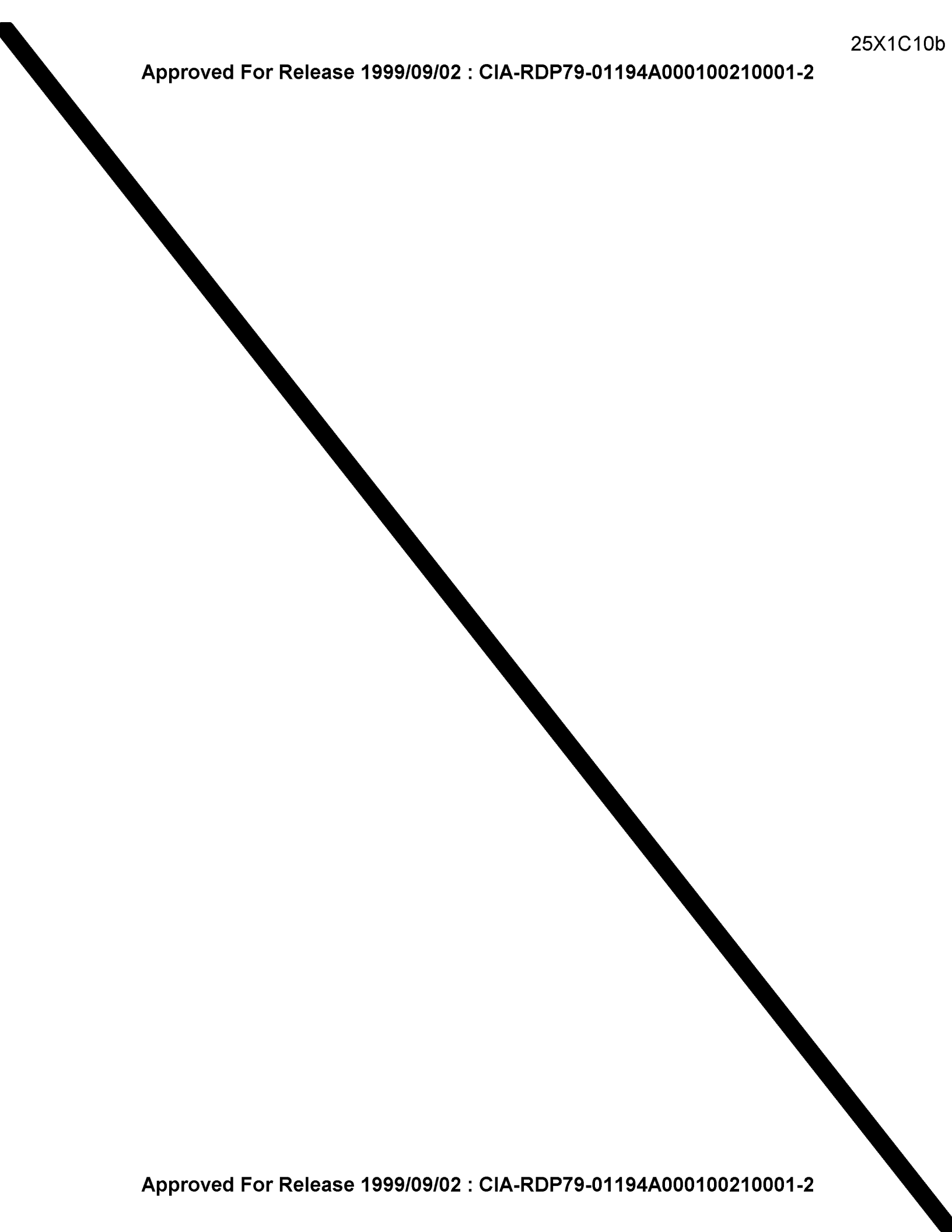


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**THIS WEEK**



CPYRGHI

Despite stepped-up enforcement, greater regional cooperation and publicity, the infamous "Golden Triangle" — the mountainous border regions of Thailand, Burma and Laos — remains a major world source of opium. Using Golden Triangle supplies, the drug syndicates continue to make vast profits by channelling opium and its evil derivative heroin to tens of thousands of addicts in Southeast Asia and Hongkong, and also to Amsterdam, Europe's new heroin clearing-house, and North America. REVIEW correspondents throughout the region and in Europe describe the new pattern of drug-trafficking and the depressing addiction problems in their countries, *page 22-30.*

Cover photo by Dinshaw Balsara

Thailand's new Prime Minister Seni Pramoj had hammered together a Government culled from a four-party coalition, but if the story going the rounds in Bangkok on the events of the past few months are true, he will be hard put to keep it that way and avoid the same fate as his brother Kukrit, *page 10.*

Undoubtedly Japan and the five ASEAN countries are important to each other. Yet Japan's trade and investment in Southeast Asia has not overcome mutual ignorance and suspicion; the cooperation that could spur ASEAN's economic development remains largely absent, *page 43.*

As Cambodia celebrated the first anniversary of the Khmer Rouge takeover, the revolutionary authorities were giving their administration a facelift after the departure of Prince Norodom Sihanouk, *page 37.*

Sabah's voters gave their verdict and Tun Mustapha's iron hold on the East Malaysian state was finally broken. The nine-month-old Berjaya party took 28 of the State Assembly's 48 seats and its president, new Chief Minister Tun Mohamed Fuad Stephens, began the task of putting the state's affairs back into order, *page 8.*



While foreign buyers in Canton are annoyed at shortages of Chinese products, officials at the trade fair are confident Peking's campaign against "capitalist roaders" will not affect the country's future foreign trade, *page 56.*

Indonesia's President Suharto has emerged the victor in the showdown with the big American oil group Caltex over profits. The extra revenue will play a key part in Jakarta's financial strategy, although it can hardly solve all the Government's money problems, *page 40.*

The export boom in Japan is good news for Asia's exporting countries. As overseas sales pull the economy of Asia's exports, *page 55.*

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# ASIA'S HARD DRUG HABIT



## War on the eternal triangle

CPYRGHT

By Rodney Tasker

**A**LTHOUGH some governments in Southeast Asia try to downplay, for political reasons, the extent of hard-drug trafficking and addiction in their countries, the area has one of the most depressing problems in the world. In Hongkong, where some estimates show that about one person in 43 is addicted to opium or heroin, the problem remains of nightmarish proportions.

