands. They have a habit of doing things without warning.

"Nearly all the wives at the High Commission drive and I would recommend anyone coming to be prepared to do so."

Sandra found that K.L. is well catered for with shopping.

"There are major food supermarkets that stock most everything you can buy in Australia," she said. "Prices are a little higher but that is catered for in your allowances. Good quality meat from Australia and New Zealand is readily available, as are most of the fresh vegetables that Australians like.

"The range of clothing is not as good as in Australia and larger sizes in dresses, shoes and trousers are sometimes difficult to come by. However, the cost of tailoring and dressmaking is low and most people have clothes made," she said.

One highlight of living in K.L. is the food. Almost every kind of European and Asian food is available, and even roadside stalls can be safely used by Europeans.

Recreation, however, is limited. For the sports-minded, there are bowling alleys and tennis courts readily available.

Most weekends see families, par-



• The old and the new in K.L. architecture. In the foreground are the law courts which date back to British Administration days.



## BACK-UP

ticularly those with children, around the swimming pool at the High Commission, which also has an active social club to arrange activities and run such facilities as a 'teen centre'.

People who want to get away for the weekend usually go to Fraser's Hill, a hill station about three hours' drive from K.L. The weather is pleasantly cool and the area caters for golf, tennis and bushwalking, with guest house-style accommodation and an international standard hotel.

For the sailing enthusiast, there is Port Dickson, on the Malacca Straits, about two hours from K.L. The water is not recommended for swimming (the Straits are reputedly the most polluted waters in the world), however there is a resident sailing club and a number of major hotels.

Rail transport is both cheap and good and is becoming more popular. Local air travel is more expensive, but still cheaper than in Australia.

Schooling in K.L. is varied. A number of pre-schools are available and most of the good ones use English as the medium of instruction.

There are three primary/secondary schools. Alice Smith School follows the British curriculum and caters for children aged 4-12. It has a high standard and gives emphasis to academic studies. The Garden School also follows the British system but takes children to High School level (aged 12-17 years).

The International School of K.L. (ISKL) is a non-profit making school run by a board with additional funds provided by the U.S. Government. It follows the U.S. curriculum and takes children from kindergarten to the equivalent of Grade 12 in Australia.

Most Australian High Commission children attend this school. It has excellent facilities, good teachers, including some from Australia, and is generally held in high regard. The High Commission provides a school bus for the Australian children.

The Schramms have both daughters at ISKL, Katie, aged 15, and Fiona, 13.

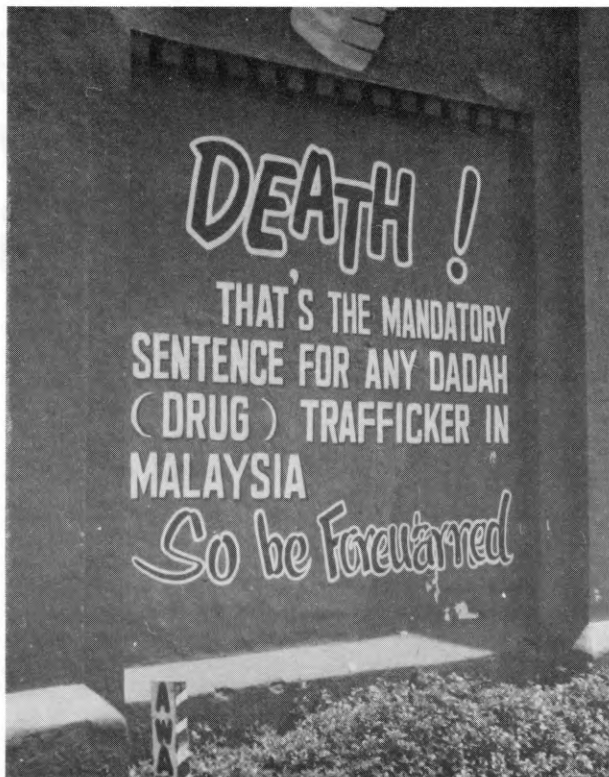
Said Katie: "At first I found it strange. There are kids from many different countries and the system is different from Australia."

"But once I got used to it I really enjoyed it. In fact I like school more here than I did in Australia. The teachers are really good."

