



CNB CENTRAL NARCOTICS BUREAU



Central Narcotics Bureau

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THE BUREAU'S FIGHT FOR

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CONTENT

PRIME MINISTER'S FOREWORD	04	2.3 The 1990s: A New Home, A New Structure, A New Vigour	30	CNB TODAY		4.3.2 A Relentless Unstoppable Force	92
MINISTER'S MESSAGE	05	2.4 The New Millennium: The Changing Face of the Enemy	36	4.1 A Formidable Force	82	4.3.3 The Embodiment of Courage	93
DIRECTOR CNB'S MESSAGE	06	2.5 From Primitive to World-Leading	41	4.2 An Organisation Like No Other	84	4.3.4 Dedication to the Tradecrafts	95
MESSAGES FROM FORMER DIRECTORS	07	2.6 Three Decades of Battling for Minds and Souls	49	4.2.1 Razor-Sharp Focus	84	4.3.5 An Uncommon Camaraderie	96
THE FOUNDATIONAL YEARS		2.7 Reinventing Aftercare	56	4.2.2 The Mentors Who Left a Lasting Impact	86	4.4 The Oddest Cases. The Strangest People.	98
1.1 The Creation of a New Dedicated Drug Enforcement Agency	12	2.8 The Four Different Homes of CNB	60	4.2.3 The Enforcement Agency with a Heart	87	READY FOR THE FUTURE	
1.2 Heroin Got its Claws on Singapore	15	FIVE DECADES OF ACHIEVEMENTS		4.3 A League of Extraordinary Men and Women	89	5.1 The Road Ahead	102
1.3 Operation Ferret	20	3.1 Of Triumphs and Frontiers	66	4.3.1 Where Mission Meets Passion	90	5.2 Adapting to Meet Tomorrow's Challenges	106
1.4 The Pioneer Team	22	3.2 It Takes a Community	70				
1.5 Singapore's First Taste of Victory in the Drug War	25	3.3 A Global Network of Allies	74				
FIVE DECADES OF EVOLUTION		3.3.1 Crippling Ah Kong: The Sensational Five-Agency Operation that Straddled Five Countries	77				
2.1 Five Decades of Growth. Five Decades of Reinvention.	28	3.3.2 The Longest Ever Trailing of a Trafficker	79				
2.2 The 1980s: The Bureau is Reengineered	29						



FOREWORD

Singapore has long experience with the problem of drug abuse. Even up to the early twentieth century, opium sale and consumption were legal. In the early years of independence, heroin emerged as the drug of choice. The rise of hippie culture in the late 1960s also saw a growing number of young people abusing cannabis and methaqualone (MX) pills.

But our founding leaders took an uncompromising stance against drug use. They were determined to prevent a drug culture from taking root here. They had seen the devastating consequences of opium and heroin abuse on individuals, who often resorted to crime to feed their habit. They had also witnessed too many families suffer. Tough laws were enacted to target and deter drug activities. At the same time, drug abusers were required to undergo treatment and rehabilitation

The Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) was formed in 1971 to give dedicated attention to this fight against drugs. CNB has played a critical role in keeping Singapore's drug situation under control, through strict enforcement and effective engagement. As a result, the number of drug abusers per 100,000 residents has decreased from the peak of over 200 in the mid-90s, to 75 in 2020. There are no drug havens or production centres in Singapore. Through CNB's efforts, Singapore has made good progress towards becoming a drug-free society.

Yet, challenges remain. Lawlessness in some parts of the world has allowed rampant drug production, which aggravated the drug situation globally. At the same time, the trend in many countries is towards a more permissive approach to drugs. The discourse is about harm reduction, decriminalisation and even legalisation. The attitude of our youths towards drugs is also shaped by its innocuous portrayal in social media and pop culture. Thankfully, despite these baleful influences, most Singaporeans still view drugs negatively. CNB must continue to adapt to the changing environment and work hard to retain Singaporeans' support for our tough stance against drug use.

This commemorative book pays tribute to all CNB officers, past and present, for the relentless work and personal risks they have undertaken to keep drugs and traffickers at bay. It celebrates stories of their perseverance, commitment, and resourcefulness in this fight against drugs.

On behalf of Singaporeans, thank you, and congratulations to CNB and its officers on a successful mission over the past 50 years. I have every confidence that CNB will continue to keep Singapore safe from drugs for many years to come.

PRIME MINISTER
LEE HSIEN LOONG



MESSAGE

The Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) started from modest beginnings in November 1971.

It was a small outfit with fewer than 20 officers. Today, it is a highly professional and effective drug enforcement agency. It has more than 800 officers.

Generations of CNB officers have done outstanding work, to keep Singapore largely drug free. They have saved tens of thousands of young people from a life of drugs and crime.

CNB's mission will get more challenging. More liberal views on drug use are prevalent, around the world. A permissive drug culture is glamorised on social media. There are stronger calls internationally for alternative and liberal drug policies that undermine Singapore's zero-tolerance approach. Narratives supporting legalisation of recreational cannabis are also becoming louder. Enforcement is becoming more challenging because more drug transactions are taking place online.

CNB has been evolving its response.

It has revamped its preventive drug education programmes. It has embarked on high-profile and creative campaigns, with an emphasis online. It has used technology to sharpen its enforcement capabilities and operational efficiency.

CNB has been engaging like-minded countries and ASEAN partners to work towards a common voice internationally on drug issues. CNB is an active contributor in the international community, working with organisations such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and the Colombo Plan Drug Advisory Programme on training initiatives and capacity building projects.

Our legal framework plays a critical role in our drug control strategy. In 1973, the Misuse of Drugs Act (MDA) was introduced to address the worsening drug situation. It consolidated previous legislations on drugs, and significantly enhanced the penalties for drug traffickers. Presumptions of trafficking and possession were introduced to overcome

traffickers claiming ignorance of the drugs they were caught smuggling.

The MDA is reviewed regularly to ensure that it remains relevant. For example, we intend for New Psychoactive Substances to be dealt with based on the psychoactive effects they produce, instead of the traditional listing of specific drugs, because of the ease and speed with which these drugs can be produced. Instead of long term incarceration, we now take a more rehabilitative approach to dealing with repeat drug abusers. This approach, targeted at abusers who do not commit other offences, helps them break the cycle of addiction more effectively and reintegrate into society sooner. We are able to shift the balance here because Singapore's drug situation has improved, due to the robust anti-drug legal framework in place, the effectiveness of CNB and its Home Team partners, as well as the support of Singaporeans.

CNB and its officers have successfully carried out their mission these last 50 years. I am confident that you will continue to keep Singapore safe from the scourge of drugs. Congratulations to CNB on its 50th Anniversary!

**MINISTER FOR HOME
AFFAIRS AND
MINISTER FOR LAW**
K SHANMUGAM



MESSAGE

This year marks 50 years of drug enforcement in the Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB). CNB was established in 1971 as the central agency for tackling drug abuse and trafficking in Singapore. During its formative years, CNB was focused predominantly on drug enforcement. Since then, it has expanded its efforts to preventive drug education, as well as community and international engagement, transforming itself into a leading drug enforcement agency where its officers are committed to Enforce, Engage and Educate to achieve the vision of a drug-free Singapore.

The drug situation in Singapore has remained under control over the years. At the heart of this is the hard work of generations of dedicated officers in the Bureau, who truly embody our values of professionalism, integrity, dedication and courage. Fueled by passion and grit, our officers work tirelessly on all fronts to

ensure that the streets of Singapore are free from drugs. They have had to adapt to changes in technology and processes as well as refinements in the law, in order to stay ahead in the fight against drugs. This often comes with many personal sacrifices, that can at times take a toll on their personal lives and health.

The CNB officer of today is capable of wearing multiple hats while equipped with diverse skillsets. This individual brilliance becomes exponentially multiplied when CNB officers work together as closely knitted teams; displaying a kind of camaraderie that is unique and deeply appreciated by officers. Not forgetting the unsung heroes from CNB's staff divisions, who have worked tremendously hard behind the scenes in ensuring CNB's operational effectiveness. All these have enabled CNB to become a public institution that is respected and trusted to deliver – an anti-drug force to be reckoned with.

To take this fight forward, towards achieving our vision of a drug-free Singapore, we have to build upon the strong foundation laid down by our predecessors, and bring onboard passionate and talented officers, developing them to their fullest potential. CNB is committed to supporting each and every officer's development journey in becoming the best versions of themselves, because a strong CNB core is our ticket to continued success.

Thank you to all past and present CNB officers for your hard work and sacrifices. I also thank the family members of our officers for their continuous support so that they can remain focused in their mission. This commemorative book chronicles the hard lessons we have learnt in overcoming decades of the drug menace, and I hope this will inspire CNB officers to remain dedicated in our duty to protect Singapore from drugs, for generations to come. I am confident that, together, we will continue to keep Singaporeans safe from the scourge of drugs.

DIRECTOR CNB
NG SER SONG



MESSAGE FROM

MR TEE TUA BA

Director CNB (1978-1981)

The Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) has grown from strength to strength since its humble beginnings 50 years ago. Every generation of CNB officers faces different challenges but they always carry out their tasks with dedication and commitment. Due to its unyielding efforts to stem the drug problem, CNB has managed to keep Singapore relatively drug-free, such that there are no black areas in Singapore. May the CNB continue to keep our nation free from the scourge of drugs.



MESSAGE FROM

MR POH GEOK EK

Director CNB (1981-1991)

For the last 50 years, the relentless anti-drug efforts of the Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) in seeking out illicit drug traffickers and addicts has been a success in controlling the drug problem in Singapore. I wish CNB continued success with its zero-tolerance strategy.



MESSAGE FROM

MR SIM POH HENG

Director CNB (1991-1999)

Congratulations to CNB on its 50th anniversary. CNB has evolved significantly in the last 50 years, from an agency that was primarily focused on enforcement to one that also educates the community on the harms of drugs as well as garners community support to create a Singapore free from the scourge of drugs. CNB has also progressed leaps and bounds in drug enforcement work. I am confident that CNB and its officers will continue with the excellent performance in containing the drug problem.



MESSAGE FROM

MR TAN SECK KANG

Director CNB (1999-2002)

Congratulations CNB on the occasion of your Golden Jubilee. The relentless enforcement actions by generations of dedicated officers the past 50 years have ensured that Singapore remains relatively drug-free and residents here live and work in a safe and secure environment. Keep up the good work. I wish CNB success and that it will achieve its vision to bring about a Singapore safe from the menace of drugs.



MESSAGE FROM

MR ERIC TAN

Director CNB (2002-2005)

Since the establishment of CNB in 1971, drug trends have been changing. The modus operandi of drug syndicates are also constantly evolving. The only thing that remains unchanged is CNB's commitment for a drug-free Singapore where everyone can live, work and play safely. Congratulations to CNB for achieving this 50th anniversary milestone. I am confident that CNB will continue its success in keeping Singapore relatively drug-free.