With profits of 500%-1,000% involved, feeding the addicts' dangerous craving is big business. There is no shortage of peddlars, mainly Chiu Chow Chinese with strong clanish loyalties similar to those of the Mafia, who display a great deal of ingenuity in keeping one step ahead of the enforcement agencies. Neither is there any real shortage of the raw material from the opium-growing area encompassing lonely mountainous regions of Burma, Thailand and Laos known as the "Golden Triangle."

Trading methods and routes are highly flexible, quickly adapting to enforcement patterns. Until the early 1970s Hongkong was a major re-export centre for heroin, supplying not only other parts of Asia but Europe and North America. Now, after a series of setbacks to drug merchants delivered by the colony's anti-narcotics officers and customs men (see *Hongkong story*), heroin is smuggled into Europe mainly direct from Thailand and, to a certain extent, Malaysia.

And since agents in France and from

the US smashed the "French Connection" at the turn of the decade, Amsterdam, with comparatively small penalties for drug trafficking, has become the main clearing-house for Asian heroin.

However, it appears that most of the illicit hard-drug trade in Southeast Asia and Hongkong is geared to satisfying domestic demand. A recent report by American Ambassador Sheldon Vance, senior adviser to the Secretary of State and coordinator of international narcotics activities, estimated that only 8% of heroin used in the US originates in Southeast Asia — "a surprisingly low percentage given the enormous amount of opium from uncontrolled production in Burma, Thailand and Laos."

The report added: "Apparently, the bulk of opium produced there is consumed by the growers themselves, and as heroin in Thailand, Burma, Hongkong, Singapore and Malaysia." Most heroin reaching the US now comes from Mexico and South America.

Although Hongkong no longer directly plays a significant role in the regional and international hard-drug trade, there is evidence that a number of local Chinese heroin "chemists" (those who refine heroin from morphine) have been travelling to Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore to set up business there. Opium and the morphine which is produced from it are cheaper in these countries, particularly in Thailand, and the chemists

provide much of the finance and couriers for the drug run to Europe. A pattern is emerging of couriers flying from Hongkong to Thailand, or possibly Malaysia or Singapore, to pick up consignments of heroin to take to Europe. The system eliminates the risk of having to run the gauntlet of first importing raw opium or morphine into the colony to be refined into heroin. Often, the Chinese syndicates employ European couriers.

However, Hongkong has by no means stamped out the drug re-export trade completely. The Preventive Service (customs) recently set up a special squad at Hongkong's Kaitak airport to check outgoing passengers. Between last November and mid-April, seven people (four Chinese and three Dutch) were arrested at the airport as they were leaving with hard drugs. This led to the seizure of 37 lbs of heroin.

According to the enforcement agencies in Hongkong, most of the colony's supplies of opium, morphine and heroin are now being smuggled in by air. In Malaysia and Singapore, however, cargoes of drugs are still being delivered by trawler or overland from Thailand. Much of the traffic to West Malaysia goes through the northern states of Kelantan, Kedah and Penang.

In the past three or four years there has been a marked increase in cooperation among countries in the region. The UN narcotic agencies from the US and Europe and Interpol have also taken a

keener interest in stemming the flow of drugs from the Golden Triangle.

In Thailand, which, according to one estimate, produces 150-200 tons of raw opium a year, there has been a major involvement by the Government in international efforts to stop the traffic through the country. But drug enforcement agencies there are still hampered by lack of staff and funds. Also, Thailand is beset by political, economic and law-and-order problems which means that priority cannot be given to the anti-narcotics drive.

Three years ago a five-year pilot project was launched by the UN Fund for Drug Abuse Control to try to induce hilltribes in Thailand's mountainous northern border areas near Burma to stop growing opium poppies and turn their fields over to alternative crops. The UN provided US\$3 million towards the scheme and the Thai Government US\$5 million. The idea was to persuade the villagers that they could make profits from other crops, such as coffee, beans or tobacco. (King Bhumibol himself is closely involved in the project.) A mission which recently carried out a survey in villages taking part in the scheme reported that it was proving itself and that it should be extended.

In Laos it is unclear how much — if any — opium and morphine is being funnelled into the illicit drug trade since the Pathet Lao takeover there. When the former coalition government was in power, the UN tried to gain support for its crop-replacement scheme. But now, although a French UN crop-replacement official is still based in Vientiane, it appears there is little chance of gaining support for implementing the scheme.

The most disappointing area for those trying to nip the opium poppy in the bud is Burma, which produces an estimated 400 tons of opium a year. Here, the UN has suggested to the Government a crop-replacement scheme similar to that in Thailand, but so far there has been no reply. The fact is that many of the known opium-growing areas in northeast Burma are in the hands of Karen and Shan insurgents, as well as remnants of Chiang Kai-shek's defeated Chinese Nationalist army. Rangoon is loathe to admit this and therefore co-operation with international narcotics officials is virtually nil.

There is a growing trend towards personal exchanges among drug enforcement officials in Southeast Asia, Hongkong, Europe and North America. Heads of operations sections of agencies in the region met in Bangkok in 1974

and again in Jakarta last year. Interpol drug liaison officer Colonel Sibarani, an Indonesian, has been based in Bangkok since February following six months at Interpol's headquarters in Paris. A senior Sri Lankan customs officer specialising in narcotics is now also based in Bangkok. Hongkong's police Narcotics Bureau already has a liaison officer, Assistant Commissioner Peter Law, in Bangkok and the bureau recently seconded Superintendent John Morris to Interpol in Paris.

The US Drug Enforcement Agency has agents in all non-communist countries in Southeast Asia and Hongkong, and the Canadians last year appointed a drug liaison officer to Hongkong. European agencies are also expressing increasing willingness to establish links with countries in the region. Holland, conscious of Amsterdam's use as a major drug distribution centre, has been particularly keen to cooperate, and last December three Dutch officials, one from the Ministry of Justice and two policemen, visited Hongkong, Bangkok, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur.

Information passed on by Hongkong's Narcotics Bureau last year led to the arrest of 20 drug couriers in Europe and Canada and to the seizure of 25 kilograms of heroin.

