

Drug Situation in Thailand

Drug situation in 1999 until 2000 has been serious continually, especially methamphetamine, which has expanded dramatically in supply and demand. The domestic and international trafficking syndicates have high potential in penetrating drug into Thai market.

Last year, the narcotics control organizations of Thailand and Myanmar could seize methamphetamine totalling 70 million tablets. Even the seizures were quite high, the supply of methamphetamine had not been affected at all. The heroin situation was expected to be more severe, whereas heroin seizure showed the declining trend in the past the 4 years. There is an increasing production of opium in Golden Triangle areas by the minority group, at the same time they also produce methamphetamine. In 1999, 1.5 tons of heroin were seized by Thai and Myanmar authorities. The most serious situation which existed in Thailand were being the hub of financial and administrative management, and trafficking routes of this region.

According to methamphetamine, they are high in both supply and demand in all regions of Thailand. The abusers can obtain drug easily, the retail price remains steady. Most of methamphetamine epidemic in Thailand was produced outside the country. It was estimated more than 300 million tablets imported last year, and about 80% were from the northern border of Thailand. Moreover, the smuggling of precursor chemicals and making tablet machine from Thailand has been increased. From July 1999 to the beginning of 2000, caffeine was smuggled through Chiang Mai and Chiang Rai Provinces about 20 tons, which can produce 35 million tablets of methamphetamine. Last year, 5 making tablet machines were seized and most of them are Rotary type; which can produce 19 tablets in each cycle. The physical characteristic of

methamphetamine tablet which was popular in this region, has orange and green color, WY stamp in one side, and flat round shape.

Concerning domestic production of methamphetamine, it is remarkable that the factories are expanding from the North to the Central in order to avoid the strict suppression of government authorities. Most of existing factories are kitchen lab, and some also produce the precursor. The retail traffickers are increasing continually, and women become more involved in the drug business now.

In case of heroin, the problem trend is expected to be more serious. Concerning the production outside Thailand, the opium smuggled from Laos PDR and Myanmar was 1,890 tons. And this year, the intelligence unit reported that 1,900 tons of opium are expected to be produced in Myanmar. Though this year, the opium cultivation in Thailand is expected to decrease, but domestic heroin situation will be more severe. One reason is the reduction of heroin's wholesale price at the North of Thailand.

The epidemic group of heroin abusers are in the same as previous year. Most of abusers ages are between 20-29 years old, and educated from primary to secondary school. Their occupations are workers and unemployed.

Marihuana cultivation has declined continually. The current problem is the transition of marihuana from the northeastern and eastern part of Thailand to the third countries. This year, the majority of marihuana seized was exported to England, Japan, Netherlands, Hong Kong, and Malaysia. Most of large order will be shipped. The marihuana epidemic in Thailand remains steady among the old group.

In case of ecstasy, cocaine, and ketamine, the traffickers are in the same group. The price of these drugs is quite high if compared with other type of drugs. The traffickers will sell it directly to the abusers, which make trafficking network has slightly expanded. The students who graduated from oversea are stated to be the major traffickers of these drugs in Thailand. They often experience

these drugs themselves, then developed to join drug business.

The reports of drug situation from the 4 regional offices of ONCB focusing on the difference of drug problem in all regions of Thailand during 1999-2000 were the following:

From the survey of the Northern Narcotics Control Office, the opium cultivation was still in the area covering Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Mae Hong Son, and Tak Provinces. In the primary survey in producing season 1999-2000, it is reported that there are 864 hectares of opium cultivation, while the authorities could eradicate about 640 hectares, or 75 percent. There are mixed-crop cultivation, multiple cropping in the same area, using Technology to supply water and accelerate the yield, or choose the area that is hard to reach. This year the cultivation field has been larger when comparing with the past, also expanding along the border. In addition, the coca plants have been cultivated as the herbal and decorated plants under the name "Siamese Ruby". But from the scientific examination, it is not found any addicted

substances like the cocaine as in South America.

In 1999, heroin production had not been reported, and methamphetamine production had decreased, and was found in tableting process. The production based was expected to move inside and down to the Central and Bangkok Metropolitan. But drug trafficking still exists severely, especially heroin and methamphetamine. In addition, chemical precursors and related equipment were smuggled out of the country for ethnic minority producers along the border. Furthermore, the syndicate of the hilltribe groups played the most important role of drugs distribution to the traffickers in the North and then expanded to the Central and Bangkok Metropolitan. There are more than 10 million tablets of methamphetamine traded in the market each month. As the result of the measures of border interception according to the Prime Minister Order No.192/B.E.2541 (1998) affected the changing of trafficking route to the western and southeastern border. In case of domestic transportation, the amount transported each time was among 10,000-50,000

tablets. The flourishing of drugs in the market made the small dealers increase widely, especially among the students.

The Central Narcotics Control Office reported that this region is the biggest market of methamphetamine, which is transited from the North. This year, the production base of methamphetamine is going to be moved down from the North to the Central. Meanwhile, marihuana cultivation in this area is expanded, heroin has decreased this year.

Heroin distribution in this region tends to decrease, because heroin abusers have changed to be methamphetamine abusers. Most of traffickers are in small groups, and abusers are still in the same group. The epidemic is in a medium level when comparing with other regions. Now the Central is the main transit route of heroin from the North to the South; which become the biggest heroin market in Thailand. Also some have been exported to aboard. In case of marihuana, the seized statistic showed a decreasing trend. Besides, cultivation could be found along the eastern border, Trat and

Srakeaw Provinces. Trat and Chantaburi Provinces are the center of marihuana distribution domestically and aboard.

For the Northeastern Narcotics Control Office, there were 600,000 drug abusers estimated in this region. Moreover, 200,000 abusers are the youth in schools, which shared the biggest proportion. From 19 provinces in the Northeast, 7 provinces were stated to be the most severe situation, 11 provinces had moderate seriousness, and Surin is only one province, which has alleviated problem. Methamphetamine is still the most serious problem. Volatile substances and marihuana are the second and the third respectively.

In case of methamphetamine, production in this region, most is found as Kitchen Lab with small and movable machine, which can produces in small amount. The smuggling along the border was the major problem of methamphetamine flourishing last year, especially from the Golden Triangle. Methamphetamine epidemic is going to cover new areas along the northeastern border. Loei and Ubonratchatani

Provinces are the major entries of methamphetamine in this region.

The cost of methamphetamine is about 70,000-80,000 Baht per package, which is declined when comparing with last year. The retail price is about 120-150 Baht per tablet, 20-30 Baht higher compared to last year. The abusers are expanded to the farmer, truck driver, out of school youth, prostitutes, government officer, and student. In addition, the people in this region have not yet realized about the danger of methamphetamine. Furthermore some teenagers realized it as group participation symbol.

According to the volatile substances, epidemic among the youth in

the villages had decreased quite obviously. But it was found that some volatile substance abusers became the methamphetamine abusers, especially in Nakhonratchasima, Srisaket, Ubonratchatani, Chiyapoom, Surin, Udornthani, and Nongkai Provinces.

Marihuana situation in this region has existed within 3 main provinces, Mookdaharn, Nakornpanom, and Sakonakorn. In cultivation season 1999-2000, the authorities can eradicate 75.5 hectares, or about 51,293 kilograms of opium cultivation. In Sakonnakorn and Mookdahan Provinces are stated to be the main cultivation area this year. The plantation area is mainly in the mountainous area.