MESSAGE FROM

MR NG SENG LIANG

Director CNB (2005-2011)

As nations around the world have taken a more liberal approach to managing their drug problems, it is Singapore who continued its zero-tolerance against drug abuse. As CNB celebrates its golden jubilee, let us take a moment to appreciate the peace and safety that CNB's commitment has given us. Congratulations to CNB for its 50th anniversary and wishing CNB success in continuing the fight for a drug-free Singapore.



CHAPTER

01

THE

FOUNDATIONAL
YEARS



THE CREATION OF A NEW DEDICATED DRUG ENFORCEMENT AGENCY

It was the twisted look of the dead that convinced Professor Chao Tzu Cheng that Singapore had a serious and new drug problem on its hands.

Between 1969 and 1974 the renowned state forensic pathologist was struck by the state of 65 people who had died in cases related to drugs. More than half of them were found dead in the street after they had collapsed and died of a drug overdose or a severe allergic reaction to drugs. Three

had died after they wandered aimlessly in a drug stupor and were hit by oncoming vehicles. Two boys and a girl died after they set themselves on fire. All the victims had consumed illicit drugs such as methaqualone (MX) or morphine. Twenty four of them were under 29.

To the authorities it sounded the alarm that drug addiction among the youths of Singapore was on the increase and that they were increasingly taking other drugs besides opium, which was then the prevailing illegal drug of choice on the island.

A DEADLY NEW TREND

Unlike the opium and morphine problem, which was largely confined to Chinese older men, Singapore was seeing a new type of addicts who took MX pills and cannabis because it was a trendy thing to do.



Methaqualone or MX is a synthetic drug that acts as a central nervous system depressant. First synthesised in 1951, methaqualone was then used medically in the treatment of sleep problems and insomnia and as a muscle relaxant or general sedative. In the 1960s and 1970s, the drug quickly gained popularity as a recreational drug. What makes the drug so popular is its effect on the central nervous system; it induces a sense of euphoria and calmness, and the relief of stress, anxiety and tension. However MX is extremely addictive and can become dangerous when mixed with other substances.

In the 1960s and early 1970s before the enactment of the Misuse of Drugs Act in 1973, MX was not a controlled drug and MX pills were easily available from pharmaceutical outlets, clinics and even sarabat stalls¹. Costing a mere 20 cents each, MX pills began to gain a foothold among young people, including schoolchildren.

The other drug that was gaining popularity with young Singaporeans around the same time was cannabis. It goes by many names: marijuana, pot, grass, joint and ganja. Cannabis contains a chemical that alters one's mood and the way one sees and hears things. It affects one's concentration and memory and, hence, weakens the ability to learn. It also leads users to feel extreme anxiety, depression, confusion and paranoia. Cannabis was a big part of the hippie culture

and when the culture hit Singapore, so did the drug. Soon pot parties where cannabis was freely passed around were the vogue. Unlike MX, cannabis is illegal in Singapore. Still this did not stop the drug from catching on in Singapore. In 1971, there were about 2,000 cannabis addicts in Singapore.

Between 1971 and 1972, Singapore saw a sudden surge in MX and cannabis addicts. In 1971, 490 addicts under 30 years old were arrested for abusing cannabis and MX pills. Just one year later, the number of young addicts had increased almost 85% to 899. It was estimated that in this same period, between 5,000 and 7,000 adolescents and young adults were experimenting with drugs in the privacy of their homes and in public places like hostels, parks, football fields and the common stairways of apartment blocks.

Pot parties were rampant and young people who took part in tea dances and frequented nightclubs were popping MX pills. In particular, schoolgirls were consuming MX pills. What was more worrying was that MX addiction permeated all strata of society, from school dropouts to the upper middle class, from teenagers to those over 50. Some tried the drugs because they were depressed or had personal problems. Others said they did it out of curiosity or for a kick.

Most of these drugs were smuggled from the Golden Triangle – the mountainous region bordering northern Thailand, Myanmar and Laos – into Singapore in vehicles with secret compartments or underneath cargo. Between January and October 1971, more than 1,000 raids were conducted resulting in the seizure of 450 pounds of ganja and 2,280 MX pills and the arrest of 420 people. The large drug seizures highlighted the severity of the drug problem facing Singapore.

AN AGENCY SOLELY DEDICATED TO THE DRUG FIGHT

The Singapore government of Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew knew it had to respond quickly before the crisis grew out of control.

There was one challenge: there was no single dedicated agency responsible for drug enforcement at that time, which hampered strong coordinated action.

The Narcotics Branch of the Police's Criminal Investigation Department (CID) was in charge of suppressing the internal distribution and consumption of opium. At the checkpoints, the Customs and Excise Department was in charge of preventing the smuggling of drugs into Singapore. Meanwhile, a Customs and Excise unit called the Central Narcotics Intelligence Bureau worked with international narcotics intelligence units to curb the activities of international smuggling syndicates.

These arrangements had many shortcomings. CID's focus on serious crimes like murder, rape and robbery cases meant that drug issues were not seen as an immediate priority.

It was decided that a dedicated drug enforcement agency completely devoted to countering and containing the drug menace was needed to prevent the drug problem from becoming a major threat to Singapore.

On 12 November 1971 the Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) was set up to lead the fight against drug abuse and trafficking in Singapore. The CNB would take over the functions of the Narcotics Branch of the CID and the Central Narcotics Intelligence Bureau.

John Hanam, then Assistant Controller at the Customs and Excise Department, was picked to head the new agency. In



¹ A Malay word for "tea stall". Sarabat is a strong-tasting drink made of ginger and sugar.

John Hanam, then the Assistant Controller the Bureau got itself a founding Director with a reputation for fearlessness and a track record for staring gangsters down.

The Director went on to virtually set up the Bureau singlehandedly with an initial force of 20 men, including himself. He also proved to be a zealous crusader for the anti-drug message. Recognising the need to enlighten

people about the dangers of drug abuse and addiction, he spent all his weekends in the first year of CNB's formation giving lectures, participating in anti-drug forums and recruiting civic-minded citizens as volunteers. In his zeal, he even brought young addicts to his home to expose them to a proper family environment and to counsel them.

HITTING THE GROUND RUNNING

The young team wasted no time and went to work with fervour. During an operation lasting two weeks, for example, CNB picked up 146 drug offenders including two opium traffickers, one morphine distributor and eight cannabis and MX pill pushers.

The dedicated and determined officers also found that the MX pills and ganja culture had infiltrated some of the night entertainment spots in the early 1970s. The Bureau gathered evidence to have the licenses of Pink Pussy Cat, The Boiler and Lost Horizon revoked in 1973. All were located in Orchard Road and most of their patrons were youths from well-to-do families.

In the more rural areas it was cannabis that was fuelling the drug problem. One hippie garden at the junction of Paya Lebar and Geylang Road was a particular sore point for the officers. A big-time cannabis trafficker supplied the drug to the hippie garden and addicts from neighbouring kampongs² rendezvoused at the garden each night without fail. The officers would raid the place but the addicts kept coming back. "We would arrest one and bring him back to CNB, another would take his place because there was ready demand," recalls Narcotics Officer Lee Cheng Kiat. Adding to the frustration of the CNB officers were the low penalties meted out under the then prevailing drug legislation, the Dangerous Drug Ordinance. The penalties were no deterrent, as it gave drug offenders a mere slap on the wrist.

One indication of the severity of the drug problem was the number of parents who knocked on the door of CNB seeking help. In one particular week, four parents came seeking help.

“**A mother of a 14-year-old schoolboy came to the Bureau requesting us to lock her son up for a week during the school holidays and to beat him every day in order to stop him from taking MX tablets and cannabis,**”

recounted **John Hanam**, Director CNB (1971-1978)



HEROIN GOT ITS CLAWS ON SINGAPORE

The problem of MX and cannabis, however, was soon eclipsed by the fearsome threat of heroin.

The Bureau's first inkling that heroin had arrived on the island was from a whisper in the ear. Assistant Narcotics Officer Schubert Lee Kuan Seng received words from his informant that heroin had come into Singapore. But he had no proof and his colleagues did not believe him.

To convince them, Schubert undertook what would have been the Bureau's (and Singapore's) first undercover drug buy, and successfully bought a phial of heroin from a street trafficker. That phial convinced the Bureau and they started to monitor the street trafficker to find his supplier.

Much patient trailing led them to an innocuous-looking house located at 11B China Street. The team moved in for the hit.

"The people in China Street thought that there was a gangland war," recalls Narcotics Officer Lee Cheng Kiat. "I pulled out my revolver and shouted 'Zheng Hu Lang! Zheng Hu Lang!'"

To their amazement, the officers found a clandestine heroin laboratory on the premises. Two kilogrammes of heroin were seized.

The officers' heart sank. It dawned on them that heroin had finally hit the shores of Singapore. And that they would soon be up against the wall.

A FEARFUL CONTAGION

The officers' fears came true.

In 1972, only four heroin addicts were arrested. In the second year 10 heroin addicts were arrested. By 1974, the number arrested had increased to 110. From that point on, the situation deteriorated drastically. In just three years - from 1973 to 1975 - the number of heroin addicts increased from 10 to 2,263. That spiraled to 5,682 in 1976 and 7,372 in 1977.

More and more people were abusing the drug from a false belief that smoking the drug - as opposed to snorting or injecting the drug - would not lead to addiction. That was why most addicts in Singapore preferred to smoke heroin, using a small flame to burn it on a piece of tin foil. They would inhale the white smoke that curled in the air like the mythical dragon, which led to the term "chasing the Dragon" for smoking heroin.

The truth however is that heroin is one of the most dangerous and addictive substances known to humankind, smoked or injected. So strong were the clutches of heroin that it became the most sought-after drug in the world, reducing the demand for other drugs to relative insignificance. Heroin

can be injected, smoked or snorted. An intravenous injection produces the greatest intensity and most rapid onset of euphoria. The drug is so potent that its effects are felt in seven to eight seconds.

The heroin that was commonly used by addicts in Singapore was poor in quality - Grade 3 containing more than 60% impurities. It was then sold in small plastic phials at S\$32 per phial in 1975. Each phial usually weighed only 0.8 grammes. By the mid-1970s heroin was such a big problem that traffickers at Sungei Road would hold up small bottles of heroin to openly solicit for potential buyers. "When you walked along Sungei Road, you would find traffickers selling heroin like hotcakes. And they did it very openly. They held up a few phials of heroin and asked if you wanted to buy any," recalls Acting Senior Narcotics Officer Tan Boon Hock, who was then the Officer-in-Charge of Sector 1, Enforcement Division.

Another officer recounted, "Addicts virtually ruled the streets then. You didn't have to seek them out. In certain "black areas" you could spot them from a mile away. They were very open about it; many of them gathered in back lanes to smoke heroin and to chase the Dragon."

² A Malay word for "rural village".

³ "Government people" in the Hokkien dialect.

