

THAILAND-MALAYSIA BORDER: A STRATEGIC ROUTE FOR ILLICIT DRUG TRADE FROM THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE

*(SEMPADAN THAILAND-MALAYSIA: LALUAN PERHUBUNGAN STRATEGIK
BAGI PERDAGANGAN HARAM DADAH DARI KAWASAN SEGI TIGA EMAS)*

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Abstract

Nestled between Burma (Myanmar), Thailand, and Laos, the Golden Triangle has long been a critical nexus for illicit drug production and trafficking, establishing itself as one of the world's most notorious hubs for the global drug trade. The region's geographical location, coupled with its porous borders, has made it an ideal centre for the cultivation and trafficking of opium, heroin, and other illicit substances. The proximity of Malaysia to Thailand, in particular, has made the Thailand-Malaysia border a significant transit route for smuggling drugs from the Golden Triangle into Malaysia. This study delves into the drug trafficking operations originating from this region, with particular emphasis on the 1970s and 1980s, when the flow of illicit substances into Malaysia surged. During this period, Malaysia faced increasing challenges due to the influx of drugs, prompting the government to take decisive action. Using a qualitative methodology by analysing archival documents from Arkib Negara Malaysia and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) reports, this research highlights how Malaysia responded to the escalating drug trade. The study traces the evolution of Malaysia's drug control policies, culminating in the country's aggressive stance in the 1980s. In 1983, the government declared a "war on drugs," introducing harsh penalties and intensifying law enforcement efforts. Moreover, the study underscores the importance of cross-border cooperation in tackling the drug trade. The Thailand-Malaysia border, heavily impacted by Golden Triangle trafficking, led to increased collaboration between the two nations' intelligence agencies. Malaysia also worked closely with ASEAN to bolster regional efforts aimed at curbing the spread of drug trade across Southeast Asia. The study concludes that these multi-pronged responses were essential in combating the growing threat posed by the Golden Triangle's drug trade in the latter half of the 20th century.

Keywords: Thailand-Malaysia border, Golden Triangle, Malaysia, drug smuggling, drug trafficking

Abstrak

Terletak antara Burma (Myanmar), Thailand dan Laos, Segi Tiga Emas telah muncul sebagai pusat utama bagi pengeluaran dan penyeludupan dadah haram, menjadikannya salah satu hab yang terkenal di dunia bagi perdagangan dadah global. Lokasi geografinya yang strategik dan sempadannya yang mudah dimasuki, menjadikannya pusat yang ideal bagi penanaman dan penyeludupan opium, heroin dan bahan terlarang lain. Kedudukan Malaysia yang berhampiran dengan Thailand telah menjadikan sempadan Thailand-Malaysia sebagai

lalu penting bagi penyeludupan dadah dari Segi Tiga Emas ke Malaysia. Kajian ini menyelidiki operasi penyeludupan dadah yang berasal dari kawasan ini, dengan penekanan khusus diberikan pada tahun 1970-an dan 1980-an memperlihatkan aliran bahan terlarang ini telah meningkat secara mendadak ke Malaysia. Berhadapan dengan cabaran peningkatan isu dadah, hal ini telah mendorong kerajaan Malaysia untuk mengambil tindakan tegas dalam memerangi dadah. Menggunakan metodologi kualitatif dengan menganalisis dokumen arkib daripada Arkib Negara Malaysia dan laporan Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), kajian ini menelusuri bagaimana Malaysia bertindak balas terhadap peningkatan perdagangan dadah dari kawasan Segi Tiga Emas. Kajian ini meneroka evolusi dasar kawalan dadah Malaysia yang mencapai kemuncaknya apabila Malaysia mengambil pendirian tegas pada tahun 1980-an. Pada tahun 1983, kerajaan Malaysia telah mengisytiharkan "perang terhadap dadah" dengan memperkenalkan hukuman berat dan memperhebatkan penguatkuasaan undang-undang terhadap dadah. Selain itu, kajian ini juga menekankan kepentingan kerjasama merentasi sempadan dalam menangani perdagangan dadah. Sempadan Thailand-Malaysia, yang terjejas teruk dengan aktiviti penyeludupan dadah dari kawasan Segi Tiga Emas ini telah membawa kepada peningkatan kerjasama antara agensi perisikan kedua-dua negara. Malaysia turut bekerjasama rapat dengan ASEAN bagi memperkukuh usaha serantau dalam membendung perdagangan dadah di seluruh Asia Tenggara. Kajian ini menyimpulkan bahawa pelbagai pendekatan tindak balas oleh Malaysia ini adalah penting dalam usaha memerangi ancaman yang semakin meningkat yang timbul melalui perdagangan dadah di Segi Tiga Emas pada separuh kedua abad ke-20.

Kata Kunci: *Sempadan Thailand-Malaysia, Segi Tiga Emas, Malaysia, penyeludupan dadah, pengedaran dadah*

INTRODUCTION

Due to Malaysia's proximity to Thailand, the Thailand-Malaysia border became a central hub for drug trafficking and smuggling in across Asia and Europe, especially of drugs from the Golden Triangle in the north (1965/0000773). Although Malaysia did not cultivate opium, it served as a transit point for heroin processing, accompanied by a substantial and increasing population of heroin addicts. Heroin, derived from opium poppies cultivated in the Golden Triangle area encompassing Burma, Thailand, and Laos, was transported through Thailand and Burma en route to Malaysia and Singapore. It was ultimately intended for Europe, Australia, and the United States (US)' markets. The US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) indicates that American and European consumers were not acquiring narcotics in Malaysia; instead, they were sourcing their narcotics from Thailand. (Study Mission to Korea, Thailand, Burma, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Hawaii 1988)

Previous research by McCoy, Read, and Adams (1972), Chouvy (2013), and Amer and Noraini (2022) examines how the CIA's support of KMT forces in the Golden Triangle area against communist insurgents along the Thai-Laos border indirectly fuelled the regional and international trafficking of heroin and opium. The Golden Triangle's drug production turned into a source of revenue for the local KMT members. This was made worse by the fact that heroin addiction was becoming more widespread among American soldiers serving in Vietnam, which increased drug trafficking from the Golden Triangle. Research conducted by Maung (1991) and Chouvy (2013) elucidates that Thailand has developed into a significant conduit for drug trafficking originating from the Golden Triangle. Thailand has historically served as a conventional conduit for Burmese opium and heroin, maintaining its status as the primary distribution point in Southeast Asia. (Chouvy 2013) The engagement of prominent figures within the Thai military, including General Phin Choonhavan, Sarit Thanarat, and Phao Sriyanond, alongside the KMT's Commander General Li Mi, in the opium trade significantly contributed to the flourishing drug industry in the Golden Triangle. Rogers (2008) similarly emphasises that General Phao influenced the drug trafficking operations within the Golden Triangle by providing protection to the KMT members along the Thai border. Rogers' study highlights initiatives undertaken by Southeast Asian nations to address drug trafficking within their borders, particularly in the Golden Triangle. While the study covers most of Burma, Thailand, Laos,

and ASEAN's preventative efforts in the 1990s, it neglects a critical time in the 1970s and 1980s that provides a fundamental understanding of how Malaysia combated the illicit drug trade.