Earlier this year a team of detectives from the bureau flew to Bangkok to join their Thai counterparts in a joint operation. As a result, four "major arrests" were made. The four were suspected members of a syndicate operated by Hongkong Chinese but with wide connections in Thailand and Malaysia. Hongkong police had been watching the syndicate for several months.

But with sky-high prices for heroin in Europe and the US (in Europe, an addict can pay 10 times more than in Hongkong, and in the US the price is two or three times higher again), and with an insatiable demand in the region, the drug trade based on supplies from the Golden Triangle is likely to remain big business for the foreseeable future.

## The flower of death

IT has many names, including "Chinese rocks," "brown sugar" and "snow." When it is inhaled, the Chinese sometimes call the experience "chasing the dragon"; when it is injected by hypodermic syringe it is known worldwide as "mainlining." Heroin — one of the greatest scourges of the modern world.

The substance which produces heroin is extracted from the opium poppy. Opium is still smoked by thousands of addicts, mainly older people, but most of the drug is first refined into morphine, which is used by some addicts, and then into heroin.

The process of refining opium into morphine is a relatively simple boiling operation, often carried out by the opium-growers themselves. But producing heroin from morphine is a more complicated process, requiring chemicals such as acetic anhydride, chloroform and sodium carbonate, and additives such as caffeine, quinine and strychnine.

Basically, there are two types of heroin: No. 4 heroin, which is a fine white powder normally with a 90% heroin content; and No. 3 heroin, with a heroin content of 30% or less, a much coarser, lumpier powder. Because of its large additive component, No. 3 heroin, which is most common in Hongkong and Southeast Asia, can be highly dangerous to inject because of impurities entering the bloodstream.

Heroin addiction is synonymous with misery and often tragedy. Some narcotics officials maintain that the average heroin addict will probably die within 10 years of taking up the habit. Others say there is medical evidence to show that if an addict manages to exert some control over his craving and still eats and works normally, he may remain reasonably healthy.

However, what is known is that addicts have to spend large sums of money on their heroin supplies, normally money which they can ill afford and which therefore reduces their budget for food and other essentials. They will also do anything to get their "fix" — many turning to crime.

RODNEY TASKER

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# Hongkong's 'mission impossible'

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By Rodney Tasker

**N**ARCOTICS officers could hardly believe their eyes when they arrested an attractive 19-year-old girl in Hongkong in February. The girl was carrying 70 bags of heroin. She admitted she was a courier for a drug syndicate, earning HK\$70 (US\$14) a day. She also admitted that she herself had been a heroin addict for a year, spending HK\$180 a day on her own supply of the drug — getting the money from prostitution and borrowing.

The girl was younger than most heroin addicts here (the bulk are over 21) and she spent more on her addiction (the average is estimated at HK\$30-\$35 a day), but her case illustrates what Hongkong's Narcotics Commissioner Peter Lee admits is "still a very grave problem."

The number of opium and heroin addicts in the colony is variously estimated at between 50,000 and well over 100,000 out of a total population of 4.5 million, which means that, per capita, Hongkong probably has the highest rate of addiction in the world.

A few years ago, the ratio of opium and heroin addicts was about 50:50. But opium-smoking requires bulky paraphernalia and the distinctive smell is easy to detect. This helped police and Preventive Service (customs) officers to carry out a successful drive against opium smokers, forcing those who still indulge in the habit to be constantly on the move.

The successful crackdown on opium "divans" had an unfortunate side-effect: It drove many former opium-smokers to heroin. Consequently, heroin addicts now outnumber those on opium by about 9:1. Most heroin addicts "get their kicks" by inhaling the fumes from heroin, which is either put in a cigarette and smoked, or is heated, normally on a piece of silver paper or a metal implement, with a flame under it.

But this again is easier to detect than "mainlining" — injecting heroin which has been heated and dissolved in a solution. So another unfortunate trend in Hongkong is that more addicts are taking heroin by the more dangerous method of mainlining.

There are also economic reasons behind the trend towards mainlining. In the past three years, Hongkong's drug enforcement agencies have had a number of successes in seizing drugs and arresting traffickers. Also last year eight heroin "factories" were raided, compared with seven in 1974 and three in 1973 — four more have been raided so far

this year. Twenty-four heroin "chemists" were arrested last year compared with 10 in 1974 and seven in 1973.

This has pushed the retail price of heroin up from HK\$450 per ounce in mid-1973 to \$2,500 per ounce now. Also, with syndicates finding it more difficult to smuggle in supplies of opium and morphine from Thailand, the heroin content of No. 3 heroin — virtually the only type of heroin available on the Hongkong market — has dropped from about 35% in January 1974 to a current purity of 29%.

Smoking heroin gives less of a boost to the addict than mainlining. So, having to pay much more for heroin which is becoming less pure, more addicts are injecting themselves with the drug.

Combined with this dismaying trend is the recent intelligence gathered by members of the police Narcotics Bureau that some youngsters in schools for expatriate children are starting to take heroin. Three years ago, the colony was shaken by the death of a 16-year-old American schoolboy from a combination of drugs, including heroin. Parents, teachers and police started to keep a closer eye on schoolchildren and for a while it appeared that no hard drugs were getting into the schools. But now there is new cause for concern.

Hongkong has a long history of opiate abuse. It was only in 1914 that the Government tried to control opium-smoking by establishing an opium monopoly, producing the drug itself with a view to reducing the harmful morphine content. But the scheme was a failure with smokers preferring the illicit supplies. Then in 1924, the first seizure of the more powerful and lethal heroin was made in Hongkong. Ironically, it had originated in Europe. After World War II, opium and its derivatives were prohibited by law, but the drug-taking habit had a firm grip on the colony — a grip which still exists today.

Until 1966, most of Hongkong's supplies of opium and morphine arrived by boat as cargo from Thailand. But during 1965 and 1966 there were a number of large seizures, one involving a ton of opium and 120 lbs of morphine smuggled here in bamboo poles, and another a large consignment of drugs in a big refrigerator.