A REGIONAL FLOOD THAT SPILLED OVER INTO SINGAPORE

The huge influx of the heroin into Singapore in the 1970s was due to the vacuum in the heroin market left by the pullout of American troops from Vietnam following the end of the Vietnam War.

During the Vietnam War heroin producers and traffickers from the Golden Triangle enjoyed a roaring trade supplying heroin to US servicemen in Vietnam who were using drugs - including heroin - in epidemic proportions. When the troops left Vietnam in 1975, the market for heroin in the Indo-Chinese region shrank. The drug lords looked for new markets as well as for fresh transshipment ports for heroin to be exported beyond the traditional territories. With their proximity to the Golden Triangle, Southeast Asian countries were a natural choice and none of them were spared the agony of heroin flooding their streets and ruining the lives of their people. That included Singapore.



A POWERFUL HOLD

While the government intensified its enforcement and rehabilitation efforts, its progress was hindered by the strong pull of the drug.

Heroin is perhaps the most lethal of all drugs because of its strong physical and psychological hold on its user. Physical dependence is the result of a change in the body's central nervous system that leads to extreme physical discomfort when the use of the drug is discontinued. Withdrawal symptoms include runny nose, watery eyes, muscle aches and spasms, stomach pains, diarrhoea and cramps. The psychological dependence is the urge to experience the drug's euphoric effects. Smoking heroin is almost an irresistible urge, especially when the addict is confronted with a personal crisis. Because of heroin's debilitating withdrawal symptoms, addicts would continue to abuse the drug, not because they enjoy the feeling of euphoria but to prevent themselves from being sick.

Like a cancerous growth, heroin had gained a foothold in Singapore as it drew in more abusers into its deadly fold.

What was particularly worrying was that heroin was highly popular among younger drug abusers. In 1976, 68% of the 2,550 young drug abusers - aged 14 to 25 years - were arrested for heroin abuse.

Why so many young people? Drug peddlers were using a pass-it-on tactic to expand their market share, with initial doses usually offered free as a friendly gesture. Most young drug abusers had their first drug experience in social settings among friends.

By the time the Surveillance Division was formed in CNB in 1975, there was even more rampant sale of heroin on the streets. The Surveillance Division was later subsumed into the Intelligence Division formed a year later.

"It spread like wildfire," describes Senior Narcotics Officer Lee Tai Huat who was then the Officer-in-Charge of the Surveillance Division. "Surveillance was overworked. There were so many projects and we had limited manpower. But we still went on collecting information."

Foreign drug agencies would enlist the Bureau's help when they discovered Singaporeans involved in drug trafficking in their countries. "It was more work but we endured."

At the start heroin abuse was confined to the more well-off Chinese as it was initially an expensive drug. In the early years the heroin addicts in Singapore were all English educated, with some even from prominent schools. Subsequently heroin became cheaper and the contagion spread to all strata of society.

FIGHTING BACK: INTRODUCTION OF ONE OF THE WORLD'S TOUGHEST ANTI-DRUG LAWS

The pioneer CNB team may be miniscule in size but its officers were fearless, dauntless, smart as a whippet and absolutely committed to their mission. The small force of 20 conducted raids daily and worked 12- to 16-hour days, going for days without seeing their family. But as the number of pushers and addicts arrested increased, even more quickly joined the growing legions of addicts.

The laws of the time did not help. When the Bureau was formed in November 1971, the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance and Drugs (Prevention of Misuse) Act 1969 were in force. Under the two laws, the maximum sentence for trafficking or possession of illegal drugs was a mere five-year imprisonment or a maximum fine of S\$10,000 or both.

A court case in 1970 illustrates how inadequate the laws were. A drug trafficker was arrested in his Chinatown hideout with 40 kilogrammes of opium and 20 kilogrammes of morphine. The street value of the drugs would have given the trafficker a handsome profit of S\$60,000 and affected thousands of people if the drugs had gone out into the streets. The penalty he received? A mere S\$7,000 fine.

Knowing they would get away lightly if caught, drug traffickers distributed and sold drugs freely in locations the authorities tagged "black areas". Traffickers and pushers would lay low during enforcement raids but returned boldly once the heat was off.

Singapore was in a vulnerable position. The Golden Triangle was close by. With its busy port and airport and open coastline, it was difficult for Singapore to detect and intercept heroin entering the country.

Even more worrying was the fact that heroin and morphine can be manufactured in a space no bigger than a toilet. CNB had also received intelligence that much of the heroin brought into Singapore had been manufactured in laboratories clandestinely set up in a neighbouring country. In 1973, there had even been an attempt to set up a laboratory to manufacture heroin on a large scale in Singapore.

The Singapore government decided that a new anti-drug law with more bite was needed to more effectively deal with the worsening drug situation.

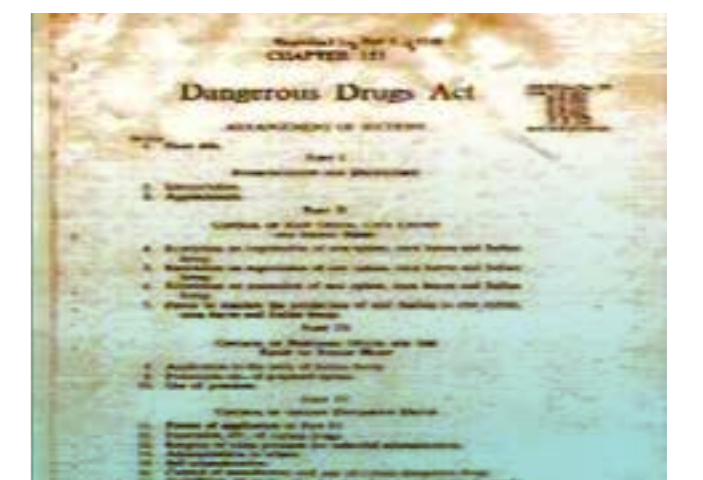
CNB provided valuable input that led to many of the provisions of the new law called the Misuse of Drugs Act (MDA) that would repeal and replace the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance.

Enacted in 1973, the MDA sentenced traffickers in Class A drugs (opium, morphine and heroin) to a maximum of 20 years in jail, a fine of S\$40,000 fine or both and 10 strokes of the cane. Selling drugs to anyone under 18 invited even more severe punishment: these traffickers faced 30 years in jail, S\$50,000 in fine and 15 strokes of the cane. Not only was the new law far more punishing than the old laws, it meted out some of the world's toughest penalties for the possession, consumption and trafficking of illegal drugs.

A key feature of the MDA was the power given to the Director of CNB to order a person whose urine tested positive for a controlled drug to six months of compulsory treatment in an approved institution. Under the MDA, officers were also conferred the power to search, seize and arrest without the need for a warrant. They can stop, board and search any vehicle suspected of transporting controlled drugs.

Introducing the MDA in Parliament in February 1973, Chua Sian Chin, the Minister for Home Affairs (1972-1985) then explained, "The ill-gotten gains of drug traffic are huge. The key men operating behind the scenes are ruthless and cunning and possess ample funds. They do their utmost to push their drugs through. Although we may not have drug trafficking and drug addiction to the same degree as in some other countries, we have here some quite big-time traffickers and their peddlers moving around the Republic, selling their evil goods and corrupting the lives of all those who succumb to them. They, and their trade, must be stopped. To do this effectively, heavy penalties have to be provided for trafficking. Government views the present situation with deep concern. To act as an effective deterrent, the punishment provided for an offence of this nature must be decidedly heavy."

He added, "The Dangerous Drugs Act [Ordinance] was enacted about 21 years ago and the controls provided therein are grossly inadequate for the 1970s."



“MERCHANTS OF DEATH MUST BE PUNISHED BY DEATH”

“**We in Singapore are now engaged in an all-out war to break the backbone of this problem. We served notice to drug traffickers when we amended the Misuse of Drugs Act in December 1975 to make the death penalty mandatory for the offence of trafficking heroin and morphine in excess of 15 grammes and 30 grammes respectively.**”

Chua Sian Chin, Minister for Home Affairs and Education (1972-1984) in 1976

While the MDA gave CNB more legal teeth to tackle the worsening drug situation, it soon became apparent that the heroin problem had become an epidemic and even the tough penalties of the new law were an insufficient deterrence to traffickers.

Between 1974 and 1975, despite the new law, 31 major traffickers and drug financiers were detained. The detention made hardly a dent in the heroin trade, which was so lucrative that syndicates were prepared to look after the interests of traffickers and their dependants in the event that they were caught and imprisoned.

The picture facing Singapore was very grim. Heroin had the nation tightly in its grip. In 1975, 2,263 arrested drug abusers were heroin addicts. The number of traffickers arrested for dealing in heroin had also increased. From six in the first half of 1974, it had jumped to 26 in the same period in 1975.

In November 1975 Minister Chua told Parliament that even the tough penalties introduced barely two years ago had no effect in reversing the uptick in heroin drug trafficking and addiction in Singapore. In his address, the minister described heroin as one of the most potent and dangerous drugs Singapore had ever seen.

“Once ensnared by drug dependence, they will no longer be productive digits contributing to our economy and social progress. They will not be able to carry on with their regular jobs. Usually for the young men, they will turn to all sorts of crimes and, for the girls, to prostitution to get money to buy their badly needed supply of drugs. Thus, as a developing country, our progress and very survival will be seriously threatened.”

Singapore’s response was unequivocal. Those who dare to trade in death would themselves face death under an enhanced MDA.

“**Every trafficker is a dealer in death. People forget that. You’re not looking at one life; you’re looking at one life, and how many other lives he is going to affect, including how many other people he is going to kill.**”

K Shanmugam, Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Law

For the first time, under the amended MDA, drug syndicates and traffickers would face the death penalty if caught with large quantities of drugs.

The law was not meant to send petty drug dealers to the gallows. Only those who engage in the illicit import, export or trafficking of more than 15 grammes of heroin or 30 grammes of morphine faced the death penalty. Those found with lesser amounts – 10 to 15 grammes of heroin or 20 to 30 grammes of morphine – would escape the death penalty but would be sent to jail for at least 20 years up to a maximum of 30 years. They could also be caned up to 15



strokes. The same penalty applied to those who dealt in more than six kilogrammes of opium, 10 kilogrammes of cannabis and four kilogrammes of cannabis resin. Prior to this, the minimum jail sentence for this lesser trafficking offence was only three years and the maximum 20 years, with 10 strokes of the cane.

Fifteen grammes of pure heroin or 30 grammes of morphine amount to about 1,000 doses. Mixed with other compounds, 15 grammes of heroin can be used to make 500 heroin-laced cigarette. In a group gathering, one heroin-spiked cigarette is usually shared by a few youths. This 15 grammes of pure heroin can do considerable damage and ruin a lot of lives.