During the period when drug-trafficking syndicates flourished in the Golden Triangle, Thailand became the foremost producer of heroin and the primary supplier of narcotics to Malaysia (Amer 2023). Amer (2023) examines the dynamics of drug trafficking originating from Thailand's Golden Triangle and its implications for Malaysia's political security. According to the study, various forms of drug trafficking threats originating from Thailand's Golden Triangle, detailing the implications for Malaysia's security includes the potential jeopardisation of diplomatic relations with Thailand, the infiltration of organised crime syndicates smuggling firearms into Malaysia, and the moral degradation observed among law enforcement officials in the border region. Although the study emphasises the effects of drug trafficking to Malaysia from Thailand's Golden Triangle, it overlooks the way illicit drug trade and smuggling were carried out and neglects the implications of drug trafficking on Malaysia's security, particularly during the 1980s when the country enacted stricter measures against illegal drug trade and abuse.

A study by Amer & Noraini (2022) examines the connection between drug smuggling and trafficking from Thailand's Golden Triangle to Malaysia's security. Given that the current security measures to prevent drug smuggling have not been resolved, the study suggests the Malaysian government to delay decriminalising drug addicts in the country. The authors assert that, due to the involvement of major powers in the Golden Triangle, which encompasses Thailand, drug addiction in Malaysia should be considered a transnational issue. The intricate nature of drug trafficking and smuggling in Malaysia suggests that decriminalising drug users might be distinctly categorised from drug trafficking and smuggling, provided that the primary source of drug addiction from illegal suppliers is eradicated. The ramifications of drug trafficking and smuggling extend beyond Malaysia's security, impacting both its economic stability and social structure. Amer (2022) asserts that drug smuggling from the region has profoundly impacted Malaysia's economic security, leading to money laundering by drug syndicates and financial expenditures on the recovery and rehabilitation of drug users (Amer 2022). According to Amer, Noraini, and Sofian (2021), the social consequences of drug usage would jeopardise the lives of Malaysian adolescents and damage the reputation of civil personnel, particularly within security forces. Drug smuggling in Malaysia is not limited to Thais; another adjacent country is also active in the unlawful trade. A study examining the history, modus operandi, and challenges of drug smuggling on Langkawi Island is conducted by Muhammad Isa, Marina, and Zarina (2022). The study confirms that the presence of foreign drug syndicates on the island and the influx of Burmese migrants in Bukit Melulut, Langkawi, have intensified drug trafficking in the area.

Based on a significant number of existing literatures regarding Malaysia's connection to drug trafficking and smuggling from Thailand's Golden Triangle, most studies have concentrated on the implications of these illicit activities on Malaysia's security, economic and social stability in the contemporary context. Most studies neglect the mechanisms employed by Malaysian authorities to combat drug trafficking and smuggling in the 1970s and 1980s, which have had a lasting influence on how Malaysia continues to address the drug issue today. Additionally, there has been insufficient analysis of how Malaysia addressed the implications of the illicit drug trade flowing from the Golden Triangle through the Thailand-Malaysia border during the 1970s and 1980s. Therefore, this study aims to examines the strategies employed by the Malaysian government to combat drug trafficking and smuggling from the Golden Triangle throughout the 1970s and 1980s. It also explores how the Malaysia-Thailand border became a key route for the illicit drug trade originating from the Golden Triangle. The Thailand-Malaysia border not only became a major route for the drug trade but also emerged as a central hub for drug trafficking within Malaysia. This prompted the Malaysian government to launch a comprehensive anti-drug campaign, which included stringent enforcement measures aimed at curbing these illicit drug activities beginning in the 1980s.

GROWTH OF THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE

Spanning an area of 77,000 square miles, the Golden Triangle intersects in between Burma, Thailand, and Laos. The name acquired from the trade of gold ingots and drugs between the early traffickers in the cities of Mai Sai, Thailand, and Tachileik, Burma (Lintner 1994). Before it emerged as the centre of global illegal opium production, the Golden Triangle was developed in the Shan States of Burma. Shan was divided into special regions: Shan State No. 1 (Kokang government), Shan State No. 2 (Wa area), Shan State No. 3 (Shan State Army), and Shan State No. 4 (Mengla government). After Burma gained independence in 1948, its opium production was limited to around thirty tonnes to satisfy local demand in the Shan States, mainly for poppy cultivation (Lintner 1994). In 1949, following the defeat of the Kuomintang (KMT) by the Communist Party of China in the Chinese Civil War, KMT forces dispersed across Burma, Thailand, and Laos, instead of retreating to Taiwan. The KMT took control of the Golden Triangle and its opium trade to fund their operations (Kaufman 2001). Led by General Li Mi, the KMT forces reshaped the region's power structure, particularly in Burma. They conquered areas including Kokang, the Wa Hills, and the northern parts of Kengtung, which had long been a prime location for opium cultivation (Lintner 1994). General Li Mi encouraged local farmers to expand their opium production and introduced a hefty opium tax, forcing farmers to boost their output for financial survival (Lintner 1994). Consequently, opium became essential for farmers to make up for rice shortages, local authorities relied heavily on the opium tax as their primary income, and opium became a regular commodity for businessmen to trade (Chin 2009).

During the Vietnam War (1955-1975), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) indirectly aided the growth of the Golden Triangle by supporting KMT forces in their fight against communist insurgents along Thailand's northern border. With support from the CIA and the US government, the KMT took advantage of this situation to develop the Golden Triangle. The increasing addiction rates among U.S. troops in Vietnam led to a surge in demand for drugs, but the primary factor driving the sharp rise in prices was the growing export of drugs to US markets (Sen 1991). The KMT's control of the area allowed for the expansion of the Golden Triangle, where local demand for opium became a lucrative business, leading to the establishment of a structured opium production industry. The close ties between General Phin Choonhavan, Commander-in-Chief of the Thai Army (1948-1954), Thai Teochiu drug syndicates, and the KMT helped facilitate the growth of drug trafficking activities. Opium often moved from Burma to Thailand with the assistance of General Phao Sriyanond, Chief of the Thai Police (1957), in exchange for supplies and weapons from Taiwan (Kaufman 2001). Together, Phin, Phao, and Marshal Sarit Thanarat, Commander of the Thai First Army (1954-1963), dominated the opium and heroin trade for years, making Thailand a significant centre for regional drug trafficking (Chouvy 2013).

The opium trade in the Golden Triangle underwent a major structural change under the leadership of Chan Chi Fu, a Shan-born Chinese known as Khun Sa. A former member of the KMT army in the Shan state during the 1950s, he later formed a militia to advocate for the autonomy of the Shan state. The Burmese government granted him permission to engage in the drug trade along the Burma-Thailand border (Rogers 2008). Khun Sa also cultivated a positive relationship with the Thai Army after many of his followers joined *Krathing Daeng*, a paramilitary group led by General Sudsai Hasdin, which aimed to fight communist insurgents in northern and northeastern Thailand (Rogers 2008). He was skilled at justifying his actions to rebellious factions, gaining the support of the Burmese government and ensuring the continued success of his drug operations. Known as the self-proclaimed "drug lord", Khun Sa controlled 70 percent of the heroin production in the region and oversaw seven of the 15 heroin refineries in the Golden Triangle (The Christian Science Monitor 1981). The DEA, however, was slow to acknowledge that the KMT and its affiliates controlled the remaining refineries. In 1978, Prime Minister of Thailand, General Kriangsak Chomanan (1977-1980), expelled Khun Sa from Thailand, but he quickly resurfaced at his remote hilltop stronghold in Ban Hin Tek, Chiang Rai, Thailand (The Christian Science Monitor 1981). In 1985, he founded the Mong Tai Army (MTA), further consolidating his power and influence, solidifying his role as a key figure in Burma, and promoting the growth of his drug empire in the Golden Triangle (Rogers 2008). Along with Ban Hin Tek, which was located about 10 kilometres from northern Thailand, and Homong, near the Burma-Thailand border, Khun Sa also set up his headquarters in Chiang Mai,

Thailand, to manage his drug operations. In addition to Khun Sa, another notorious drug lord, Lo Hsing Han, also operated in the Golden Triangle's drug trade.