The illicit drug trade reacted swiftly to the seizures, and this marked the start of the notorious Thai trawler era. During this time, from 1966-74, large amounts of opium and morphine would be brought by Thai fishing trawlers and

normally handed over or dumped in international waters some 150 miles southeast of the colony. The drugs were

either passed directly to Hongkong junks or tossed into the sea attached to marker buoys or onto deserted islands to be picked up later. The smuggling method was largely successful as police and Preventive Service officers had to cope with some 15,000 junks operating in Hongkong waters, any of which could have been taking part in the drug run.

During 1973, there was an increase in cooperation by the Thai authorities in cracking down on large-scale drug consignments. The drug pipeline to Hongkong began to flow more slowly and stockpiles here dwindled. Early in 1974 the drug syndicates were dealt another blow when two Thai trawlers were arrested off the coast of South Vietnam as the result of a joint intelligence operation by the Thais, South Vietnamese and the US Drug Enforcement Agency. Each trawler was carrying two tons of opium and morphine destined for Hongkong.

The authorities in Hongkong took their cue, and the Royal Air Force, Royal Auxiliary Air Force and Royal Navy started to harass drug-carrying Thai trawlers in the open sea, forcing many to turn back.

Then in November 1974 Hongkong's "merchants of death" suffered their biggest setback for a decade. Ng Sik-ho, Chiu Chow head of the biggest of Hongkong's estimated 10 drug syndicates, was arrested together with several of his cohorts. Described by the local press as "Mr Big" and "the Godfather," and by his colleagues as "Limping Ho" because of a defect in his walk, Ng had long been the elusive prize of narcotics agencies. He had built an empire employing thousands in a drug-distribution network (see graph) designed to ensure misery and death for thousands more addicts.

His syndicate had used brutal methods to ensure vast profits, including, allegedly, murder — in fact, it was largely as the result of investigations by Hongkong's Homicide Squad that Ng was eventually arrested.

With Ng's arrest, and drug lieutenants prepared to "squeal" to the police, the Hongkong syndicates apparently collapsed like a pack of cards, many members fleeing to other parts of Asia. In May 1975, Ng was sentenced to 30 years' jail. His common-law wife, Cheng Yuet-ying, was arrested two months later and in February 1976 was jailed for 16 years and fined \$1 million. The Inland Revenue Department here has since issued writs against the couple claiming a total of \$2 million.

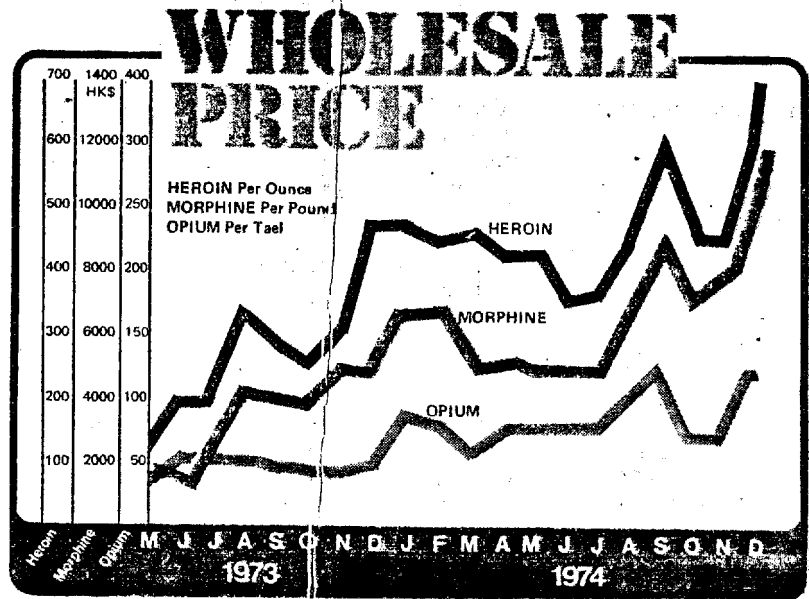
The Hongkong authorities now claim that the Thai trawler method of smuggling drugs into Hongkong has been abandoned. Instead, smugglers are using human-wave tactics, with individuals bringing smaller amounts by plane or ship to feed domestic demand (Hongkong is no longer a major re-export centre for drugs — see companion story). At Hongkong's Kaitak airport alone, 21 people (nine Chinese, 11 Thais and an Indonesian) were arrested for bringing in opium, morphine or heroin between November 1975 and

mid-April. This produced a haul of 157 lbs of crude morphine, with a wholesale value of more than HK\$1 million, and 4 lbs of heroin and 46 lbs of opium with a retail value of about \$200,000. If the morphine had been converted to No. 3 heroin, it would have had a street-level value in Hongkong of more than \$10 million.

Although the trade here has been largely fragmented since Ng Sik-ho's arrest, Preventive Service chief Roy Hatton told the REVIEW that there was evidence that two new syndicates had been formed recently, both operating in Kowloon. Syndicates were already operating in the murky depths of Kowloon Walled City and along the waterfront in Western, Hongkong Island, he said. And despite tighter enforcement measures, it is estimated that only 10% of about 35-50 tons of opium and 7-10 tons of morphine arriving here annually is being seized.

It is difficult to pinpoint accurately the extent of Hongkong's drug-addiction problem. Five years ago a central registry of drug addicts was started. The names of all those who came into contact with the police in connection with drugs were entered, plus those addicts who sought voluntary treatment with such agencies as the Society for the Aid and Rehabilitation of Drug Addicts (SARDA). By December 1974 there were 43,000 names on the registry, but 13,000 of these were duplicates.

The semi-Government Action Committee Against Narcotics (ACAN), which coordinates the drive against narcotics in Hongkong, realised that the registry was not providing an effective guide to the size of the colony's problem; since December 1974 addicts have still been entered on the registry on a case-by-case



not been processed. However, as part of Narcotics Commissioner Lee's new 10-year drugs programme to assess how Hongkong should be tackling the problem, a narcotics statistics expert from New York, Bent Werbell, a Swede, arrived in the colony in April for three months. He will make recommendations on how Hongkong should gather and process statistics on drug addiction.

What is known is that an alarming number of prisoners in Hongkong's jails are either drug addicts or have been convicted of drug offences. Between 65% and 70% are addicts, 46% have been convicted of drug offences and 20%-26% have been convicted of minor drug offences.