Articulates Tee Tua Ba, the second Director of CNB (1978 to 1981), “What soft options do you have in dealing with such a deep-seated problem like drug addiction? We are tough on drugs as we are tough on crime and we are not apologetic about it. Had we not imposed the death penalty for drug trafficking, the situation would be worse. The rationale is very simple. Singapore is a small country and we cannot afford the luxury of having its citizens hooked on drugs for the rest of their lives.”

Barely two months after the death penalty was introduced in November 1975, it was used against a drug trafficker trying to smuggle heroin from Malaysia into Singapore. In January 1976, a 25-year-old stevedore was caught at

Woodlands Checkpoint after immigration officers found him looking suspiciously anxious as he tried to slip through the checkpoint. When officers conducted a body search, they found a plastic bag containing 46.83 grammes of pure morphine. On 17 July 1976 he became the first drug trafficker in Singapore to receive the death sentence. Soon after, several other Malaysian drug traffickers were also sentenced to death for trafficking large amounts of drugs.

The effect of these cases was pronounced. Malaysian drug traffickers soon avoided trafficking in Singapore and began to operate from Johor. Many Singapore drug addicts began to go to Johor to purchase drugs in small quantities and smuggle them into Singapore, creating a trend known as “ant trafficking”. It became increasingly rare to arrest drug traffickers in Singapore who had large quantities of illegal drugs.

For Director Tee Tua Ba there is no question that capital punishment is effective as a deterrent. “As drug enforcement officers on the ground, we could see clearly that tough punishment did indeed have tremendous impact in deterring and shaping the pattern of drug trafficking on the ground.”

For the next five decades MDA would remain the main legislation for drug offences in Singapore, with regular reviews to ensure that it remains relevant to the prevailing drug situation.



OPERATION FERRET



In 1975 the number of suspects arrested averaged 188 per month. In 1976, the corresponding figure had soared to 475 per month although enforcement resources had remained at essentially the same level in those two years.

By 1977, 1% of Singapore's population (between 11,500 and 23,000) was estimated to be hooked on drugs, the majority of them on heroin. The fact that one in 100 citizens was an addict was a shocking revelation. At almost every street corner of Singapore's "black areas", addicts could be spotted.

Most countries tackle the problem purely from the supply side, enforcing against traffickers only. The Singapore government however decided that the problem had to be tackled from both the supply and demand fronts because demand inevitably creates supply. It was clear that heroin abusers were contaminating others and luring them into the ranks at an alarming rate. The government felt that unless the demand for drugs was curbed, traffickers would be enticed into risking the severe penalties of the MDA to meet the demand.

Said then Minister for Home Affairs Chua Sian Chin, "There will always be some who cannot resist temptation and greed. They will continue to traffic in drugs even at the risk of forfeiting their lives, so long as there is big money to be made. There must therefore be a sustained attack not only on the supply side but also to check the demand for drugs. This means that the drugs abusers and addicts must also be arrested and put through a process of rehabilitation."

The Bureau was given the task of cleaning the Singapore streets of heroin addicts. A massive nationwide strike was planned against drug offenders at selected "black areas" in Singapore.

As a tiny nascent organisation, CNB did not have the manpower to mount the massive and prolonged operation. It joined forces with the Police, the Department of Scientific Services in the Ministry of Health, the Prisons Department and the Customs and Excise Department to launch the attack codenamed Operation Ferret. Operation Ferret was the first national level coordinated drug operation.

Together CNB and the Police were given the job of rounding up heroin addicts from their hideouts and street haunts. The job of the Department of Scientific Services was to process and analyse thousands of urine samples. Prisons Department was to set up drug detention centres with the capacity to hold 8,000 drug addicts. In short Operation Ferret was a Home Team effort well before the term gained currency.

Tee Tua Ba, who later assumed the post of Director of CNB at the age of 36, was then Commander Areas (Police) and one of the key architects in its implementation.

Operation Ferret was meant to disrupt the multiplier effect of heroin addiction. The aim of the operation was to round up all drug abusers in one sweep and detain them for rehabilitation so that the growth in the heroin addict population could be stopped, if not reversed. It was envisioned that the contraction in demand would choke off the supply of heroin.

In April 1977, Operation Ferret swung into action.

Hundreds of officers from CNB, Police, Special Constabulary and Vigilante Corps moved in to flush out drug offenders from hideouts and drug dens in one coordinated strike. Law enforcement officers swamped every street corner of "black areas" and raided more than 100 locales where addicts were known to gather to chase the Dragon.

A long-serving CNB officer who was only 22 when he was involved in Operation Ferret recounted, "When Operation Ferret was launched, I was tasked to go to Weld Road, which was then Ground Zero for heroin addicts. We saw so many

that we literally went around collecting them one by one. It was that easy. They didn't bother to struggle because many were already high on drugs. And once we managed to nab a pusher, our job would be made even easier. We just sat there in his flat and waited for the addicts to come knocking one by one. In those days, some drug traffickers were very violent. Some were armed with guns, while others carried weapons such as a chopper or even a sickle. I remember that a trafficker charged at my colleagues, swinging a sickle wildly. They had to open fire and shoot him."

The operation was a huge success.

Describes former Director CNB Tee Tua Ba (1978 to 1981), "When Operation Ferret was launched, 8,000 suspected addicts were rounded up in one fell swoop over several days. The impact on the ground during the first 48 hours was dramatic. The ratio of new addicts to repeat addicts dropped drastically, and the price of heroin per straw rose dramatically, indicating that there was a shortage of heroin on the street."

A TURNING POINT IN THE WAR AGAINST HEROIN

Operation Ferret was a turning point in Singapore's war against heroin. The operation effectively contained the heroin problem and brought it to a manageable level. It also crippled drug distribution networks in the nation.



The continuous rounds of raids that lasted into 1978 led to the arrest of 26,376 persons for suspicion of drug consumption. Of this, 7,348 of them (28%) tested positive. Instead of prosecuting these addicts in court, then Director of CNB John Hanam exercised his powers under MDA to commit these addicts directly to drug rehabilitation centres (DRC). This last measure was a powerful deterrent because it meant addicts caught could be packed off to DRCs immediately after a positive urine test. About 95% of these addicts were males, with the majority aged between 16 and 25.

Tee Tua Ba recalls, "We had to take addicts off the streets. Cure first, debate later."

To house the sudden surge in arrested drug addicts and pushers, the Prisons Department had to turn old houses and schools into DRCs and prisons.

The relentless enforcement action caused many traffickers to go out of business because their supply of heroin was cut off. There was also a big drop in demand because their customers had been rounded up by the hundreds.

Worried about being charged with a capital offence, many drug dealers simply vanished, escaping from Singapore or going into hiding. Their disappearance made it very difficult for addicts to feed their heroin addiction. This in turn resulted in a drastic drop in the overall drug addict population.

Singapore had scored its first victory against the Dragon.

"The greatest achievement in Operation Ferret was that we contained the problem and stopped the spread of drug addiction," says former Director CNB Tee.

If Singapore had not launched Operation Ferret, the nation would have been a very different place today. "We would definitely have had a substantial proportion of our young hooked on heroin addiction and our streets would no longer have been safe, had we not taken a tough stance against drugs," he adds. "When an addict is seized by his craving for drugs, nothing will deter him from committing crimes to satisfy his urge. It is not difficult to visualise a totally different Singapore where drug addicts roam freely to rob and steal."

Two years after Operation Ferret, Minister Chua Sian Chin told Parliament that the operation had successfully contained the spread of drug addiction.

THE PIONEER TEAM: _____

A PLUCKY, DAUNTLESS AND MOTIVATED FORCE

The pioneer team of CNB consisted of just 20 men: 18 officers, one Director (John Hanam) and one Officer-in-Charge of Narcotics (Ahmad Malik). Of the 20, 17 were plucked from the Narcotics Branch of the Criminal Investigation Department and three from the Customs and Excise Department.

The 20 men joined the Bureau in January 1972, two months after the formation of CNB. As the force was tiny, the Bureau had no divisions and all the officers were known as Enforcement Officers. A year later, the Bureau was strengthened by the arrival of a second batch of officers who were also seconded from the Police. CNB was then able to form two divisions: the Enforcement Division and the Special Projects Division.

While Director John Hanam had his office at what was then the Pearl's Hill Police Headquarters, the new Bureau was assigned the former quarters of the Narcotics Branch of the Criminal Investigation Department at Robinson Road for its headquarters. It was not much of a headquarters. It consisted of just three offices, with each office just big

enough to hold a few tables. One office was designated for Officer-in-Charge of Narcotics Ahmad Malik. Another office was occupied by senior officers. The last office was for junior officers. Only senior officers had tables. "The rest of us sat outside along the corridor or gathered in the briefing room," describes Narcotics Officer Lee Cheng Kiat.

It didn't really matter to the officers. They didn't get to sit around the office much anyway as the brand new team was immediately thrown into a raging battle.

In the 1970s Singapore was a pitched drug battleground, with drug traffickers and abusers on one side and the authorities on the other. First, the pioneer team had to deal with the surging problem of an MX and cannabis drug scene that had taken hold in Singapore. Even before that fight was over, a bigger enemy arrived in the shape of heroin.

But the pioneer officers showed they were no feeble lot. Fearlessly they faced down gangs and syndicates, carried out prolonged surveillance, conducted raids on hideouts and tracked down abusers, pushers and traffickers.

A FEARLESS FIGHTING FORCE _____

“**You do the surveillance, you trail and then when it's time to hit, you do the hit.**”

Tan Boon Hock, Acting Senior Narcotics Officer, Officer-in-Charge of Sector 1, Enforcement Division

“Danger was part of our job,” recounts Lee Cheng Kiat. “The drug situation in Singapore was just so bad in the 1970s.”



Each day the officers faced the real risk of being stabbed at, shot at or run over by traffickers desperate to escape capital punishment. High-speed car chases in rural areas like Lim Chu Kang, chases across the rooftops of shophouses and the kicking down of doors were all in a day's work for this band of bold and street-smart mavericks. The job was so dangerous that all the men brought their revolvers home with them.

One story illustrates just how dangerous their job was.

In 1977, riding his motorcycle, Acting Senior Narcotics Officer Yeo Kiah Hee trailed a suspected trafficker from Rochor Road to Woodlands where the suspect picked up a lady from a bus stop. The suspect dropped her off at Rochor Road and

drove on. By this time Kiah Hee had a hunch that the suspect had picked up some drugs. He signaled for the suspect to pull over. "But the chap refused, panicked and wanted to run me over." To avoid being ran over, Kiah Hee pulled out his revolver and shot out the rear tyre of the oncoming car. The shot brought the car to a grinding halt and the suspect began frantically tossing heroin out his car window in an attempt to get rid of the evidence. With that shot, Kiah Hee went down in CNB history as the first CNB officer to fire at a trafficker.

In spite of the danger, the ragtag team of 20 were unafraid, and remained audacious and united in their common goal of keeping the Singapore streets free of drugs. Seeing the deadly toll exacted by drugs on families and the young steeled the resolve of the pioneer team. "There was a cause to fight, a common cause," says Cheng Kiat. "We thought we could solve the drug problem."