Chinese, American, and Corsican syndicates started sending large shipments of Heroin No. 4 directly to the US, causing a significant increase in the price of heroin produced in the Golden Triangle's laboratories (Sen 1991). Thailand-Burma border emerged as a significant refining hub for heroin destined for the US, Europe, and other Asian territories, despite a substantial portion of the area's opium was used domestically (CIA-RDP85T01058R000405330001-1). According to Bertil Lintner, Thailand transformed into a key transit country for narcotics from Burma, acting as the central point for trade operations, including deal-making, recruitment of couriers, and money laundering (Lintner 1994). The expansion of the drug trade in the Golden Triangle reinforced Thailand's role as a primary route for smuggling and trafficking drugs. Thailand became the main pathway for transporting drugs from mountain regions to distribution points or from northern Thailand to Bangkok for the international market (Belanger 1989). The Chinese Haws, a Muslim community, and the Teochiu, originally from Swatow in Guangdong, emerged as major players in Thailand's drug trafficking scene. This was largely due to their experiences of social inequality, discrimination in education and employment, and the lack of economic opportunities in the border regions, despite their citizenship and residence in Bangkok (Chin 2009). Chouvy highlights the long-standing influence of Teochiu descendants in Thailand's economic and political spheres (Chouvy 2013). The Thai Office of the Narcotics Control Board reported that since 1980, narcotics from the Golden Triangle have often been directly delivered to Bangkok, where a network of brokers and sub-brokers facilitated distribution to organised crime syndicates both within Thailand and internationally.

The US DEA officials argued that the primary issue in the Golden Triangle stemmed from Burma and Laos, where poppy cultivation occurred without significant restrictions and was conducted on a commercial scale. The rise in marijuana production became a major concern, with Thai authorities suspecting that cannabis was secretly transported from Thailand by smaller vessels, which then transferred the drug to larger ocean-going ships heading to major southern ports like Penang and Singapore, for re-export to regions including the Far East, Europe, and the US. In 1980, it was reported that 38 percent of all heroin in the US came from Southeast Asia, despite a poor harvest that reduced the opium crop to just 240 tonnes (with ten tonnes of opium yielding one tonne of heroin). Of the 600 tonnes of opium produced in 1981 by the three Golden Triangle countries—Thailand, Laos, and Burma—500 tonnes came from the conflict-ridden Shan States of Burma (The Christian Science Monitor 1981). Unlike opium, which thrives at altitudes above 800 meters, marijuana grows almost anywhere, even in backyards. As Major-General Chavalit noted, “You start cutting in one area, and it spreads to another. And it never looks like stopping.” (The Straits Times 1988). While two-thirds of the Golden Triangle's opium production was consumed within the three producing countries, approximately 150 tonnes of opium, or its equivalent, typically enter international markets each year. This likely represents the largest single source of opium and its derivatives in the global illicit drug trade. (CIA-RDP80T00702A000400010004-2) About 50% of the Golden Triangle's exports were consumed in other Southeast Asian countries, with Malaysia, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Indonesia being the main markets. (CIA-RDP80T00702A000400010004-2) (See Map 1) Asian drug smuggling organisations had increasingly shifted their attention from traditional markets to nearer ones, such as Australia, Hong Kong, and Malaysia, in response to an oversupply in the US and Europe from the West Asian opium belt, which includes Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan (Singapore Monitor 1984).



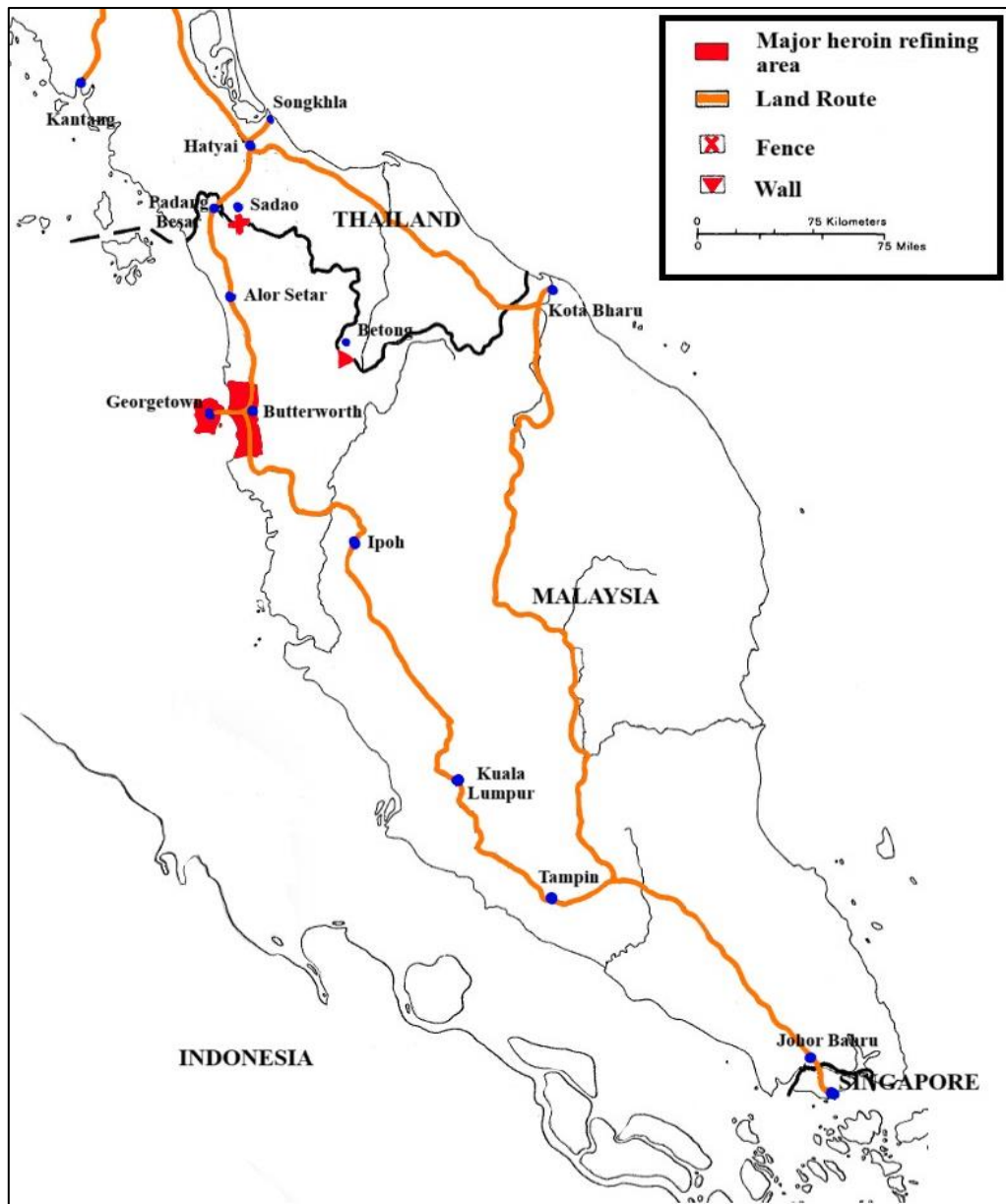
Map 1. Principal Narcotics Smuggling Routes in Southeast Asia

Source: Adapted from CIA-RDP85T00283R0020006006-4. October 1983. *Golden Triangle: Increased Military Actions Against Narcotics Traffickers*, Copy 315, p. 9.