Far from the down-and-out hippy image of drug addicts in the West, experts here believe that many Hongkong heroin addicts have normal jobs and do not live by crime. "On the evidence, we

have a reasonable supposition that many Hongkong addicts have developed, through use, experience and absolute necessity, an ability to control their intake," Commissioner Lee told the REVIEW.

Lee's picture of the average Hongkong heroin addict is: a man over the age of 21 (male addicts outnumber females by 50:1), of the lower-income group, generally employed in unskilled or semi-skilled work, with less than five years' primary education, single or separated. He lives in overcrowded conditions and first

started the habit through curiosity, because of pressure from friends, to relieve tiredness, pain or tension or as an escape from family pressures. Many addicts also take heroin because it prolongs the sex act, although heroin addiction eventually kills both sexual desire and ability.

Opium-smokers are in a very different group. They are mainly older — often respected, senior members of the community — who like to take two or three pipes of the drug in the evening.

Hongkong is proud of its treatment and rehabilitation facilities for addicts. The Prisons Department runs four addiction treatment centres with compulsory after-care, and it claims a 42% success rate in curing addicts. On the voluntary side, the Medical and Health Department, Discharged Prisoners Aid Society and SARDA also provide treatment for addicts. There are four methadone maintenance clinics — methadone is a substitute drug, less harmful than heroin but equally addictive. The average heroin addict requires three shots of methadone a day, but he pays only \$1 a shot instead of \$10 for heroin. Experiments are also being carried out using acupuncture and electric stimulation to relieve addicts' withdrawal symptoms.

The war on drugs in Hongkong is a particularly frustrating one for the enforcement agencies, given the deeply-ingrained nature of the problem and the elaborate precautions taken by traffickers.

The stakes are high for those involved in the drug trade — huge profits, but a violent death or mutilation at the hands of colleagues if they put a foot wrong. And if they fall into the hands of the law they face a life sentence and/or HK\$5 million fine; even possession of the chemical used in

the refining of heroin for which there is no legitimate use in Hongkong, carries a maximum penalty of life imprisonment and/or \$1 million fine.

Commissioner Lee thinks the penalties are not tough enough. "We must hammer those we catch, particularly major traffickers," he said. "I believe that execution of major traffickers is justified - although I realise in the context of Hongkong it is out of the question - because they are killing tens of thousands of people by a slow process. The social harm to the fabric of families is quite incalculable. I would like to see the maximum penalty imposed in every case."

These are strong words from a mild-mannered British civil servant. But the odious nature of the drug trade provokes such sentiments from men whose job it is to wipe it out - particularly when they realise they have a "mission impossible."

# An uphill battle in Thailand

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By Richard Nations

THE notorious "Golden Triangle" - the highland regions on the borders of Burma, Thailand and Laos - continues to export more than 30 tons of heroin a year to the world market, despite political changes. A new democratic government in Thailand, a socialist revolution in Laos, tough counter-insurgency campaigns by the Burmese army, coordinated police and international agency efforts, and UN crop replacement programmes, have all failed significantly to stem the flow.

About 500-800 tons of raw opium produced annually in the region has its origins in the primitive economies of the Meo, Yao, Lisu and Muser hilltribes strung along the ridge-tops throughout the remote Golden Triangle. This presents problems for officials trying to stamp out the trade.

Any comprehensive attack on opium production requires the cooperation of three governments, Burma, Thailand and Laos, which are hardly on speaking terms and have, at best, very limited control over the remote tribal populations.

At the one extreme, the opium trade finances the insurgent Shan state armies which protect the opium poppy-growing hill tribes from central Burmese control. Although Thailand and Laos have greater administrative influence among the hill tribes, there are definite political limits.

Opium, with its derivatives morphine and heroin, is perfectly suited to the ecology and social conditions of the region's tribal economies. It is the major cash crop and any effort to suppress poppy cultivation without replacing it would, as all Thai and Lao authorities realise, only accelerate social decay and exacerbate increasing social and political tensions between the tribes and those living in the plains.

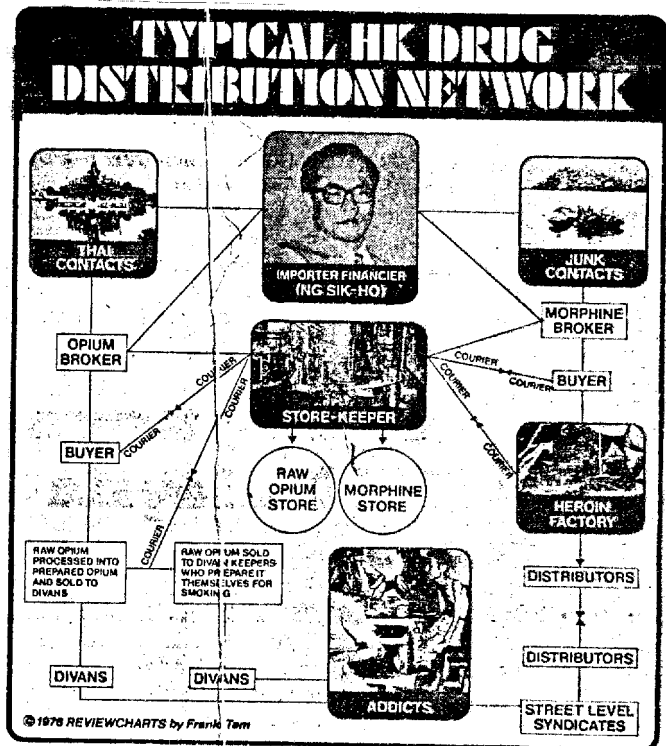
"Most of us agree that crop substitution is the only feasible long-term solution," commented one international narcotics expert. The UN is currently involved in a number of promising experiments to find crops which would provide even higher incomes.

Since Thailand is the marketplace for Golden Triangle drugs - currently thought also to be the biggest supplier of the European market - a major international effort has been concentrated on cracking down on the source. The Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), under the United States Justice Department, has set up a regional office in Bangkok. And partly in response to pressures from the US, the Thais set up a Narcotics Suppression Centre (NSC) in the police department in 1973.

