



The State Department web site below is a permanent electro information released prior to January 20, 2001. Please see [y](#) material released since President George W. Bush took office. This site is not updated so external links may no longer func [us](#) with any questions about finding information.

NOTE: External links to other Internet sites should not be c endorsement of the views contained therein.



## U.S. Department of State

### Malaysia Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1997

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, January 30, 1998.

---

#### MALAYSIA

Malaysia is a federation of 13 states with a parliamentary system of government based on periodic multiparty elections in which the ruling National Front coalition has held power since 1957. The coalition headed by Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad increased its majority in a 1995 general election. Opposition parties actively contest elections, although they hold only about 12 percent of the seats in the federal Parliament. An opposition party controls one state government. The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary, however, government-sponsored constitutional amendments and legislation have undermined judicial independence and increased executive influence over the judiciary in sensitive cases.

The Royal Malaysian Police have primary responsibility for internal security matters. The police report to and are under the effective control of the Minister of Home Affairs. The Prime Minister also holds the Home Affairs portfolio. There have been instances of abuse by some police officers.

Foreign direct investment has played a vital role in economic development. High growth rates in exports of manufactured goods, such as semiconductors, have greatly reduced reliance on traditional commodity exports such as tin, rubber, and palm oil. Consistently strong economic growth has led to significant reductions in poverty, an improved standard of living, and more equal income distribution. In the second half of 1997, the effects of the regional financial crisis, in addition to growing international concerns over economic policy, contributed to a marked depreciation of the ringgit (the national currency) and a substantial decline in the Kuala Lumpur stock exchange.

The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, there were problems in some areas. The Government continued to arrest and detain citizens without trial, and prolonged pretrial detention is a problem. The Government sometimes limited judicial independence and freedom of assembly, association, speech, and the press. Partly as a result of these limits, opposition parties could not compete on equal terms with the long-ruling governing coalition. A Western correspondent was sentenced to 3 months' imprisonment for contempt of court in a case that raised questions about freedom of the press and judicial impartiality. A United Nations special rapporteur and a prominent jurist faced libel charges for their criticism of the judiciary. The trial and harassment of a prominent human rights activist on criminal charges under the Publications Act also continued. Religious worship is subject to some restrictions. The Government continued to impose long-term restrictions on movement without due process hearings. Violence against women and child abuse remain problems. Police did not always act on reports of domestic violence. Some discrimination against indigenous people and ethnic minorities, and restrictions on worker rights, persisted.

## **RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**

### **Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom from:**

#### **a. Political and Other Extrajudicial Killing**

There were no reports of political killings.

In a June raid on illegal aliens in Johor, soldiers killed one illegal alien. Four soldiers were later charged with culpable homicide not amounting to murder; at year's end the case was still pending. Because of this incident, the Defense Minister and Police Inspector General later announced an agreement on guidelines for future raids.

Human rights groups also raised questions about several cases of prisoners who died while in police custody. In January the father of a suspect allegedly found hanged in his cell while being detained without trial under the Dangerous Drugs Act (after being acquitted on criminal charges) filed a complaint alleging police abuse. In June a suspected serial rapist being escorted by four policemen was shot and killed "after a struggle." In August a handcuffed Indonesian suspected of theft died of severe head wounds after he fell to the ground while being escorted by police officers.

#### **b. Disappearance**

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

#### **c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment**

There continued to be allegations that police officers abused criminal suspects and illegal alien detainees during interrogation and detention. Abuses included strong psychological pressure and sometimes physical mistreatment. In some cases, authorities have investigated police officials for such abuses, but, because the Government does not routinely release information on the results of the investigations, whether those responsible for abuses are punished is not always known.

In September police announced the suspension of an officer pending a criminal investigation for the beating of a 14-year-old girl.

Criminal law prescribes caning as an additional punishment to imprisonment for those convicted of

some nonviolent crimes such as narcotics possess