<https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP85T00283R0020006006-4.pdf>

THAILAND-MALAYSIA BORDER AS A STRATEGIC ROUTE FOR ILLICIT DRUG TRADE

The CIA estimated that 15 to 20 percent, or approximately 30 to 40 metric tonnes per year, of the Golden Triangle's exports passed through Southern Thailand. Drug trafficking into the Thailand-Malaysia border frequently involved air, road, sea, and rail transport. Shipments to Malaysia typically used land routes through the southern provinces of Songkhla, Narathiwat, and Yala, while maritime shipments to more distant destinations often departed from Klong Toei in Bangkok, Thailand (Singapore Monitor 1984). The critical drug route from the Golden Triangle was from Hat Yai and Poh Loh Thiam through Sadao. (See Map 2) While all opiates were trafficked through the south, DEA agents in Songkhla reported that opium and heroin were the most commonly smuggled drugs. Although some morphine passed through the region, many of its usual buyers were switching to heroin base to avoid the conversion process that required acetic anhydride, a banned substance. In 1985, DEA officials in Songkhla estimated that at least 80 percent of the narcotics passing through Southern Thailand were acquired by buyers from Malaysia (CIA-RDP87T00685R000100060002-1). Heroin processed along the Thai-Burmese border had increasingly been trafficked through Southern Thailand and into Malaysia for distribution to global markets.



Map 2. Drug Trafficking Routes via Land

Source: Adapted from CIA-RDP86T01017R000201200001-5. 1986. *Memorandum: Malaysia's War on Drugs*, Doc. No.: GI M. 86-20168, July 18, p. 6. <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP86T01017R000201200001-5.pdf>

Before Southern Thailand became the primary route for drug trafficking to international markets, the main smuggling route from the Golden Triangle was through Chiang Mai to Bangkok, from where drugs were distributed globally. However, after stricter laws were enforced in central Bangkok, drug traffickers in Burma shifted to using Southern Thailand as the main route, bypassing Chiang Mai and Bangkok (Rogers 2008). Drugs from northern Burma were transported by truck to Yangon and Moulmein, where they were loaded onto vessels along with timber and charcoal for shipment (Rogers 2008). An investigation by the Royal Malaysian Police (PDRM) revealed that transactions for low-cost goods, like charcoal, were conducted using gold bars, suggesting that narcotics were being trafficked alongside charcoal sourced from Burma (Rogers 2008).

Reports from the US Consulate in Songkhla, Thailand, revealed the presence of heroin refineries along the Malaysia-Thailand border, many of which were not fully under government

control. In November 1985, a refinery located on the Malaysia-Thailand border was found to process raw opium into heroin base, allegedly under the protection of the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) (CIA-RDP86T01017R000201200001-5). Despite denials from Thai and Malaysian officials, the large quantities of opium arriving from Southern Thailand suggested that opium was being processed in the Malaysia-Thailand border. Corruption among law enforcement on both sides of the border further facilitated this trafficking route (CIA-RDP86T01017R000201200001-5). According to reports from the US Embassy, all heroin used in Malaysia, as well as a portion intended for export, was domestically produced. The majority of production facilities are located in Penang and Johor (CIA-RDP86T01017R000201200001-5). The US Embassy estimated that Malaysian refineries produce between five to ten metric tonnes of heroin annually, a volume that adequately satisfies the demands of the Malaysian market. Most of these laboratories are mobile and operate sporadically, converting morphine or heroin base into Heroin No. 3 (CIA-RDP86T01017R000201200001-5).

The chosen drop-off locations were located in the northern Malaysian state of Perlis, which shares a partial border with Thailand (CIA-RPD79-01194A000100210001-2). Penang, known as the traditional drug hub of Malaysia, provided access to a range of substances, including marijuana, opium, morphine, heroin, amphetamines, and various hallucinogenic drugs (CIA-RPD79-01194A000100210001-2). The informal routes commonly used by drug traffickers to Malaysia began at Bukit Kayu Hitam and led to Penang. Unprocessed drugs, usually in parcels weighing around 50 kilograms, were often transported via land smuggling routes. The prices of drugs fluctuate depending on the type of substance. Heroin No. 4 was the most expensive, with prices ranged from RM 9,000.00 per kilogram in 1974 to RM 23,000.00 per kilogram in 1989. Drug prices continued to increase annually, as shown in the Table 1.

Table 1. Drugs Prices at Black Market in Malaysia (1974-1989)

Types of Drugs Year	Raw opium (RM/kg)	Morphine (RM/kg)	Heroin No. 3 (RM/kg)	Heroin No. 4 (RM/kg)	Marijuana (RM/kg)
1974	400-660	3,000-4,800	7,000	8,000-9,000	150-350
1975	700	5,400	8,000	15,000	350
1976	700	5,400-5,500	8,000-8,500	15,000-15,500	300-330
1977	600-700	5,000-5,500	8,000-8,500	15,000	250-350
1978	600-650	3,800-5,000	8,000-10,000	10,000-15,000	200-250
1979	-	-	-	-	-
1980	-	-	-	-	-
1981	2,000-3,000	14,000-17,000	17,000-19,000	-	500-600
1982	1,500-2,100	8,000-14,000	12,000-15,000	-	350-600
1983	1,400-1,500	4,700-5,000	10,000-13,000	20,000-24,000	280-330
1984	1,200-1,600	4,500-4,700	12,000-13,000	-	280-400
1985	1,200-1,760	4,500	14,000-14,600	20,000-24,000	300-500
1986	1,200-2,250	-	13,000-18,000	20,000-24,000	300-500
1987	1,600-2,400	-	18,000-20,000	23,000-24,000	600-700
1988	1,000-2,000	-	11,000-19,000	21,000-23,000	600-700
1989	1,300-2,000	-	7,000-12,000	21,000-23,000	600-1,000

Source: File No.: 2000/0024610W. *Kajian-kajian Mengenai Penyeludupan*. Arkib Negara Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur.

To evade detection by Malaysian authorities, the drugs were hidden in various parts of vehicles. The drug supplies were then deposited at budget hotels, with transportation fees ranging from RM 1,000 to RM 2,000 for each destination (Suzilawati 1999). Trains were used to transport drug supplies, with the drugs hidden inside legitimate goods, such as rice cookers, specifically designed to avoid detection by Malaysian authorities (Suzilawati 1999). The railway network in Penang started at Kampung Siam in the northern region and extended southward to Bukit Mertajam. From there, the

route continued to Pengkalan Abdul Halim in Butterworth, which is close to Kuala Perai, offering a potential route for drug smuggling into the central part of Penang (Suzilawati 1999).