The NSC has earned a remarkable reputation for diligence and pursuit of drug syndicates operating in the country. "Their phenomenal progress is way out of proportion to their budget and

manpower," said a foreign narcotics enforcement officer. But with a staff of five, the NSC remains an overworked and understaffed coordinating centre in the middle ranks of the police hierarchy, with few hard results to show.

In the first nine months of 1975, only 1,872 kilograms of narcotic drugs were seized in Thailand by the authorities. While this represents a substantial increase in enforcement, it is still an insignificant fraction of the estimated 30 tons of hard drugs annually moving around the country.



But seizing the drugs is of secondary importance to arresting the key figures behind the syndicates that run the trade. The problem is particularly difficult in Thailand. The traffic is thought to be organised by a number of independent figures with loose links that bring together an organisation for a few specific consignments then break up, lie low and change tactics for the next haul.

Even given the elusive nature of the enemy, the police record in Thailand is not encouraging. In the past year, three alleged central organisers of the drug trade were caught "red-handed" in possession of large quantities of drugs. But they were soon free and on the streets again. In each case, the DEA, which has powers in Thailand to investigate but not to prosecute, tipped off the police.

Two of the alleged traffickers were released from police custody when, because of a dubious muddle of procedure, what appeared to be a cast-iron case for the prosecution was not presented in court. The third, himself a former lieutenant-colonel of the police "escaped custody." The press and public understandably suspect the inevitable payoff did the trick. The then Prime Minister, Kukrit Pramoj, initiated an investigation, but no results have been seen so far.

As one narcotics enforcement officer put it: "We need two closely-related things to make any enforcement effort here effective: a clear political commitment from the top and an integrated narcotics division as part of the police structure with the budget and authority to tackle the job in a comprehensive manner."

Narcotics have traditionally been thought of in Thailand as a "European problem," but this is rapidly changing. The pattern is shifting away from the elderly village opium-smokers to a burgeoning and alarming population of heroin addicts estimated at between 300,000 and 600,000 including a growing number of younger and even school-age users. These are becoming more aware of the problem through press campaigns and there are rehabilitation efforts carried out by the Buddhist monasteries, hospitals and voluntary groups.

## Getting tough in Malaysia

**T**OTAL British Malayan Government revenue in 1936 was M\$35,124,137, of which M\$7,259,296 was from opium. The earliest figures available show that the monopoly accounted for as much as 46% of revenue in 1898. Some put the figure 20 years earlier at 70% when opium cultivation was not only legal, but also

Registered smokers in 1936 numbered more than 32,000 in Malaya and about 28,000 in the Straits Settlements. The "illegals" may have equalled them in number — while cultivation was unrestricted rural smokers were unlikely to be bothered with the rigmarole of registration.

The smokers at this time were almost entirely Chinese who, according to English writers, explained the taste for opium as developed in the belief that it cured tropical diseases, reduced loneliness in mines, estates and roadworks and satisfied a vanity reminiscent of the rich man's vice in their homeland.

When the Geneva Opium Conference in 1925 urged that governments reduce sales of opium, only registered smokers obtained rations. By 1934, the restriction limited smokers to those authorised for medical reasons.

In 1941, when the Pacific War broke out, there were 75,000 registered smokers and twice that number of illegals. The Japanese, hardly encumbered by the rules of Geneva, continued the trade. Then in 1945, the cut-off came without warning.

Herded into primitive drying-out centres, some addicts died and the rest were quickly forgotten by a society that largely knew little about drugs and cared even less. The faint distaste for the vice ignored the fact that a network of traffickers existed, catering for so long for some 200,000 in a Chinese population of fewer than 2 million.

According to government experts there was no real break in smuggling as a result of the British ban. In the Emergency years (1948-60) customs officials, as well as police, were engaged in widespread stop-and-search operations aimed at contraband in the form of food and weapons and drug smugglers ran very serious risks.

Still, they took chances, using jungle courier paths from Thailand to make up for the long prohibited local cultivation. One bizarre episode was the "nursing" of a dead baby stuffed with opium all the way from Bangkok to Kuala Lumpur where the "nurse" was arrested. The smokers who paid fancy prices, however, remained the old-time addicts, mostly in their 50s and 60s, smoking in secret and shame, the whiff of Victorian morality ever present to poison the sickly sweetness of the weed.

The Beatles era of long hair and violent rhythms, campus revolutions and the glorification of pot were not entirely responsible for the new drug "culture" in Malaysia. It took the Kennedy era — replete with his "sentinels on the watchtowers of freedom" who went to fight in Vietnam but found the poppy better than the prospect of death — to launch a fresh drug culture in the country.

Nixon's "honourable peace," which took the sentinels away, left behind vast hoards of camp followers — pimps, prostitutes and pushers galore. Like Vietnam Rose, a particularly virulent form of venereal disease, the early source of grass or pot was the rest and recreation (R and R) station in Penang where the troops rested — and infected the young in the country.

The Beatles and the Rolling Stones and other dashing symbols of the 1960s gave narcotic drugs popularity and the American sentinels joined the vanguard of couriers who, as the Americans reduced to a trickle, grew in number and increased the hardness of their wares.

By the late 1960s, the aloof and indifferent public woke up to the fact that the habit associated with dirty old men in dark, dank dens was spreading among school-goers with long hair and transistors in their satchels beating out the rhythm of the new age. The drugs were still "soft," but the qualitative difference did not reduce the panic.

Seizures and arrests over the past five or six years gives an indication of the rate at which the problem has grown. Raw opium seized has remained at about 5,000 pounds a year. With morphine, the figure has hovered around 150 pounds a year. Heroin, on the other hand, has leapt from a mere 8 ounces to more than 130 pounds in the first nine months of 1975.

In 1970, only about 2,300 tablets of psychotropic drugs were seized. In the first three-quarters of 1975, the authorities seized more than 50,000 tablets. Since 1970, nearly 9,000 people have been arrested on drug charges.

The drug route from the Golden Triangle does not seem to concern the authorities here as much as the short hop from across the Thai border. The critical route is from Haadyai, through Sadao and Poh Loh Thiam. The drop points favoured are in the tiny north Malaysian state of Perlis which is partly surrounded by Thai territory.