LONG HARD EXHAUSTING WORK, DAY IN DAY OUT _____

CNB's first year was very tough. There were raids almost every day and the Bureau's office was always busy even late into the night.

Before 1976 the Bureau had only the two divisions of Enforcement and Special Projects. This meant the officers handled practically everything on their own: gathering intelligence, enforcement (that is, arresting offenders), investigation and, later, the supervising of former drug addicts who were on supervision orders.

"We conducted investigations, carried out arrests, seized evidence and charged offenders in court," says Cheng Kiat. "We did everything ourselves."

Fortunately, the pioneer officers received training that prepared them well for this. They were trained by the US Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs, the forerunner of the present Drug Enforcement Administration. Says Kiah Hee, "They taught us how to do surveillance, carry out investigation and collect evidence."

The Bureau's work did not stop with the arrest of drug offenders. The officers also made sure abusers stayed clear of drugs after their release from DRCs. As a result, work was from dawn to dusk for many officers in the Supervision Division in the 1970s. Mornings were spent at the Supervision Division in the former Rumah Miskin Police Station, where officers would talk to supervisees about their problems. In the evenings, officers would travel to the police station on bicycles to supervise addicts reporting for urine tests. They also had to ferry urine bottles

and boxes to the homes and workplaces of supervisees to collect their urine samples in surprise urine tests.

To do all this, the officers were working 12 to 16 hours each day. There were days on end when the officers did not see their families. At one point in time, Cheng Kiat and Kiah Hee were away from home so long, their daughters forgot what their fathers looked like.

Despite this, the 20 officers neither questioned nor complained about the massive workload.



STAKEOUTS IN ALL KINDS OF PLACES, UNDER ALL KINDS OF CONDITION

Neither did the officers complain about the harsh conditions that came along with the job - conditions that would be intolerable to most.

To stake out suspects, the intrepid officers often had to hide in abandoned huts, in monsoon drains and on top of trees.

Round-the-clock 24-hour surveillances that went on for days were common. With the small size of the force, each team of just four to six men was often stretched to the limit. And so in the first decade, it was common for an officer to take on the surveillance of a suspect on his own for long hours on end, with no backup. The men would sleep on void decks or on their motorbikes, forgoing food or toilet breaks for fear of losing sight of their suspect.

Recounts Deputy Superintendent Geoffrey Soh, Head of General Investigation HQ, "We depended a lot on leg work and we didn't have handphones. We would follow suspects on motorbikes, on cars and on foot. When we had to do surveillance overnight, we had to sleep on our motorbikes or at void decks. It was all part and parcel of the job."

The men were imperturbable. They would relentlessly pursue - leaving no stones unturned - until they got their man.

A 1973 operation demonstrates just how tenacious they were. A team of CNB officers had received information that opium had been stashed in a pig farm in Lim Chu Kang. As a result, officers went on an intense search that covered every inch of the farm.

"The farm was very big and we had already been sticking it out in a monsoon drain the night before and had spent another night combing through the farm," describes Cheng Kiat. "By early morning we were exhausted but had found nothing. As we rested against some trees, Yeo Kiah Hee leaned against a fence close to where a dog was guarding a heap of sawdust. The farm owner had said that the dog was very fierce. Yet Kiah Hee was sitting very near it and it did not bark. It was also strange why the owner would put a dog to guard sawdust. So Kiah Hee poked at the sawdust with a stick. And that was how we found the opium." The men uncovered over 127 kilogrammes of opium worth S\$45,000.

A REMARKABLE FORCE TO BE RECKONED WITH, DESPITE THE ODDS

What was especially astonishing was that the miniscule team was able to take down hundreds of traffickers and pushers and arrest thousands of abusers with hardly any mission-critical support.

The Bureau did not have any vehicles; instead the men relied on their own motorbikes to do surveillance and chase down drug offenders.

Describes Kiah Hee, "We had to indent for vans, vehicles and motorcycles from Police Logistics because we didn't have any. So we used our own transport, our motorcycles and Vespa scooters." It was only in 1973 that the Bureau became the proud owner of three brand new Ford Cortinas, which were the envy of the Police Force.

They also did not have handphones. The common transmission equipment was the fax machine, with no email.

Even when they were off-duty, the pioneer officers would need to go to a public telephone to call the hotline every hour to check if they had been recalled, as many homes did not have telephones then.

In its 1998 Bulletin, the Bureau described its early years as: "An undersized organisation encumbered within the domains of its landlord. A mediocre establishment vexed by deficiencies in the amplitude and stature of its workforce and the body of supplies required for an effectual confrontation against the bands of drug traffickers and members of their ilk. An institution ensnared in the manacles of its superannuated framework. This was the Central Narcotics Bureau of yesteryear."

These humble circumstances in the early years embedded in the team a sense of humility but also an inexplicable sense of pride.

A BOND FORGED IN FIRE

As the officers faced down daily dangers together, the troop of 20 built an uncommon bond of mutual respect and utmost trust.

As the officers faced down daily dangers together, the troop of 20 built an uncommon bond of mutual respect and utmost trust.

"There was no rivalry among us. It was just a lot of mutual respect," says Cheng Kiat.

There was tremendous camaraderie and a keen desire to look out for their colleagues. Despite their heavy workload, all officers would volunteer to lend a hand in a raid.

Describes Cheng Kiat, "When we were going for a hit, all the officers went along. Nothing about "I got a wedding." "I got that." No, no, everyone came along."

The officers also took on the responsibility of training up younger officers seriously. When the first batch of direct intake officers arrived at the Bureau in 1974, the pioneer team took it upon themselves to train the new officers and to pass on the enthusiasm and camaraderie that they had developed.

By the end of the tumultuous first decade, it was clear that the Bureau's baptism of fire had forged a mission-driven team with a unique culture of bravado, determination and camaraderie.

This distinctive culture would endure through the next five decades.

SINGAPORE'S FIRST TASTE OF VICTORY IN THE DRUG WAR

When Operation Ferret ended, Singapore was no longer the same. There were no "black" areas where drugs were sold openly. Death by overdose also became something that was hardly heard of. Singapore had won the first round of the fight against drugs.



CNB, the newest enforcement agency in Singapore, had shown the nation that it was a valiant and remarkably effective fighting force.

Four decades later, in a debate in Parliament, Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Law K Shanmugam pointed out, "In the early 1970s, we were arresting less than 10 heroin abusers a year. We could have kidded ourselves and believe that was a true situation. But after we set up CNB and after we started Operation Ferret, by February 1978, 26,000 abusers had been arrested. That is the picture before and after."

For the next 10 years, through the determined efforts of CNB's dedicated officers, the drug problem remained stable with the number of drug offenders arrested remaining between 3,000 and 4,000.

For his contribution in Singapore's fight against drugs, CNB's second Director Tee Tua Ba was awarded the Public Administration Medal (Gold) in 1981.

CHAPTER

FIVE

DECADES
OF EVOLUTION



THE CREATION OF A NEW DEDICATED DRUG ENFORCEMENT AGENCY



The history of CNB is the story of constant change and reinvention.

Through its five decades, the Bureau reinvented itself time and again to fight an ever-changing enemy.

When it was first born, the Bureau was a tiny but valiant force of 20 who were simply called Enforcement Officers because the Bureau had yet to form specialised divisions. Nor were there any specialisation of job functions. The pioneer officers simply did everything: enforcement, surveillance, gathering of intelligence, supervising of drug addicts and bringing of cases to trial.

The first evolution took place just one year after the Bureau's formation. With the arrival of the second batch of officers seconded from the Police Force, a Special Projects Division was formed.

With that, the Bureau consisted of two Divisions, Enforcement Division and Special Projects Division. Though the Special Projects Division was tasked with tracking traffickers and their hideouts, both divisions were equally responsible in arresting both traffickers and addicts.

As the fierce battle against heroin raged on, CNB underwent yet another evolution. The Bureau expanded its manpower once more by recruiting its first direct intake of officers in 1974. With this enlarged squad, the Bureau was able to form a third division, the Intelligence Division, in 1976.

This Intelligence Division was an administrative unit tasked with investigating potential criminal law cases. Its officers also served as ad hoc liaison officers for operations involving international counterparts.

These changes were only the first of many ahead for the Bureau.

THE 1980s: THE BUREAU UNDERGOES RE-ENGINEERING

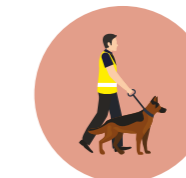
The drug menace showed no signs of abating in the 1980s. During that period, the Golden Triangle experienced exceptionally good opium harvests year after year and countries around Singapore were seizing huge volumes of heroin.

One indication of how bad the problem was could be seen from the number of drug abusers arrested during the 1980s. In 1988 alone, the number exceeded 6,000.

In response, the Bureau recruited more officers and re-engineered its divisions.

Two divisions – the Supervision Division and the Enforcement Division - had their scope of work enlarged. Augmented with an additional 52 officers, the Supervision Division had one more role added on top of its job of supervising drug supervisees; it was also put in charge of suppressing illicit drug activities within Singapore.

Meanwhile the Enforcement Division was revamped to look after three specific areas:



the entry points



special investigation and surveillance



preventive detention and anti-inhalant abuse.

THE FORMATION OF THE SPECIAL INVESTIGATION TEAM

There was a particular problem the Bureau was determined to tackle. In the 1980s, drug trafficking syndicates continued to attempt to use Singapore as a transit point for drugs destined for other countries and CNB had to work hard to outwit these foreign drug trafficking syndicates.

The Bureau responded by setting up a Special Investigation Unit in the Enforcement Division in 1985.

The Special Investigation Unit was tasked with the responsibility of investigating major and capital drug trafficking cases, where investigations usually end up with life imprisonment or the death penalty for the offender. Before the arrival of the Special Investigation Unit, ad hoc teams were formed as and when needed for major operations.



The Special Investigation Unit consisted of three teams of Special Investigators who would develop their own information, carry out observations, arrest and follow up with the investigation of the cases.

The Special Investigators encountered challenges right from the start.

The hours were very long. "Round-the-clock surveillance for days was common," describes Staff Sergeant Freddy Lee. "We used to sleep on our motorbikes when we were doing surveillance on suspects."

In spite of its small size, the Special Investigation Unit proved itself by breaking up a remarkable number of drug syndicates.

However, more than the number of syndicates it cracks, the Unit prides itself on its professionalism and the scrupulous care it takes in conducting investigation. As major offences entail life imprisonment and a capital offence means the death penalty if convicted, all investigators take painstaking care to be extremely thorough and detailed. Every detail has to be looked at and examined carefully so that nothing is left out.

"An outstanding investigator is not one who secures a conviction all the time. A good Investigation Officer is one who can remain objective throughout the entire investigation process to ensure that justice is upheld," says then Assistant Superintendent Adam Fashe, who was then Officer-In-Charge of Special Investigation Team IV. Today Adam holds the rank of Assistant Commissioner of Narcotics and is Director of the Investigation Division.