Maritime routes for transporting narcotics from Southern Thailand to Malaysia became more common as drug traffickers sought to avoid overland transit across the Thai border. Not all narcotics from Bangkok were sent to Hong Kong; some were trafficked through Southern Thailand to Malaysian ports such as Penang, Port Swettenham, or Kota Bharu, or to Singapore, which served as both a market and a transshipment hub for Southeast Asian opium exports. Other Malaysian ports also facilitated the movement of narcotics to Indonesia, which became a transit point for heroin destined for the continental US via the Philippines and Hawaii (CIA-RDP80T00702A000400010004-2). The DEA estimates that 40 percent of the opiates leaving Thailand were directed towards Malaysia. Due to its maritime proximity to Burma, Malaysia naturally emerged as a transshipment hub for opiate trafficking. These transshipments were sent to various Asian cities, including Hong Kong, and both Singapore and Penang were identified by Hong Kong customs authorities as suspect ports of origin, leading to all vessels from these locations being inspected for illicit goods (CIA-RDP80T00702A000400010004-2).

The significant presence of fishing vessels along the east and west coasts contributed to the smuggling of drugs into the country through these maritime routes. *Khlongs* (traditional Thai boats) were commonly used because of their speed and manoeuvrability in coastal areas. These routes facilitate the transport of drugs from Satun in Southern Thailand to unauthorized entry points along the coasts of Kedah, Perlis, and nearby offshore islands. Sea-based smuggling operations required careful planning, as a common defence in drug trials claims that the raid occurred in international waters, granting the defendant immunity from prosecution. Drugs were also transported overland using primary trunk roads from the Thai-Malaysian border, particularly along the eastern route through Kelantan and Terengganu. They were concealed in hidden compartments within motorcycles, cars, and trucks, or disguised within packages of fish or vegetables. Drug syndicates had taken advantage of the ongoing communist-inspired tensions along the Thai-Malaysia border to set up floating laboratories and makeshift jungle factories, where raw opium was refined into morphine or heroin before being distributed to international markets (The Straits Times 1988).

Drug distributors from Satun, Thailand, used “Siamese boats” to reach Langkawi waters, typically departing around 6 p.m. and arriving in Penang waters between 2 and 3 a.m. Each shipment generally consisted of packages weighing about 1 kilogram, with cannabis shipments ranging from 300 to 500 kg per load. The drugs were usually stored in plastic or “polly” bags, which were then placed in a sack and either left at a predetermined location or discarded into the water. Smuggling activities typically took place at night. At Batu Feringgi Beach, a signal to confirm drug distribution was given by flashing a torch three times. The Batu Feringgi area became a key location for drug trafficking due to the visibility of numerous hotels, which served as landmarks. Other notable locations in Penang included Tanjung Bungah, Tanjung Tokong, Jerejak Island, Rimau Island, and Kendi Island (Suzilawati 1999). The embouchures in Penang also served as conduits for drug smuggling into coastal villages via rivers that led to them. Prominent embouchures include Sungai Pinang and Sungai Air Hitam, located in the northeast and southwest, respectively, which flow into the creek of Bagan Sungai Pulau Pinang. Jelutong, located nearby, became a significant drug landing zone in Penang. In the southern area, rivers such as Sungai Juru, Sungai Tengah, and Sungai Jawi flow into Kuala Sungai Jawi and Kuala Sungai Tengah, while Sungai Kerian flows into Kuala Kerian (Suzilawati 1999). Malaysian drug dealers generally did not accept drug shipments immediately but waited several days to a week before retrieving them. They would only collect the drugs at the same time if they were located in the open sea. Siamese boats would stop in open waters while Malaysian drug dealers pretended to be fishing. The drugs were then stored in unoccupied houses and dilapidated huts.

HOW MALAYSIA DEALT WITH THE DRUG THREATS FROM 1950S TO 1980S

Drug abuse and illicit drug-related activities have been a longstanding problem in Malaysia since its independence. The Ministry of Health of Malaysia recognised drug addiction as both a social and

health issue. As a result, the Pharmacy Enforcement Division enforced the Poisons Act 1952 and the Dangerous Drugs Act 1952, which regulate the sale, import, and export of dangerous drugs (narcotics), poisons (including psychotropic substances), precursors, and essential chemicals (Suzilawati 1999). In 1972, the Central Narcotics Bureau was established under the Ministry of Law to oversee drug-related matters through enforcement, prevention, coordination, and research. In 1975, the Malaysian government formed the Cabinet Committee on Drugs, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister, to review and determine policies on drug use, prevention, and eradication. In 1978, the Execution Action Unit (UBE) was created, chaired by the Deputy Minister of Home Affairs, to coordinate the implementation of all decisions and actions made by the UBE regarding drug control and prevention (History of NADA).

Despite efforts to suppress drug trafficking, the problem persisted and intensified over time. In 1983, the number of first-time drug addicts peaked at 14,624, leading Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad to label drugs as Public Enemy No. 1 (The Straits Times 1988). Malaysia enforced tackling the drug issue a top priority, treating it as a key security concern. However, many countries still approach the issue from a social and humanitarian perspective, often downplaying its importance due to internal challenges like economic, political, or border-related issues. As a result, efforts to harmonise drug legislation among ASEAN countries had yielded only limited outcomes (The Straits Times 1988). In its efforts to tackle drug trafficking and abuse, Mahathir's government implemented stricter laws, including a mandatory death sentence for drug traffickers, indefinite detention for suspected traffickers, and regulation of precursor chemical imports (CIA-RDP86T01017R000201200001-5). The Dangerous Drugs (Amendment) Act of 1983 introduced the mandatory death penalty for those convicted of narcotics trafficking. The Malaysian government enforced this penalty, with public warnings displayed nationwide and communicated to all incoming travellers. Trafficking is legally defined as possessing 15 grams or more of heroin, morphine, or a combination; 1,000 grams of raw or processed opium; or 200 grams or more of marijuana. Since its introduction in 1975, the death penalty has led to the execution of over 30 individuals for drug trafficking, with another 54 either appealing or awaiting execution. This law is subject to review and re-passing by the Malaysian Parliament every five years as a safeguard against misuse (CIA-RDP86T01017R000201200001-5).

Mahathir viewed drug addiction as a disease rather than a criminal issue, prompting the government to implement a comprehensive rehabilitation program for drug addicts (CIA-RDP86T01017R000201200001-5). The Drug Dependents (Treatment and Rehabilitation) Act of 1983 provided the legal foundation for treating and rehabilitating individuals with drug dependency. This Act is crucial to rehabilitation efforts, as it mandates both compulsory and voluntary treatment for those with drug dependence. The minimum duration of internment at government rehabilitation facilities was extended from six months to two years, with an additional two years of aftercare (Executive Summary of the Country's Report-Malaysia). Malaysia introduced a two-year rehabilitation program specifically for heroin addicts, reorganised and expanded its drug enforcement agency, and implemented a series of stringent anti-drug laws. The first one-stop centre (*Pusat Serenti*) opened in May 1983 in Tampin, Negeri Sembilan offering a comprehensive program managed by military personnel. This centre provides a wide range of services, including detoxification, intensive training, therapeutic work brigades, and job placement. The paramilitary structure of this centre, along with two other centres that followed, sets them apart from the other four centres (Executive Summary of the Country's Report-Malaysia). The Poisons Act of 1952, revised in 1989, stipulates penalties for the possession of acetylating substances, such as acetic anhydride, without a license. Offenders face imprisonment for up to 14 years, no less than three years, and a minimum of six strokes of whipping. The law also mandates strict oversight of legal imports of acetic anhydride, from entry to usage (Executive Summary of the Country's Report-Malaysia).

