



PAHANG PLANTERS, ALL MARKED FOR DEATH BY THE BANDITS, MEET AT BENTONG TO DISCUSS COMMON DEFENSE. FOREGROUND: THE GUNS THEY CARRIED TO THE MEETING

MALAYA—Rich but Uneasy

Its rubber economy is booming. So are its Red bandits' guns

PHOTOGRAPHED FOR LIFE BY HOWARD SOCHUREK

Last week the Malayan peninsula, an area long identified with crocodile-ridden jungles and lonely rubber plantations, bore an incongruous resemblance to the Chicago of 1928. Many residents went about in armored passenger cars, paid large sums for "protection," carried and regularly used Tommy guns and occasionally died by sudden bullets or tossed "pineapples." And, as was Chicago during the '20s stock market boom, the 51,000-square-mile peninsula which forms Asia's southernmost tip is surcharged with the wild excitement of enormous and unexpectedly gained wealth.

The reasons are historic and simple: Malaya produces virtually half the world's natural

rubber and today the world wants all the rubber it can get (pp. 142, 143). So the price has leaped from 17¢ a pound in 1949 to as high as 86¢, and Malaya is in the grip of a tremendous boom. Native workers ride to work in taxis, buy radios two at a time. Rubber speculators bank hundreds of thousands of dollars in a month.

The lethal fly in this fat ointment is "The Malayan Races Liberation Army," 5,000 ragged, fanatical Communists, mostly Chinese and known locally as "bandits." Since 1948 they have attacked plantations, killing, bombing and burning, or shooting policemen and throwing flaming benzine into

crowded buses in Singapore. The British have 25,000 troops, 110,000 civil police ranged against them (total Malaya population: 6 million), but the best they can do is kill an average of three bandits a day. For the bandits have two allies: not Russia nor Red China which are too far away to send material help, but the dense Malay jungle from which they operate, and the obvious advantages of being Chinese in a white-controlled land almost half of whose population is Chinese. Now terrorist acts are multiplying, and Malaya's up-country planters are getting all the rubber they can out of their trees. They only hope that when they have to they can get themselves out too.



ARMORED CARS like this rebuilt Mercury and jeep (top) are necessary protection against snipers

on all "estates" (large plantations). Barbed wire circles the homes, which are floodlighted at night.



NO MAN'S LAND of 120 acres on a Pahang estate was abandoned because repeated bandit raids so frightened the

PLANTATION PERILS IN "THE EMERGENCY"

In Malaya the current unrest is known as "The Emergency." In the towns along the coasts The Emergency is a constant anxiety. But on the interior's 2,300 big (100 or more acres) estates or the 360,000 small ones carved out of the matlike jungle, The Emergency is pure, heart-clutching terror. At any hour bandits may steal out of the nearby underbrush, singly to snipe at workers or in handfuls to ambush travelers, attack homes, steal



UNDER GUARD, workmen push a trolley-load of latex sheets to the Lanchang estate smokehouse for smoking, which is the last major step before marketing.



ESTATE NURSERY cares for workers' children while their parents tap the trees.



CAPS of bandits killed by patrols hang in Raub police station.



tree tappers that they would not work there. Here an armed patrol walks through the burned-out workers' quarters.



MOMENT OF SILENCE, a tribute to eight of their number killed during The Emergency, is

observed by Pahang planters' meeting. Pahang is the most remote and dangerous of Malay states.

rubber or quietly slash valuable trees by the thousands and thus cripple their production. The bandits ruthlessly kill policemen for their guns, force tribute from the native villages and attack the ones they suspect of informing against them. Sometimes they set fire to the bamboo houses and throw fleeing children back into the flames.

To protect themselves and their workers, the planters maintain squads

of 20 to 40 special constables, who stand guard 24 hours a day. Every planter carries a pistol at his hip and often a Tommy gun cradled in his arms. His wife travels in an armored auto when she goes shopping in town, and every plantation has its arsenal of Bren guns, hand grenades, carbines and submachine guns. Planters pay a heavy price for their heavy profits; in some areas more than half of them have been killed in a single year.



ARMS INSPECTION is routine for Jenderak estate constables.



SLASHED BY BANDITS, trees should "rest" six months, are now tapped anyway.



BURNING RAILWAY BRIDGE near Kerdau, set on fire by bandits, is wet down by some rail workers. The derailling of Malaya's few trains is also frequent.