The most favoured method is to mix the drugs with legitimate goods which come across in vast quantities. Fish trucks with their unpacked slithering loads, are waved away by officers discouraged by the prospect of a search. Dead chickens stuffed with opium in transports carrying thousands live also slip by. Foot runners using jungle paths are very highly favoured — the men do not see their Malaysian counterparts, who pick up the contraband at pre-arranged spots and times.

The traditional drug centre in the country has been Penang, and there is little doubt that the hippy tourist favours the island less for its exotic beauty than for the availability of marijuana, opium, morphine, heroin, amphetamines and some hallucinatory drugs. There is no evidence so far that drugs like LSD are on the market.



The laws in Malaysia have been given some muscle only in recent times and the Central Narcotics Bureau was formed in 1973 after much deliberation. It is not the sole enforcement agency — the police and customs departments play major roles in investigation, prevention and enforcement. Employing fewer than two dozen men, with half on desk jobs, the Bureau still seems to be bogged down with departmental responsibilities and bureaucratic procedures. The strength of the Bureau seems to have no relationship with the size of the problem.

Meanwhile, the battle to rehabilitate drug abusers has been stepped up. Constant reminders on television and repeated public statements by ministers has even raised questions in Parliament about over-stress in the campaign. Rehabilitation centres are increasing in number and prominent citizens, including the former premier Tunku Abdul Rahman, spend a great deal of time visiting addicts and campaigning for better facilities.

The University of Science in Penang is about to release a study on drug abuse, based on a year of research and study. There is also mounting pressure for harsher punishment of pushers, even including the death sentence. It is known that some 50 or more big-time pushers are detained on the island of Jerejak off Penang, including foreigners caught in possession. With the dramatic rise in the arrests of pushers and, equally disturbing, the number of drug abusers, the battle, according to experts, is expected to be a long one.

## Singapore: Concern over youth

By Ho Kwon Ping

THE Singapore connection in the international drug trade has seen several changes in the decade since independence. The pattern of opium, heroin and morphine smuggling and addiction has adapted to the small city state's transformation from an exotic and somewhat sleazy entrepot centre to an industrialised, affluent metropolis.

At the same time, penalties have become tougher and enforcement tighter. The island's key role as a vital link in the international network of hard drug trafficking has diminished, but even as the smugglers have chosen to bypass Singapore for their European and American cargoes, the island itself has become a lucrative market.

Having become Westernised and affluent, Singapore developed its own drug addiction problem of near panic proportions. Although the two problems are intertwined, the authorities today seem more worried about the spiralling domestic drug abuse among its young than the transshipment of drugs through the Republic. But measures to combat drug abuse, draconian as they are, have not succeeded in stemming the tide of addicts.

In the first post-war decade, more than 22 tons of prepared and raw opium were seized in Singapore, but many more times that amount was successfully smuggled through the island. In the mid-1950s the Thai connection began to bloom and by the mid-1960's well-heeled syndicates with fast speedboats were smuggling large quantities through Singapore for the rapidly growing European and American markets. Singapore, along with Hongkong, became a major centre, with airborne smuggling playing a more important role in the trafficking of refined heroin or morphine.

Bulk opium or morphine blocks were smuggled into Singapore by fishing vessels making rendezvous with Thai fishing vessels on the east coast of Malaysia, or at well-known fishing grounds in the South China Sea. Cargoes containing up to 1,000 kilograms of raw opium were hidden in fish crates of the Singapore vessels. This method, which replaced the speedboat retrieval tactic when harbour patrols became more effective, also changed as coastal patrols and port inspections became stricter.

Drugs from the Golden Triangle then entered Singapore by land,

smuggled into West Malaysia via the east coast, the drugs were then taken by lorry, car or van to Johore Causeway and into Singapore. This method continued well into the late 1960s.

In 1971, the job of narcotics suppression was switched from the Customs Department to a separate Central Narcotics Bureau under the Ministry of Home Affairs. In the same year, the American Embassy opened a regional narcotics liaison office in Singapore, with its agents helping to crack the international syndicates. In 1973, the Misuse of Drugs Act was passed, providing severe penalties for pushers and greater powers for enforcement agencies.

The traffickers have since tended to bypass Singapore and instead trade directly from Bangkok, Jakarta or other Asian centres with the Hongkong and Amsterdam connections. The death penalty was introduced last year for the manufacture or trafficking of even a mere 15 grams of heroin. As a result, trade has diminished considerably. The inflow of hard drugs, however, continues unabated as drug abuse among the island's young grows.

The number of drug offences last year increased 21 times over 1974. More than half the arrests were for heroin usage or peddling — in the past marijuana users were the main offenders. Of those arrested, 88% were under 30 years old. Known drug addiction rose eight times and arrests of drug traffickers increased three-fold.

Although better vigilance and enforcement partially account for the rising drug abuse statistics, the Government is openly worried about the spreading use of heroin among the young. Last month, an estimated one-fifth of the 540 students at the Singapore American School were thought to be taking drugs or trafficking in them. This followed a series of arrests by the Central Narcotics Board.

The death penalty for drug trafficking — seven people have so far been charged with the capital offence — has probably discouraged many small-time traffickers who would have liked to use Singapore's busy sea and airport to smuggle drugs to other countries. It has had little effect, however, in curbing the addiction rate. Of the addicts sent to the nearby St John's Island for rehabilitation, 80% returned to drugs after

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## Amsterdam connection

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By Malcolm Subhan

THE discovery of the body of a Chinese woman near Amsterdam recently gave rise inevitably to speculation that the murdered woman had been connected in some way with the heroin traffic. A Dutch newspaper headlined the story "Another killing in the heroin jungle?"

It noted that the police linked her death to the murder two weeks earlier of the 46-year-old Chinese heroin king Chan Yuen-muk. His murder, in fact, was only one of several attributed by the police to the gang warfare which has accompanied Amsterdam's dramatic rise to prominence as the European centre for heroin traffic.

That the Dutch capital now enjoys this unenviable reputation is admitted by the authorities themselves on the basis of the amounts confiscated each year (and which represent only 10% of the heroin entering the country according to the police). In a parliamentary

debate early this month, Justice Minister Van Agt listed the amounts seized in recent years: 1970, none; 1971, 50 grams; 1972, 2.5 kilograms; 1973, 23 kilograms; 1974, 29 kilograms; 1975, 60 kilograms; 1976, 28 kilograms to date.