The anti-narcotics legislation in Malaysia imposes stricter penalties for offenders and strengthens the authority of enforcement officials to apprehend suspected traffickers. The Dangerous Drugs (Special Preventive Measures) Act of 1985 empowered the Minister of Home Affairs to order the detention without trial of individuals suspected of drug trafficking. While police must inform detainees of the charges against them, they are not required to present a case in court. Every two

years, an Advisory Board, consisting of six lawyers (half appointed by the Prime Minister and half by the King), evaluates the case and may extend the detention indefinitely if the individual is considered a persistent security threat. Before this law, suspected drug traffickers were detained under the 1969 Emergency Ordinance, which allowed for a maximum detention period of two years, with the possibility of an additional two years of restricted residence after release (Executive Summary of the Country's Report-Malaysia). Malaysia also became the first Southeast Asian nation to implement the Dangerous Drugs (Forfeiture of Property) Act in 1988, which allows for the seizure of property and profits from convicted drug traffickers (The Straits Times 1988). The Act allows police and customs officers, with the public prosecutor's authorisation, the authority to intercept, detain, or open parcels during postal deliveries and to intercept telecommunications messages. Additionally, the Act broadens the use of wiretap technology in drug-related investigations (CIA-RDP86T01017R000201200001-5).

The Narcotics Crime Investigations Department (NCID) of the Royal Malaysia Police (RMP) became the primary authority responsible for drug law enforcement in Malaysia, while the Royal Malaysian Customs Department (RMCD) enforced drug regulations through its Narcotics Division (Executive Summary of the Country's Report). Malaysia Additionally, the Anti-Narcotics Task Force, an interagency body established under the National Security Council within the Prime Minister's Department, was created to initiate, coordinate, and oversee anti-narcotics activities conducted by various government agencies and private organisations involved in drug control. A restructuring of narcotics management in Malaysia assigned explicit authority for drug-related issues to the Deputy Prime Minister. Musa Hitam, who served as the Chairman of the National Security Council's Narcotics Committee and Minister of Home Affairs, prioritised narcotics as a critical issue, ensuring it remained a key focus in both domestic and international politics. Following his sudden resignation in mid-March, Mahathir assumed control of the Home Ministry and appointed a provisional Deputy Prime Minister from his party (CIA-RDP86T01017R000201200001-5). In response to the growing drug problem, the Cabinet established the National Narcotics Committee on 10th September 1983 to address drug use and trafficking. This led to the formation of additional committees and bodies at both the federal and state levels to tackle the issue (Vong). The Anti-Narcotics Committee was placed within the National Security Council of the Prime Minister's Department, and since 1986, the Prime Minister has chaired the committee (Study Mission to Korea, Thailand, Burma, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Hawaii 1988). In 1986, the Malaysian government significantly enhanced the PDRM's anti-drug enforcement capabilities. The Anti-Drugs Unit, Division 8 of the Criminal Investigations Division, which is the primary enforcement body, grew from just 37 inspectors and detectives in 1979 (who could manage only one investigation at a time) to 1,500 personnel. The PDRM also formed two dedicated anti-narcotics units in Ipoh and Penang, each comprising 20 officers (CIA-RDP86T01017R000201200001-5).

Following a promising start, Malaysia's assertive anti-drug initiative faced significant obstacles that hindered its progress. A government study indicated a troubling rise in the number of registered heroin users, from 22,000 in 1976 to 104,000 in 1984 (CIA-RDP86T01017R000201200001-5). As Malaysia's Director of the Anti-Drug Task Force, Khairuddin Ibrahim, stated, "We have to be aggressive in enforcement action because Malaysia is the first major transit point outside the poppy-growing hinterland" (The Straits Times 1988). Despite strict anti-narcotics laws, including the death penalty for drug traffickers and mandatory incarceration for suspected offenders, along with compulsory drug treatment programs, drug trafficking continued to be a significant issue in the country. A coordinated and aggressive anti-drug strategy, led by the National Security Council, produced a notable improvement, with first-time drug users dropping by 50%, from 15,500 in 1986 to 7,596 in 1987 (The Straits Times 1988). To further combat the influx of narcotics, the Malaysian government strengthened border security, particularly along the Thai border, which was the primary entry point for opiates from the Golden Triangle. A third anti-narcotics unit was established in Alor Star, and a chain-link fence was built along the Padang Besar border, accompanied by a parallel roadway and patrol towers positioned one kilometre apart (CIA-RDP86T01017R000201200001-5). The border fence, part of an effort to curb narcotics smuggling, was monitored by a specialised anti-narcotics unit and a paramilitary police force. Additionally, Border Anti-Smuggling Prevention Unit, under the National Security Council, was formed, comprising officials from the Police, Customs,

Immigration, and the Rice Board. This unit was tasked with intercepting smuggling operations along the western section of the Thai border (CIA-RDP86T01017R000201200001-5).

Since 1983, Malaysia's anti-drug campaign yielded promising results. The number of first-time addicts dropped significantly, from 14,624 in 1983 to 9,591 in 1985, and further to 7,596 in 1987. Additionally, the number of newly identified or reported addicts decreased from a peak of 26,513 in 1982 to 16,335 in 1987. In February 1987, a nationwide drug initiative, similar to Singapore's 1977 Operation Ferret, was launched to further reduce drug consumption. This initiative, called *Gerakan Tumpuan*, aimed to cover offices, schools, factories, and religious places throughout Peninsular Malaysia. It categorised regions as "black" or "white" depending on the severity of the drug issue, drawing parallels to the anti-communist efforts of the 1948-1960 period. An area was considered "white" after arresting addicts, compiling lists of former addicts and dealers, and observing significant changes in that area (Berita Harian 1988). The initiative was a broad "blanket program" designed to identify suspected drug addicts for treatment and rehabilitation. It raised awareness about local drug issues while conserving government resources. Khairuddin Ibrahim stated that, "we will tackle localities with a population of about 8,000. We intend to identify the high-risk areas to flush out the addicts." (The Straits Times 1988). The pilot project began in Penang and Selangor in late February, with plans for the remaining states to follow over five months. A similar initiative in Singapore a decade earlier reduced the heroin user population from an estimated 13,000 to 10,600 and significantly undermined known drug "hotbeds" (The Straits Times 1988). The highest incidences of drug-related issues were observed in the western coastal states of Penang, Perak, the Federal Territory, Selangor, and Johor. The program also included public drug education efforts to warn of the dangers of addiction and encourage attitude changes among users, potential users, parents, and the wider community. It included training for school counsellors and teachers, as well as incorporating drug counselling into university curricula (CIA-RDP86T01017R000201200001-5).

Police Major-General Chavalit Yodmani, Head of the Office of the Narcotics Control Board of Thailand, commended Malaysia and Singapore for their rigorous approach to addressing the drug issue, encompassing both enforcement strategies and exemplary treatment and rehabilitation programs (The Straits Times 1988). The CIA also recognised Malaysia's anti-narcotics efforts as highly successful, noting that they outperformed many other Third World countries' initiatives (The Straits Times 1988). However, Malaysia's approaches in dealing with drugs were criticised. Amnesty International condemned the country for its mandatory death penalty for drug traffickers and the use of presumptive evidence in prosecutions (Vong). Under Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's leadership, Malaysia's approach to addressing illicit drugs, drug trafficking, and addiction reached an international milestone when he was elected President of the UN-sponsored International Conference on Drug Addiction and Illicit Trafficking, held in Vienna in June 1987 (1992/0019823). Despite all of the significant efforts, the battle against the drug threat appeared to be a long and challenging struggle, especially with substantial opium harvests in the Golden Triangle continuing for around eight consecutive years (The Straits Times 1988). Heroin consumption in Malaysia was estimated at three tonnes, with approximately 75,000 individuals using the drug. The Malaysian Foreign Minister acknowledged the severity of both drug trafficking and substance addiction, highlighting the need for greater international cooperation to address the issue, stressing that "no nation can single-handedly" combat drug traffickers (The Straits Times 1988).