THE 1990s: A NEW HOME, A NEW STRUCTURE, A NEW VIGOUR

The 1990s was a decade of transformation for the Bureau. It ushered in a brand new CNB by way of a new home, a new structure, a new size and new capabilities.

Since birth CNB had been a tenant of the Criminal Investigation Department. This was not a desirable situation, decided then Director of CNB (1991-1999) Sim Poh Heng. In 1992, the Bureau acquired a building at Outram Road that was formerly a primary school and renovated it at a cost of S\$12 million. The Bureau finally had a home it could call its own

Beyond transforming CNB's home, the Director also remoulded the Bureau in every way.

In 1994, CNB's organisational structure was badly in need of a re-modelling. At that time, the 200 men and women of the Bureau were spread thin across the three divisions of Intelligence, Enforcement and Supervision.

All three divisions were under stress. The Intelligence Division was in dire straits and the Enforcement Division overworked. Each division was working in silo. The overextended Bureau was too swamped with work to carry out analysis.

Describing the Bureau before the revamp, then Director of the Field Intelligence Unit Assistant Superintendent Muhammad Azni said, "We were busy with ad hoc day-to-day function, what you might call piecemeal work. Things were not clear in terms of direction. Information was coming in but little time was spent on collation and analysis. Each division had its own agenda on enforcement. Sometimes efforts were duplicated with different divisions working on the same targets."

This was because in the early 1990s the Bureau found itself up against the wall, fighting an escalating drug war.

AN ESCALATING WAR

While the drug situation in the 1980s was bad, by the early 1990s the drug situation had worsened and was becoming a particularly worrisome problem for the nation.

The number of addicts arrested had increased significantly. In 1994, 6,165 addicts were nabbed, compared to 3,132 in 1987. This is an increase of about 97% in just seven years. By the early 1990s, it was estimated that between 8,000 and 10,000 families were affected annually by drug addiction in the family.



In 1977, addicts in DRCs per 100,000 population aged 10 and above was 179. By 1993, it was 336. This is an 87% increase between 1977 and 1993. It was also observed that 70% of the addicts relapsed within two years of their release, despite intensive efforts by the Prisons Department to treat and rehabilitate them.

The increase in the population of drug addicts also led to an increase in crime on the island. Between 1991 and 1997, about half of the inmates in DRCs had committed theft, housebreaking, robbery and other crimes to support their habit. Some resorted to prostitution.

In response, a committee led by then Parliamentary Secretary of the Ministry of Home Affairs Associate Professor Ho Peng Kee presented a 1994 masterplan that involved coordinated efforts under four main strategies: Preventive drug education, tough laws and rigorous enforcement, effective treatment and rehabilitation and continued aftercare support. These four strategies would remain the mainstay of Singapore's approach to the drug problem through the decades.

The committee set in motion a series of bold initiatives that saw better planning and cooperation among the various agencies so that Singapore could deal with the problem more effectively.

The committee also proposed that CNB turn its focus to crippling large drug syndicates. Many small-time drug pushers at that time obtained their stocks of heroin from big drug syndicates. The Committee put forward that if these big syndicates were wiped out, pushers and addicts would find it hard to obtain drugs.

GOING AFTER THE BIG GUYS

Crippling drug syndicates, however, is extremely difficult. Syndicate leaders are elusive, shadowy figures who cover their tracks well. When going after syndicates, the Bureau has to expend tremendous resources before picking up a tiny lead that would eventually put it on the right trail. In order to take on syndicates, CNB had to build up its enforcement and intelligence capabilities.

This meant both enlarging its manpower strength and thoroughly overhauling the way the Bureau worked.

To make that happen, Director CNB Sim Poh Heng put in an audacious request to the Ministry of Finance for an additional headcount of 286. This more than doubled the headcount of the Bureau to 513. The request was granted in 1995, in a resounding endorsement of CNB's importance and capability.

“By appointing Directors with an intelligence background, such as Mr Sim Poh Heng and Mr Tan Seck Kang, CNB has also developed a strong intelligence capability to detect drug syndicates and to disrupt their activities. From then on, we could hit the big groups and the big guys.”

Wong Kan Seng, Minister for Home Affairs (1994-2010)

EXPANDING CAPABILITY, DEEPENING EXPERTISE

The addition of 286 men and women to the agency made possible the greater specialisation of roles within the Bureau and a deepening of expertise.



The Bureau underwent a major revamp of its organisational structure that transformed its intelligence and enforcement capabilities.

All three existing divisions were strengthened with an injection of manpower. A new civilian wing was also set up.

More importantly, the revamp introduced momentous changes in the way the Bureau plans, coordinates and executes operations. These changes in turn led to a radical change in the mindset of CNB officers.

STRONGER, SHARPER, MORE DEADLY TO SYNDICATES

“**Intelligence is a lot like putting together a jigsaw puzzle. The difference here is that there are no pre-defined jigsaw puzzle pieces for you to try and put in place. There is also no picture to make reference to. We provide the big picture. We make sense of the wheeling and dealing of drug trafficking syndicates and we put together their operational blueprint. From there we proceed to terminate these syndicates.**”

Superintendent (1A) Terence Tan, Deputy Director of Investigation Division

First formed in 1976, the Intelligence Division was initially a mainly desk-bound unit. Nobody expected Intelligence to become operational.

However Director CNB Sim Poh Heng decided that CNB must have a professional Intelligence Division. In 1991 the Director set in motion a major revamp of the Intelligence Division.

The division started developing both hardware and human capabilities, with Intelligence Officers trained in various specialties. The goal was to create a division with the capability to hunt down the most elusive and dangerous drug traffickers.



“In Intelligence, you are really working out the organisational structure of a drug trafficking syndicate,” described Assistant Superintendent Alan Yeo, who was then the Head of Intelligence Operations. “We try to understand how the syndicate operates so we can get ahead of it. You might want to compare what we do to corporate takeovers. First you study the performance of a target, find and secure its bases and then you move in for the kill. That’s what we aim to do – stay atop of a drug trafficking syndicate, sneak up behind it and with one fell swoop, eliminate it.”

One of the most powerful engines of the revamped Intelligence Division is the Surveillance Unit.

As part of the reorganisation of the Bureau, the Surveillance Unit was transferred from the Enforcement Division to the Intelligence Division. Here, it was given a major makeover. The Unit was enlarged with a substantial increase in manpower and its capability boosted with the addition of more sophisticated equipment and an intensification in training. With the Unit’s new professionalism and enhanced capability, surveillance work became the backbone of CNB and an element vital to the success of most operations.

This turned the previously low-profile unit into a star unit.

Describes Inspector Paul Ang who was then Officer-in-Charge of Surveillance, “In the past, the Surveillance Unit used to suffer from high turnover of staff as the men were only given menial or insignificant tasks. Now officers are asking for a transfer to our unit. There is a sense of professionalism in the unit. In almost every major operation, the Surveillance Unit is now being consulted for its views before a hit is made.”

The Field Intelligence Unit was another unit in Intelligence Division that was transformed by the revamp.

Detailed Muhammad Azni, “Field Intelligence Unit became the nerve centre for mounting intelligence and field operations against major drug syndicates. An official command post was set up, together with the establishment of an islandwide communication network in 1993. It led to a quantum leap in the way CNB conducted its operations against drug syndicates. Real-time intelligence was gathered as information on the ground was relayed swiftly to HQ. This was vital in making effective decisions during operations against key syndicate leaders.”



The revamped Field Intelligence Unit allowed the Bureau to develop the intelligence capability to penetrate major drug syndicates, identify their members and ascertain their modus operandi and drugstores before mounting an operation against them.

Quickly the Intelligence Division became a formidable force, crippling syndicates with deadly strikes.

The effect of a stronger, sharper and more effective drug enforcement agency was immediately felt on the ground as the number of drug syndicate members apprehended and total drugs seized increased dramatically.

In 1996, for example, work by the Intelligence Division led to the interception of one of the biggest drug hauls in Singapore’s history. An international drug syndicate was planning to use Singapore as a transit port to ship 72kg of pure heroin slabs to another country. Based on intelligence gathered, CNB raided the ship carrying the heroin, searched through the vessel and seized heroin found hidden in air compressors. If the consignment had slipped through, the syndicate could have made S\$72 million.

In the opinion of former Director CNB (2002-2005) Eric Tan, the Intelligence Division is the most transformed division in the Bureau. “Intelligence-led operations have evolved the most since the beginning of the Bureau. The current strength of our Intelligence Division puts us always one step ahead of traffickers.”

A BRAND NEW CAPABILITY: FINANCIAL INVESTIGATION

The decade also saw the agency develop new capability in the complex realm of financial investigation.



In 1993, the Drug Trafficking (Confiscation of Benefits) Act came into effect to ensure that traffickers would not enjoy the fruits of their crime. To enforce this legislation, the Bureau established the Financial Investigation Division in 1992.

The Division specialises in investigating the finances of convicted drug traffickers. Yang Lye Hock was seconded from the Commercial Crime Department of the Singapore Police Force to start the new division. He brought with him an impressive track record and vast experience in investigating complex commercial crimes.

The new division on the block turned out to be a tough cookie. Within a short span, it managed to gather evidence for the successful confiscation of money and assets in 15 big cases of convicted traffickers.

In just three years after the Act came into effect, the Division managed to seize from drug dealers almost S\$4 million in ill-gotten gains.

ENHANCED RESEARCH CAPABILITY

The revamp also saw civilian units blossoming in the Bureau. The existing Research Unit became a Research Division made up of the Research Unit, Operational Research Unit and Statistical Unit.

The new Research Division relieved the Enforcement Division of the task of studying drug trends and profiling drug abusers, so that it could focus on the demanding task of combating drug abuse. It also addressed the need for the systematic collation and analysis of intelligence.

THE LAUNCH OF MORE SPECIALISED UNITS

In the 1990s the Bureau also deepened its expertise in critical fields. Several important specialty units were formed during this period that would eventually see the Bureau developing sophisticated capabilities in key areas.

In 1992, for instance, the Preventive Education Unit was set up to dedicate resources to the task of educating the young people of Singapore about drugs in innovative ways. The unit would go on to create ground-breaking campaigns.

The year 1997 saw three more units springing up: the Special Task Force, Precursor Unit and the Public Affairs Unit.

The idea of setting up the Special Task Force came from CNB officers.

In the 1990s, major drug syndicates were increasingly engaging mid-level drug traffickers to handle their drug distribution. These mid-level traffickers had very good networks and were often able to get wind of the arrest of the syndicate leaders that they were working for. Hence even when the main drug trafficking syndicate was crippled, the mid-level traffickers would get away.

The officers suggested forming a task force that would focus solely on removing these mid-level drug traffickers.