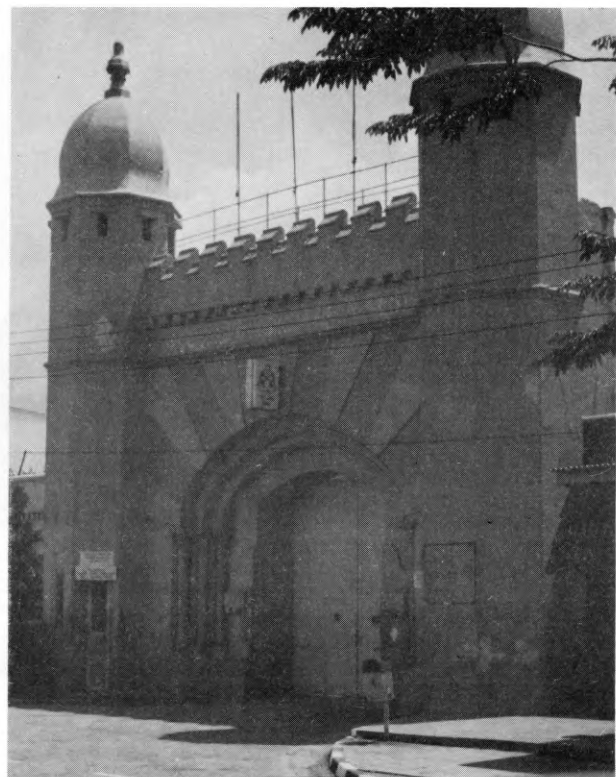
"We start earlier than at home — the bus picks us up at 7 a.m. — and we finish at 2.30 p.m. The school year follows the northern hemisphere, with our long holiday from June to August, and three weeks off at Christmas."

Denis Gray and his wife Sandra, with their 18-year-old son David and 15-year-old daughter Karen, have been in K.L. for seven months and are happy with the schooling. David was in his last year of school in Australia when he moved to K.L. and was able to sit for his matriculation exam at the High Commission. He is presently attending ISKL, taking supplementary subjects and will graduate with an American Graduation Diploma in June.

"The exposure to a new system with children from all over the world is certainly beneficial," Denis said. "However, anyone with children taking their last two years' schooling should seriously consider the alternative of boarding



• Above: A sign warning of the dangers of drug trafficking. Right: Gates to Pudu gaol. In the past 8 years, 26 people have been hanged for drug offences in K.L.



• Outside the Australian High Commission in K.L.

school, particularly if the children are contemplating tertiary education.

"Most people at the High Commission with older children have them in boarding school in Australia. Although it breaks up the family, it is not really as bad as it seems. Overseas conditions of service allow the children to fly to the post three times a year for school holidays and the education costs are met by the Government with a contribution from parents."

Housing standards in K.L. are good with a typical residence being a two-storey, four-bedroom bungalow with servants' quarters.

Sandra Gray has no complaints about her house.

"The High Commission looks after the maintenance which means if something breaks down you can get it fixed quickly," she said. "Our house is quite a deal bigger than the one we have in Sydney and of course there is a lot more to keep clean."

"Thankfully we have an amah (maid) which is a necessity in this climate. Having help in the house allows wives a lot more freedom to get out and for mothers with young children it is a particular benefit."

Sandra Schramm finds her house is very comfortable and good for entertaining.

"Being a housewife in an over-

seas post is very different from Australia. In Malaysia it is impossible for a wife to work, other than at the High Commission, but she certainly won't be bored," she said.

"It took me some time to get used to having staff — we have an amah and a part-time gardener — and running the family budget is not always easy as the cost of food,

particularly Western food, is considerably higher than in Australia.

"Entertaining takes a fair amount of organisation and there always seems to be something on involving the children at school, or High Commission activities.

"I thought I would miss working but find there are usually not enough hours in the day. The last 2½ years have flown," she said.

On living in Asia generally, David Schramm believes people sometimes go overseas with preconceived ideas.

"It is no good thinking you are going to hate it or, alternatively, that everything will be like it is at home. It is different, but if you adapt and enjoy the positive aspects and don't let the frustrations caused by shortcomings get the better of you, it can be very pleasant," he said.

Said Sandra Schramm: "For a woman living in Asia it is perhaps more difficult than for men. Here, it is very much a man's world. Malaysia in particular, because it is predominantly a Muslim country, requires women to be aware of local customs, particularly in relation to dress which is more modest than Australians would wear in a tropical climate."

"But these are not major difficulties and the key is to take a positive approach and enjoy what the country has to offer."

## First for Hong Kong

**The AFP now has a permanent Liaison Officer stationed in Hong Kong.**

He is Detective Inspector Brian Bennett, who took up his appointment as First Secretary (Police Liaison) at the Australian Commission in Hong Kong recently.

Since his arrival, Detective Inspector Bennett has been busy making contacts within the Hong Kong Police Force and with Customs and other Government bodies with whom he will be dealing.

His arrival on the island was heralded as a first by the Hong Kong police newspaper 'OffBeat'.

He told 'OffBeat': "My job here is not operational, it is purely liaison. The posting of an officer to Hong Kong does not reflect any inadequacies in the liaison between here and Australia."

"In fact, it's just the opposite. The

liaison has been so good that it has caused an increased workload of police forces in Australia and it's to help with this that I've been sent here.

"The intelligence and inquiry service provided for Australia by the Hong Kong Police and other agencies such as Customs and ICAC have been excellent."

A native of Coffs Harbour, NSW, Detective Inspector Bennett started his working life as a Customs officer and later joined the Federal Bureau of Narcotics when it opened its Brisbane office in 1971.

In 1978 he was posted as the FBN's Liaison Officer to Kuala Lumpur from where he covered the whole of Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Indonesia, the Philippines, Guam, Thailand, Japan and Hong Kong.