MALAYSIA-THAILAND COOPERATION

Malaysia and Thailand entered into an Exchange of Notes, in which both nations agreed to uphold and recognise the applicability of the extradition treaty between the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand and the Government of the United Kingdom, which has been in effect since October 27, 1959 (1992/0004341). Additionally, several ASEAN member states established extradition treaties with one another, including Indonesia and Malaysia on June 7, 1974; Indonesia and the Philippines on February 10, 1976; Indonesia and Thailand on June 29, 1976; and the Philippines and Thailand on March 16, 1981. These agreements reflect regional commitment in enhancing legal cooperation and facilitating the extradition process for addressing cross-border criminal activities. The Royal Malaysian Customs and Excise Department played a crucial role in combating smuggling activities,

yet the regulation and control of narcotics within Malaysia were primarily managed by other agencies, particularly the police, rather than the Customs Department itself. In contrast, in Thailand, the Central Narcotics Bureau, which is operated and administered by law enforcement officers, is responsible for overseeing all aspects of narcotics regulation (1992/0019823). This distinction highlights the differing structures and divisions of authority in addressing drug-related issues between the two countries. Although each country has its own specialised unit dedicated to addressing the illicit drug trade and abuse, the drug trafficking along the Thailand-Malaysia border requires special attention. Efforts must not only focus on eradicating these activities but also on actively combating the ongoing illicit drug trade in this region. Given the cross-border nature of the issue, enhanced cooperation between the two countries is essential for effectively addressing and disrupting the drug trafficking networks operating in the border area.

Therefore, effective collaboration between Thailand and Malaysia in drug interdiction to combat drug trafficking and smuggling is crucial. The alignment of national interests has fostered coordination between these two neighbouring countries, enabling them to jointly address the issue of opiate trafficking. Both the US and ASEAN played a supportive role in this collaborative effort (CIA-RPD89M00699R002201800007-0). The strengthening of Thai-Malaysian relations, coupled with Kuala Lumpur's steadfast commitment to anti-drug initiatives, brought substantial benefits to their bilateral cooperation in drug suppression efforts. While the collaboration remains constrained and largely informal, it stands as one of the most effective and promising models of counternarcotics cooperation in Southeast and Southwest Asia. A key aspect of this cooperation is the sharing of intelligence on opiate trafficking. This intelligence typically flows from Thailand southward to Malaysia, mirroring the direction of the narcotics trade. Additionally, Thai officials often seek the help of Malaysian authorities to apprehend and prosecute drug offenders, taking advantage of Malaysia's more stringent anti-narcotics laws. Furthermore, law enforcement personnel from both countries frequently cross the border to collaborate on narcotics investigations, enhancing the overall effectiveness of their joint efforts.

There was also an informal cooperation between countries regarding the extradition of narcotics offenders, where authorities transfer individuals upon request, bypassing formal extradition processes. This collaboration, while primarily informal, was bolstered by frequent high-level meetings involving enforcement officials from Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore. The reduced frequency of these meetings reflects the resolution of past issues, rather than a diminishing interest in cooperation. To further formalise these informal efforts, Malaysian and Singaporean narcotics officers were deployed on a rotational basis in Southern Thailand (CIA-RPD89M00699R002201800007-0). However, persistent challenges to cooperation arise from ongoing mistrust between these two culturally distinct nations. For instance, Thai officials voiced concerns about their Malaysian counterparts withholding intelligence and details of enforcement actions. Malaysian police, on the other hand, were wary of sharing certain information due to a deep-seated mistrust of corruption within Thai law enforcement. Despite these tensions, the growing positive outcomes of their collaboration had led to a reduction in scepticism over time. Additionally, the US involvement in anti-narcotics efforts with Thailand and Malaysia presented an opportunity for further strengthening bilateral opiate interdiction measures (CIA-RPD89M00699R002201800007-0). The DEA's presence in Southern Thailand and Malaysia played a crucial role in facilitating the exchange of intelligence between Thai and Malaysian authorities, contributing valuable information to combat drug trafficking. Before the significant improvement in Thai-Malaysian relations, the DEA was often the primary channel for communication between drug enforcement officials from both countries.

DRUG SUPPRESSION EFFORTS THROUGH ASEAN

The cooperation between Thailand and Malaysia highlights the important role that international organisations play in promoting cooperation for opiate interdiction efforts. As members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), both countries had been instrumental in supporting the organisation's ongoing initiatives to address drug-related problems in the region. ASEAN became a key platform for these nations to align their anti-narcotics strategies, coordinate enforcement efforts, and share resources. Malaysia, in particular, emerged as one of the leading

contributors to global anti-drug efforts, particularly through its significant support of the United Nations Fund for Drug Abuse Control (UNFDAC). Since the establishment of UNFDAC in 1971, Malaysia donated \$55,000 to the fund, making it one of the largest donors among ASEAN countries. The fund itself played a crucial role in supporting international projects aimed at tackling drug trafficking and substance abuse, drawing contributions from UN member states. Other ASEAN countries had also made notable contributions to the UN drug fund, though at lower levels. The Philippines contributed \$22,000, Thailand donated \$19,000, and Indonesia had given \$14,000. Brunei, despite being a smaller nation, made its first contribution of \$3,000 in 1986 (Study Mission to Korea, Thailand, Burma, Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Hawaii 1988). However, Burma had yet to contribute to the fund, which highlights disparities in the region's financial support for international drug control initiatives. These voluntary contributions are critical to the success of global anti-narcotics efforts, as they enable the United Nations to coordinate large-scale operations, fund research on drug prevention, and provide technical assistance to countries struggling with drug-related issues. The ongoing engagement of ASEAN nations, with Malaysia leading the way, underscores the importance of regional cooperation in addressing the complex and persistent problem of drug trafficking in Southeast Asia.

The strategy for narcotics crime prevention was first formalised in 1972 during the ASEAN Drugs Experts Meeting on the Prevention and Control of Drug Abuse, held in Manila at the end of October. This regional declaration by ASEAN emphasised collaborative efforts, such as the exchange of insights, methods, and strategies to combat drug-related crimes, the alignment of drug laws and regulations, the creation of national coordinating bodies in each member country, and the strengthening of bilateral, regional, and international cooperation among ASEAN nations. In 1976, ASEAN formalised its commitment to regional drug control by establishing the ASEAN Drug Experts Conference, a key step in uniting member countries in their efforts to combat the rising drug abuse and trafficking issues affecting Southeast Asia. This platform allowed for the exchange of expertise, the development of shared strategies, and the harmonisation of policies among ASEAN nations to address the region's growing drug problems (Sinar & Putri 2023). A critical milestone in this collaborative journey occurred in 1984 with the creation of the ASEAN Senior Officials on Drug Matters (ASOD), a dedicated body tasked with overseeing and coordinating efforts to tackle drug-related issues across the region. The formation of ASOD was complemented by the approval of the ASEAN Regional Policy and Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, which laid out a comprehensive framework for member states to address both the supply and demand sides of the drug trade. These developments represented a significant leap forward in ASEAN's unified approach to combating illicit drug trafficking. They provided a structured platform for policy implementation, resource sharing, and coordination among member states. ASOD's establishment allowed for a more organized and strategic response to the escalating drug trade, ensuring that ASEAN countries could work together more effectively to reduce drug abuse, curb trafficking networks, and enhance law enforcement cooperation across national borders. Overall, these advancements marked an important step in ASEAN's long-term strategy to address the complex and multifaceted issue of drug trafficking, with a focus on collaboration, prevention, enforcement, and rehabilitation. By formalising and institutionalising these efforts, ASEAN set the stage for a more coordinated and powerful regional response to the ever-growing challenges posed by illicit drugs in Southeast Asia.