Made up of two senior and 14 junior officers, the Unit proved to be a formidable force. Within five months of its formation, the Special Task Force had conducted 35 operations and assisted in 12 operations that resulted in the arrest of 25 traffickers.

In 1997, the Special Task Force busted two local drug syndicates in one day in Operation Whirlpool. For that achievement, the Unit was awarded the Minister for Home Affairs Instant Award for Outstanding Performance.



MORE EFFICIENT, MORE FOCUSED, MORE ABLE

“**The cost of relenting or lowering our guard in the face of an improved drug situation is to lose the drug war completely.**”

Sim Poh Heng, Director of CNB (1991-1999)

By the end of the decade, the Bureau was far larger than it was at the beginning of the decade. In 1999, its headcount was over 600. This increase in manpower together with the restructuring of the organisation resulted in a more focused, more efficient and more capable agency.

“CNB became more professional and deepened its capability in a few areas,” notes Marvin Sim, former Deputy Director of CNB (2011– 2015). “In the past, investigators were tasked with conducting operations, arresting abusers and investigating cases. With the separation of roles, arresting officers now have the space and time to hone tactical and technical skills such as car interception manoeuvres, car surveillance tactics, forced entry techniques and the planning of operations instead of having to multitask.”

With its new strength and capability, the Bureau was able to rein in the drug problem. Starting from 1995, the number of drug abusers fell steadily year after year due to intense enforcement. The population of addicts in DRCs fell from 8,130 addicts in 1993 to 3,826 in 1999. Between 1994 and 1999, the number of drug abusers in the country shrunk 38%.

In particular, the Bureau was successful in arresting the problem of Ecstasy by acting decisively against night



entertainment spots found to be promoting the party drug. Its intense raids hauled in 24,000 Ecstasy pills in 2001. The number of identified Ecstasy users in Singapore plunged from 661 in 1996 to just 151 in 2001.

More impressively the Bureau scored victories after victories in its strikes against major drug syndicates: the result of a combination of good intelligence, exhaustive investigation work and meticulous planning.

“The question on most people’s mind then, is whether we have finally won the war against drugs,” remarks Director Sim Poh Heng. “The answer is no. The drug problem has been with us for a long time and it is not going to go away. This is because the drug problem is global and is ever changing.”

THE NEW MILLENNIUM:

THE CHANGING FACE OF THE ENEMY

“**The ever-changing and fluid nature of the drug problem means that new drugs may emerge and gain sudden popularity with our people.**”

Sim Poh Heng, Director of CNB (1991-1999)

The 21st century brought the Bureau a new challenge: the arrival of synthetic drugs.

The millennium had started promisingly. The number of drug abusers arrested in the year 2000 was nearly half that in 1994, when over 6,000 drug abusers were arrested. In terms of prevalence in the population, the number of abusers arrested fell from 201.7 persons per 100,000 resident population in 1993 to 100.3 persons per 100,000 resident population in 2002.

The introduction of harsher drug laws discouraged new abusers while improved rehabilitation regimes reduced relapse rates. Singapore seemed to have the drug problem licked.

However the Bureau soon found itself battling a new enemy.

Synthetic drugs like methamphetamine (also known as Ice, yaba, crystal and speed), Ecstasy and ketamine were gaining a foothold in Singapore. Created using man-made chemicals rather than natural ingredients, these drugs surged in popularity to replace heroin as the main drug of choice on the local drug scene.

The abuse of synthetic drugs spread like wildfire. Between 2002 and 2003, there was a 62% increase in the number of ketamine abusers. Singapore is the sort of environment where ketamine use flourishes: Ketamine abuse is prevalent in urbanised countries and where youths have a clubbing culture.

Nimetazepam or Erimin-5, a depressant, was also a growing problem. In 2003, the Erimin-5 tablets seized increased by 140% compared to 2002 to more than 94,200 tablets. Erimin-5 is an unsettling drug because its withdrawal symptoms include anxiety, increased heart rate, distorted eyesight, violent convulsions and insomnia.



As the millennium wore on, it became clear that synthetic drugs have taken over from heroin as public enemy number one. In 2003, the number of synthetic drug abusers arrested (specifically, ketamine, methamphetamine and ecstasy abusers) was almost double that of heroin abusers. More than half of those caught for synthetic drug abuse had consumed ketamine. That year heroin addicts made up only 31% of the total abuser population, down from 66% in 2002 and 78% in 2001.

Part of this drop in heroin addicts was due to the approval of Subutex as a substitution treatment for heroin addiction

in 2002. The Ministry of Health subsequently revoked the approval of Subutex in 2006 when Subutex led to an addiction problem of its own. (See story **Subutex: The Harm Reduction Experiment that did not Work**)

For the first time in four decades, heroin abusers did not form the majority of the drug abusers. In 1994, heroin abusers had numbered over 5,000 but by 2006, there were just 116 heroin abusers in Singapore. New heroin abusers also fell to only 2% of the total new abuser population, down from 33% in 2002 and 48% in 2001.

A NEW ERA, A NEW CHALLENGE

“**The regional and international situation does not look pretty. The global and regional situations in fact, are worsening. Southeast Asia is home to the world’s largest methamphetamine market and the second largest opium and heroin market. It is estimated that the trafficking of methamphetamine and heroin in the region generated more than S\$43 billion annually.**”

Amrin Amin, Senior Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Health (2015 - 2020), in 2018

Synthetic drugs are a huge threat because they can be smuggled easily and are perceived as trendy, less harmful and less addictive than plant-based narcotics. Because of this false belief, synthetic drugs are highly popular among the young. They also pose a new challenge because unlike plant-based drugs, synthetic drugs can be produced easily in any small laboratory with the right precursor chemicals; chemicals that also have legitimate uses.

What makes the problem of synthetic drugs particularly worrisome is the fact that Southeast Asia is home to the world’s largest methamphetamine market. A 2019 report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimates the market volume of the amphetamine trade throughout Southeast Asia to be US\$30 billion to US\$60 billion.

In its World Drug Report 2011, UNODC remarked that Asia has “developed into a major production and trafficking hub for ATS (Amphetamine-Type Stimulants)” with methamphetamine seizures increasing 36% from 2005 to 2009.

The Bureau fought hard to contain the problem and by 2004 the outlook appeared rosy. That year only 956 abusers were netted, a sharp 47% decline from 1,809 abusers in 2003. “We turned the tide against synthetic drug abuse. Ecstasy abusers decreased by 11% and methamphetamine and ketamine abusers decreased by 13% and 32% respectively,” proclaimed the Bureau in its Annual Bulletin 2004.

The celebration was premature. In the late 2000s, the drug situation in Singapore reversed with a vengeance.



The number of drug abusers arrested rose from 61.7 in 2007 to 76.5 in 2010 per 100,000 resident population. The number of methamphetamine abusers arrested rose from 6.2 in 2007 to 18.6 in 2010 per 100,000 residents.

This was not surprising. As demand for heroin decreased and that for methamphetamine increased, drug producers in the region turned their effort to supplying the latter. They

are happy to do so; synthetic drugs like methamphetamine are easier to manufacture and more profitable. A 2019 UNODC report on synthetic drugs in East and Southeast Asia observed that in recent years, transnational organised crime groups have increasingly produced methamphetamine and other drugs in the Golden Triangle. The report also recorded that by the third quarter of 2018, methamphetamine seizures in the region totalled 116 metric tons, exceeding the previous high of 82 metric tons in 2017.

NEW WEAPONS TO COMBAT A WILY ENEMY



The challenge of synthetic drugs pushed the Bureau to evolve in various ways to better fight this new enemy.

The Bureau turned the dial up on its preventive drug education effort, delivering groundbreaking, high-impact campaigns and programmes that slam home the harms of synthetic drugs. In particular, the Bureau began to think harder and more creatively about how to connect with young Singaporeans and “immunise” them against the lure of synthetic drugs. (See chapter **Evolving Preventive Drug Education**)

Another evolution was on the policymaking front. The Bureau began to involve itself increasingly in policymaking to ensure that the laws support the agency’s fight on the ground. The Bureau’s management of the Subutex problem illustrates this new role adopted by CNB.

“CNB’s key shift to policymaking was clear in the Subutex episode,” observes Marvin Sim, former Deputy Director of CNB. “To me, it is an evolution in how Singapore looks at the drug issue and how Singapore manages the drug problem.”

EVOLVING TO BETTER FIGHT A TOUGH BATTLE

“A large part of the work is about outsmarting drug traffickers and drug abusers. It is like laying a mousetrap for the drug trafficker who thinks he is too smart to be caught.”

Marvin Sim, Deputy Director of CNB (2011– 2015)

The Bureau transformed itself operationally as well in the new millennium to fight this new enemy.

The 2000s saw the formation of two key troops. The first was a new division, the Investigation Division, formed in 2004. The second was the formation of a Forensic Response Team (FORT) in 2008. With an experienced and knowledgeable forensic expert at the helm, the Team comprising a crew of forensic investigation officers began to be regularly deployed at the scenes of drug crimes to harvest valuable forensic evidence.

Meanwhile the Public Affairs Unit and the Preventive Education Unit were merged to form a new Communications Division.

In 2014 the Bureau once again re-engineered its structure by merging two divisions, the Supervision Division and Enforcement Division, to form the new Enforcement Division. This helped optimise the Bureau’s manpower deployment and also resulted in integration between its checkpoint and inland operations.

THE MANY EVOLUTIONS OF CNB THROUGH THE DECADES

The transformation of the Bureau from its founding to the present is astonishing on many fronts.

One of CNB’s most startling transformations is its evolution from a poorly outfitted, low-tech force to one of the most technologically advanced drug enforcement agencies in the world.

As late as the 1990s, the Bureau was still stretched thin in terms of mission-critical resources. “In the late 1980s and 1990s, we had only one manual non-air-conditioned car and one manual non-air-conditioned van per division,” describes Qamarul Zaman Bin Hussin, Deputy Commanding Officer of the Enforcement ‘L’ Division. “This meant that each division of 20 officers had to share two vehicles. I remember one time the van broke down while we were ferrying drug offenders to the DRC. Our division only had that one van and the other divisions’ vans were all in use so we ended up waiting for three hours by the road before we got picked up.”

The CNB officers of today are supported by cutting-edge technology: they arrived at drug crime scenes armed with an arsenal of sophisticated digital devices developed by the Bureau such as the Mobile Diary, which enables officers to electronically document evidence on scene. In addition, they are supported by the Forensic Response Team, which works alongside them.

“Now we have more technology, a lot more vehicles and a lot more resources,” says Deputy Superintendent Geoffrey Soh, Head of General Investigation HQ.

The Bureau has also become much bigger in size and more advanced in capabilities. From a simple one-division agency, CNB is today an 800-strong force with nine divisions and extensive specialist expertise.

Another shift is the Bureau’s considerable evolution in strategies and objectives.

