

MALAYSIA STATES ITS CASE ON DRUG LAW

By Saad Hashim

LONDON, Thurs. — A moving TV documentary on Malaysia's strict drug laws, which include the mandatory death sentence, was shown on British television last night during which Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad states the country's case.

Although the number of traffickers who were caught by the police had increased since 1983, and could face execution, the Prime Minister said: "We have to carry out this death penalty because it would not be fair to those who had already been hanged and their families."

The hour-long programme by Yorkshire television with the title *The Prime Minister, the junkie and the boys on death row*, received full backing from the Malaysian Government since the 1986 hanging of two Australians which was described by Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke as barbaric.

The crew was allowed into the Kajang prison to talk to some of those on the death row, scene of flogging in the facility, the Perlop Drug Rehabilitation Centre and to film police drug raids in Kuala Lumpur and Penang.

The "junkie" featured in the programme was Aris, who in excellent English, also puts the case of junkies like him who could go to the gallows if found in possession of more than 15gm of pure heroin or 200gm of ganja.

For the British public whose young generation is facing increasing threat from the more lethal drug like the crack, Malaysia's stiff law is viewed with mixed feeling.

"I would agree that Malaysia's drug laws are barbaric, given that the main drug pushers escape and the small fry die," says the *Daily Express* TV columnist Compton Miller.

According to the programme, in the early 80s there were already 100,000 registered drug

addicts but in 1983, the crackdown on pushers had begun in earnest.

So far, 147 prisoners have been hanged and since 1983, about 4,000 have been arrested under Section 39(b) of the Dangerous Drug Act and out of this, 1,000 could face hanging in the next few years.

In stating Malaysia's case, Dr Mahathir said that if murder is regarded a serious crime, then this widespread murder should be regarded as a more serious crime.

"Murder involves one individual, drug trafficking involves the whole nation. A drug trafficker deliberately sets out to murder people eventually.

"It is a slow death as far as we are concerned. It causes a lot of problems for the addicts, his family, the whole nation and the community.

"In the end, you find these people are really dead, walking dead.

"They are no longer people. Almost everybody in Malaysia has somebody

in their families a drug addict. One of my own relatives is an addict.

"Once they have the need, they will do anything. They are not capable of rational thinking. Imagine people like this populating the nation."

As for his side of the story, junkie Aris was at first seen injecting himself with the stuff.

"The stuff is a monster. If it gets you it gets you. I have been an addict for 20 years and I have been trying to kick the habit," says Aris in his flawless English.

He said many people whom he knows buy the stuff enough to be hanged, but it's for their own use. "They are not pushers. I agree traffickers should be hanged."

"The amount you read in the papers is so little. People like me know that. In Penang, the price is cheaper. So for three or four hundred dollars, I can get three or four packets.

"They are for my own use but under the law, this

amount could send me to the gallows," he said.

Dr Mahathir said: "Nobody likes to pass the death sentence. Nobody likes to terminate anybody's life no matter what crime they committed. Left to themselves, most judges apparently would not pass the death sentence.

"So, to make it effective, we must make sure the sentence is passed. The matter is so serious we cannot leave it to the whims and fancies of the judges.

"It is grossly unfair if somebody gets a lenient judge, another gets a hanging judge. So there should be no exception. It's better to make it uniform sentence."

The Prime Minister said the convicted person could always appeal for mercy from the Pardons Board.

"I have sat in a Pardons Board meeting and it was really devastating that we had to reject the appeal and confirm the death sentence," he added.