On February 24, 1976, the Heads of Government from Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, and the Philippines gathered in Bali, Indonesia, for the Declaration of ASEAN Concord. This landmark proclamation called for greater collaboration among ASEAN member countries and relevant international organizations to combat the rising threat of illegal drug trafficking and curb substance abuse across the region. The declaration emphasized the need for a unified regional response to the drug problem, recognizing its increasing impact on the stability and development of Southeast Asia. In the same year, the Foreign Ministers of these five founding ASEAN countries signed the ASEAN Declaration of Principles to Combat the Abuse of Narcotic Drugs. The declaration outlined a comprehensive approach to addressing drug abuse, urging stronger vigilance and both preventive and punitive measures against illicit drug trafficking. A key component of this approach was to promote information exchange among member states, which included sharing

intelligence, research findings, and technological expertise related to drug control. The ASEAN Declaration further called for concerted efforts to eradicate the cultivation and production of illicit drugs, as well as enhancing collaboration in drug research and education. It also highlighted the importance of improving national laws and regulations to strengthen the collective fight against drug abuse and its damaging consequences. The declaration encouraged increased participation by national agencies in close cooperation with international bodies, such as the Colombo Plan Bureau, the United Nations and its specialized agencies, Interpol, and other organizations dedicated to addressing drug misuse. By advocating for a more coordinated and multi-faceted approach, the Declaration aimed to create a robust and sustainable framework for tackling the drug problem, promoting regional cooperation, and aligning national efforts with global anti-drug initiatives. This foundational agreement marked a significant step toward building a united front in the fight against drugs in Southeast Asia.

ASEAN developed a comprehensive strategy aimed at strengthening regional cooperation in drug enforcement, with each of the six member countries providing centralised training programs for law enforcement professionals from other ASEAN states. The United Nations became the primary source of funding for these initiatives, supporting the goal of enhancing the region's collective capacity to combat drug trafficking and abuse. One of the key elements of this strategy was the ASEAN Cross-Posting Programme, which emerged from the ASEAN Drug Experts Meetings held in 1976, 1977, and 1978. This program was first implemented in 1979, with the Philippines and Thailand taking the lead in facilitating cross-border training for personnel involved in both drug enforcement and rehabilitation. The program quickly became a successful model of regional collaboration, and by 1980, Malaysia joined the initiative, further expanding the scope of cooperation. Since then, Thailand conducted an annual training exercise for ASEAN drug enforcement agents, focusing on enhancing skills and strategies for tackling narcotics-related crimes. In 1986, Malaysia launched a similar program, aimed at training personnel involved in drug rehabilitation, which complemented the enforcement-focused training in Thailand (CIA-RPD89M00699R002201800007-0). These initiatives not only foster stronger ties between ASEAN member countries but also promote the exchange of expertise and best practices, creating a unified approach to the region's drug problems. Through continuous collaboration and shared training, ASEAN made significant strides in developing a well-coordinated response to drug trafficking and abuse across Southeast Asia.

In 1981, participants involved in drug prevention education, research, and expertise sharing experienced significant improvements in collaboration and mutual understanding among the nations involved. A post-evaluation study conducted by those involved in the cross-posting program revealed that cognitive development was more pronounced than changes in affective skills. Participants showed the greatest gains in acquiring knowledge about drug misuse prevention and control programs, while shifts in attitudes toward work, colleagues, and a deeper understanding of their roles within the program were ranked lower. Despite this, improvements in cognitive, psychomotor, and affective skills were all considered of equal importance in the overall development of the participants. It was noted that these skills were cultivated more effectively among administrative staff and those directly involved in drug prevention and control programs, particularly through the Technical Exchange Program. This program provided on-the-job training that enhanced their knowledge and competencies, equipping them with the tools needed to address drug-related issues in their respective countries (1992/0004341). The ASEAN Technical Exchange Program on Drug Abuse Prevention and Control, launched in 1985, became a crucial five-year initiative that involved the ASEAN member states of Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. This program facilitated the exchange of technical personnel focused on drug prevention education, information dissemination, treatment, rehabilitation, research, training, and law enforcement. The initiative aimed to improve the technical and professional capacity of the participating nations in the fight against drug abuse and trafficking. The narcotics coordinating agencies of each member country—such as Indonesia's Bakolak Inpres 6/1971, Malaysia's Cabinet Committee on Drug Control, the Philippines' Dangerous Drugs Board, Thailand's Office of the Narcotics Control Board, and Singapore's Central Narcotics Bureau played significant roles in suppressing illicit drugs in each country (1992/0004341).

CONCLUSION

The illegal drug trade originating from the Golden Triangle has evolved into a highly profitable and increasingly complex industry. Several factors, particularly in the 1960s, contributed to the rise of the Golden Triangle. The US forces, which included CIA support for the Kuomintang (KMT) in their fight against Communist forces, along with the involvement of powerful Thai officials in the drug trade and internal political instability in Burma, all played pivotal roles in fuelling drug proliferation in the region. Due to its proximity to Thailand, Malaysia, became a direct recipient of drugs trafficked from the Golden Triangle. Southern Thailand emerged as the main route for drug smuggling into Malaysia, making the fight against the illicit drug trade increasingly difficult. By the 1970s, Malaysia recognised the gravity of the drug problem and began implementing preventive measures. However, the sharp rise in drug cases during the 1980s continued to be a major concern for the Malaysian government. Under Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, the government intensified its efforts to combat the illicit drug trade, declaring drugs to be Malaysia's primary national threat. This led to the introduction of stricter regulations and policies aimed at addressing the issue. The trafficking of narcotics across the Thailand-Malaysia border posed significant challenges, and reports of corruption, including allegations of bribery among authorities turning a blind eye, further complicated Malaysia's efforts. Despite these obstacles, Malaysia remained committed to fighting the illicit drug trade and drug abuse. Informal intelligence-sharing with Thailand was established to curb cross-border smuggling, and Malaysia became actively involved in ASEAN's broader regional initiatives to combat drug trafficking. Despite these measures, drug trafficking continued unabated. The stricter drug laws introduced in the 1980s highlighted the growing concerns over the expanding drug-processing operations in the Golden Triangle and their impact on Malaysia's national security. The illicit drug trade in the region posed a serious threat, underscoring the need for regional cooperation and stronger enforcement. Malaysia's determination to address the narcotics trade was crucial in managing this transnational challenge. The 1980s marked the beginning of Malaysia's domestic and international efforts to fight the illicit drug trade, as the flow of drugs from Southern Thailand, a major hub of the Golden Triangle, continued. While the drug trade persists today, the 1980s set the standard for efforts to prevent the illicit drug trade from becoming a widespread scourge, not just for Malaysia, but for the broader Southeast Asian region.

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