The heroin, which originates in Southeast Asia's "Golden Triangle," reaches Amsterdam by way of Hong Kong and Bangkok. Kuala Lumpur, another embarkation point for the couriers, reportedly has been used less often since a large haul of heroin was seized by police in Brussels and Vienna last year on flights from the Malaysian capital. The mammoth Schipohl airport is not the only point of entry: The drug is often taken to Brussels or other neighbouring airports and brought to Amsterdam by train or car.

According to Dutch police, the heroin traffic is largely in Chinese hands. Although Europeans have been used as couriers, most are Chinese as they are considered more trustworthy. They have been recruited from among Hong Kong, Malaysian and Singapore Chinese. Many of the Malaysians are from the northern town of Ipoh. Singapore Chi-

nese reportedly have also been enrolled into the strong-arm squads maintained by the various gangs.

While the heroin traffic is controlled by the Chinese, many of the pushers are Surinamese or Dutch. Statistics on drug addiction show that of the 5,000 or so addicts, 1,000 are Dutch and 1,500 Surinamese.

Because both hard and soft drugs are readily available in Amsterdam, the city acts as a magnet for both tourists on a "drug" trip and US soldiers stationed in West Germany. One of the unexpected hazards is that the heroin peddled in Amsterdam is of the inferior No. 3 quality.

Amsterdam's reputation as an international centre for heroin traffic is also due to the fact that it is a transit point for shipment to the US and other West European countries — apparently it is easier to smuggle hard drugs to Paris from Amsterdam than Marseilles. But the quantities reaching North America from Holland are believed to be small. As an American official put it: "The French connection is dead and there is no Dutch connection — yet."

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## Laos' political solution

By John Everingham

IRONICALLY, it took a communist victory in Laos to solve the problem of America's elusive second war in Laos — the Laotian sector of the Golden Triangle heroin and opium trade. When Americans packed their bags and fled Laos' gradual communist takeover last May and June, many of the top-ranking military and civilian officers of the old government who had run Laos' opium and heroin traffic sought foreign refuge in France, Thailand or the US.

After the Pathet Lao shipped the majority of middle and top-level officials remaining in the country off to political re-education, it is unlikely that more than a small handful of the lowest links of the old smuggling chain actually remained in the capital or other towns along the route.

The total dismantling or reorganising of the old rightist army, air force and national airline through which heroin and opium from the Golden Triangle is believed to have flowed, leaves the country without the physical means as well as the personnel to move narcotics.

Although estimated to have produced up to 100 tons of raw opium a year at its peak, Laos' output today is probably only 10-20 tons, sufficient only for the domestic market. Major production around the Plain of Jars region stopped abruptly in the late 1960s and early 1970s when the Meo tribesmen under the control of the CIA-supported General Vang Pao were pushed out of their homeland by the communist advance.

At the end of 1971, the US used a threatened cut-off of aid to Vientiane to force the signing of Laos' first-ever narcotics law, and, to give it teeth, created within the Lao Government itself a force of more than 40 American-trained narcotics police. American-paid rewards were offered for each kilogram of heroin and opium seized, but still official seizures of heroin totalled less than 20 kilograms during its multi-million dollar four-year lifespan.

The narcotics law was clearly the most unpopular ever passed in Laos, and on several occasions the House of Representatives debated rescinding it. The carrot and stick of the US aid lasted only until the formation of the coalition government. The Pathet Lao opposed the law due to its American origins, and the Bill was declared void in February 1975.

Not a single big fish was put behind bars in four years, despite the fact that at least two House deputies were caught with opium and one of Vientiane's most powerful princes was caught in Paris with 40 kilograms of No. 4 heroin as he arrived to take up the post of new Laotian ambassador there.

It is noteworthy that during the life of Laos' coalition government the communist-supported Pathet Lao refused to let any of their personnel join the narcotics branch of the police force, at a time when they were otherwise infiltrating every possible organ of government. Now that the Pathet Lao have taken over, the narcotics police branch has been dispersed. Some officers fled the country, possibly on narcotics kick-back money, others have been sent to seminars for re-education. To date, no special body has been set up within

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the Government to carry out or police new policies on opium or heroin.

The Pathet Lao can afford to take such a lax attitude to narcotics. Laos itself is not threatened by a significant drug problem. The rate of opium addiction is rather high among retired and chronically sick people, but this remains the traditional social role of the opium pipe. The old and infirm spend their final years in semi-euphoria, a state regarded as a just reward following a tough and productive life. The sick turn to opium since the majority of villages in the country still have no access to medical centres. At the same time, there are powerful family and communal taboos that keep younger, productive members of the society from seeking out the pipe for pleasure only, and these remain strong and effective today.

Heroin addiction is limited to a tiny handful. Most of these are sad cases who have become victims on No. 3 heroin "red-rock," or *khai* as the Laotians call it. Half zombies, members of this group wander the streets of Vientiane begging handouts. Their numbers appear to have decreased in the past few years, seemingly through death, and to date the new Government has not turned to this problem. Use of pure white No. 4 heroin is rarely heard of in Laos.

The new authorities have defined plans for opium as an earner of foreign exchange. Opium has brought far more foreign currency into Laos than any other source for many generations past, short of war and related aid, and its potential remains vast. The Government has expressed its determination to return many of the refugee Meo from the Plain of Jars region to the cultivation of the red and white poppies. Their crop will be monopolised by the Government, which in turn intends to sell it abroad.

Present trends suggest that Vientiane, which has declared its intention to keep official drugs off the blackmarket, will be most willing to sell its opium crop to Western governments and pharmaceutical houses. In selling such produce to socialist brother countries, said one trade official fearfully, Laos will risk being repaid only in socialist merchandise, aid and services at a time when their greatest need is for hard cash dollars, which they are assured from the West.

For the moment, dollars from opium remain something of a dream. Not only have the Pathet Lao the task of returning many thousands of Meo to opium-producing regions, but first they need to pacify completely those rebellious Meo guerillas left over from the Vang Pao army who continue a sporadic but paralysing resistance throughout the central mountain districts.