“In its first phase when it first started, the Bureau was going mainly after the demand side of the drug game,” explains

The biggest transformation of the millennium, however, was the re-imagining of the Bureau’s vision and mission. In a process largely driven by CNB officers themselves, the Bureau arrived at the new, co-created vision: “A Singapore without Drugs, Where Everyone Can Live, Work and Play Safely”; and a new mission to “Enforce, Educate and Engage for a Drug-Free Singapore”.

former Director of CNB Eric Tan. “Then, CNB was focusing on suppressing addicts through raids like Operation Ferret and supervising these addicts. In the second phase, CNB shifted its focus to going after pushers and traffickers. Today, the Bureau is in its third phase. This is an intelligence-led phase, where CNB is heavily using intelligence gathering to go after syndicates and try to cripple their operation.”

This meant that operations have become far more protracted and complex. “In the past operations were much more straightforward,” observes Deputy Superintendent Geoffrey Soh. “This was because traffickers were less sophisticated. Now people in the drug business are smarter; they are more educated and they use technology to evade officers and to detect surveillance attempts.”

“We have evolved in so many areas over the past decades,” sums up Director of CNB Ng Ser Song. “These areas include our engagement with the international community, our preventive drug education and public engagement with our increased presence on social media platforms, and our use of technologies to augment enforcement and investigation work to ensure that we remain effective at what we do. But one thing has not changed in our five decades: CNB officers have been and always will be the heart and soul of CNB.”



SUBUTEX: THE HARM REDUCTION EXPERIMENT THAT DID NOT WORK

Subutex (or buprenorphine hydrochloride) was approved by the Ministry of Health in 2002 as a substitution treatment for opiate-dependent drug abusers. When used correctly, Subutex reduces craving for heroin and allows heroin addicts to function in their job and socially.

Ironically Subutex quickly created an addiction problem of its own.

Instead of taking the drug under their tongue as they were supposed to, drug addicts in Singapore began mixing Subutex with other drugs and injecting the cocktail into their body. From September 2003 to August 2005, 50 addicts in Singapore died from buprenorphine. Within four years of its introduction, there were at least 3,800 known Subutex users in Singapore.

In addition, a needle injection culture emerged in Singapore. While common among drug addicts in many other countries, needles were never part of the Singapore drug addiction scene until Subutex.

“Syringes were thrown all over HDB stairway landings and we were receiving so many complaints but there was nothing much we could do,” describes Marvin Sim, former CNB Deputy Director. “For the first time, our officers were helpless in the face of drug abuse because they were not backed up by the law. When they arrested somebody and brought him in, they had to release him the next day because Subutex was then not illegal. And that hit us hard because CNB officers always had a very strong legal regime backing them up. One of the key reasons why Singapore is able to bring the drug situation under control is the fact that apart from having an effective drug enforcement agency in CNB, it also has a strong legal regime.”

The Subutex chapter was a wake-up call, says Marvin. It served notice to the Bureau that it had to help shape policymaking to support its law enforcement work. From that point on, the Bureau began to proactively seek to be part of the policymaking process on matters related to drugs.

It also made CNB realise that it cannot be complacent. “It made us recognise that it is not given that Singapore will be very different from other countries. The moment we relax, stop paying close attention and ease up on enforcement, the drug abuse problem will come right back to our heartlands and HDB estates.”

The Bureau worked closely with the Ministry of Law and the Ministry of Health and in 2006, buprenorphine was made a Class A Controlled Drug under the Misuse of Drugs Act. Those arrested for trafficking buprenorphine face a minimum sentence of five years imprisonment and five strokes of the cane, and a maximum sentence of 20 years in jail and 15 strokes of the cane. Those convicted for possession of buprenorphine face up to 10 years in jail, \$20,000 fine, or both. To deter proliferation of a needle culture among drug abusers, those found in possession of syringes face up to three years imprisonment, \$10,000 fine, or both.

CNB then moved swiftly to contain the problem. Between August 2006 and end 2007, CNB arrested 1,300 buprenorphine abusers and removed them from the streets.



FROM PRIMITIVE TO WORLD-LEADING

By leveraging on technology, the Bureau has transformed itself into one of the world's most technologically advanced drug enforcement agencies.

While the men and women of CNB have always been an extraordinary lot from the very onset, their work in the first two decades of CNB was made a lot harder by the primitive technological support they received and the Bureau's general lack of resources and supplies.

“Our office environment was very simple,” describes Assistant Narcotics Officer Ng Beng Chin of CNB in 1984.

There was no air-conditioner, just noisy and dusty fans. There were also no computers – the bulky desktops came much later. Instead the officers shared manual typewriters that “seemed to also perform the dual role of being “pressure release mechanisms”. I leave it to your imagination to figure this one out,” comments Beng Chin wryly.

For these officers, there wasn't the luxury of churning out criminal records in a cosy office. CNB officers had to run around government agencies and fill up forms to get any information. “We had to work hard queuing in the Criminal Records Office to copy down handwritten accused records and queuing at the National Registration Office for IC counterfoils in the early morning before 8am, so you need to travel whenever you need to charge your accused,” relates Beng Chin.

Those were also the days when CNB officers needed to join a queue at the Chief Clerk's office to do any photocopying. Names were recorded in the register book and officers were only allowed to photocopy according to the number of sheets of paper they brought along. The early-day photocopier paper was expensive so officers were issued the exact sheets they required.

Says Beng Chin stoically, “Resources were thin but we made do.”

Among the officers' many tedious tasks then was the collection of urine samples from suspects and from supervisees. Supervisees are ex-drug addicts released from prison or rehabilitation centres who are required to undergo regular urine tests to ascertain that they remain drug-free. The officers had to travel to the homes and offices of drug supervisees in their small motorbikes filled with urine metal boxes and urine bottles. Their job included sealing the two required bottles using candle wax, before anointing the bottles with a CNB stamp as a security seal.

Another pressing problem the Bureau faced was the lack of supplies for the effective execution of operations.

Officers were not issued mobile phones. Instead they depended on pagers and office telephones to keep in contact with their team.

“When I got beeped on my pager, I had to run for the nearest public phone,” recalls Superintendent Cindy Goh, Senior Assistant Director of Operations Division. “Things were also much slower in terms of communication and office processes. Files took days or even weeks to get transferred from one division to another.”

The radio sets issued to CNB officers for communication purposes were so bulky, the officers refused to use them for fear of having their cover blown. “Our radio set can be spotted miles away especially when you are seen talking to a big radio set wrapped with newspaper to ‘conceal it’,” relates Beng Chin.

While the officers put up with this state of affairs, things eventually came to a head.

The tipping point was a joint operation between CNB and the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). Then Director CNB Sim Poh Heng learnt to his deep chagrin that the nation's primary drug enforcement agency had to borrow handphones and pagers from the DEA for that operation because it didn't have any handphone. He put up a requisition for an improved communication system. That led to CNB receiving an S\$1.7 million. Motorola encrypted system.

THAT FIRST TENTATIVE STEP ON THE TECHNOLOGY JOURNEY

From 1987 on, this situation began to change.

That year saw the launch of the Case Management System. With that CNB became the first enforcement agency in Singapore to computerise case management. The system was part of a larger computerisation project called the Law and Enforcement System, which also involved other enforcement agencies such as Prison Service.

The Case Management System supported CNB officers in managing all aspects of a case from the arrest to prosecution and sentencing. For instance the system integrated the data of supervisees reporting to CNB and automated the officers' supervision of these supervisees.

In addition, the system was linked to the Bureau's urine-test machines so that test results were automatically transferred to the electronic case file of the supervisee. When a drug supervisee failed to report for a routine urine test, the system would immediately alert his supervising officer. This allowed CNB officers to monitor a larger number of drug supervisees with lesser effort.

The Case Management System also meant that the Bureau was able to electronically exchange case information with Prison Service, so that both agencies could better coordinate the release of ex-addicts into CNB's care.

Introducing the system, however, was not easy. CNB not only had to train computer-illiterate officers, it had to convince the reluctant officers that it was worth the effort.



"There was a lot of resistance to the change. Many of the officers hated computers. They were afraid to even touch them," relates then-Sergeant T C Lim, a surveillance officer who was roped in to train his colleagues.

Just one year later, however, those same officers came to rely so heavily on the computer, they could not do without it. Officers were thrilled at being able to pull up the data of offenders at a click. The system had become indispensable to the work of the Bureau.

"The computer became a tool to help the officer investigate intelligently. It was only an aid to give value-added data...I told the officers that they were still required to cultivate sources to gather intelligence," says then Director CNB Poh Geok Ek (1981 – 1991).

Game-changing when it was introduced, the Case Management System was eventually replaced by a more advanced version in 1994. (See **From a Stroll to a Sprint: CNB's Technological Transformation Began in Earnest**)

A year later, CNB debuted another technological innovation, the Instant Urine Test (IUT) Machine. With IUT, addicts who tested positive for drugs could be immediately admitted to drug rehabilitation centres. In August 1988, the first IUT machine was installed at the Woodlands Checkpoint. The second machine was installed at the railway station in December 1989.

The IUT machines at the Woodlands Checkpoint checked the rise in ant traffickers plying to and fro the Causeway to obtain a cheaper supply of drugs. It also drastically cut down the number of drug addicts on the run. Before IUT, many addicts would abscond during the two weeks' wait for the results of urine tests to come in.

However, apart from the Case Management System, CNB was hardly using cutting-edge technology.

Recounts Senior Assistant Director of Intelligence Operations Research Chong Fui Kim, "We would draw link charts manually. All we had was the draw function of Microsoft Word which we would use to draw boxes. To brief officers, we would cut photos and paste them onto the hard copies of profiles. To get a copy of these NRIC photos, we would either have to get them faxed over or we would have to physically go to the National Registration Department, or Singapore Immigration and Registration (SIR) post-1998, to collect them."

FROM A STROLL TO A SPRINT: CNB'S TECHNOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION BEGAN IN EARNEST

In 1994, CNB began a startling transformation from a woefully underequipped agency to a sharp and nimble fighting force.

CNB began investing heavily in the "5Cs": Case Management System, Computerised Criminal Intelligence Systems and the Command, Control and Communication System.

The Command, Control and Communication System (C3) handed the Bureau a new capability; it gave the Bureau a real-time electronic view of Singapore. It allowed CNB officers to zoom down to street-level detail to get a bird's eye view of persons or locations of interest. The GPS also supplied the teams with real-time information on the location and movement of CNB's resources such as manpower and vehicles so that operation commanders could plan better and make informed decisions. While revolutionary when introduced, this system became obsolete in 2012 with the Singapore government's rollout of a nationwide network of surveillance cameras that year.

The Criminal Intelligence Systems was another important step forward for the agency. The system electronically links up the four different arms of the Home Team – CNB, Police, Immigration and Prison Service – allowing all four agencies to share and instantly retrieve information and intelligence across the four agencies. Officers can now access an individual's particulars, employment records and criminal record at a touch of a button.

The tiny agency is no longer a siloed force. The common electronic network allows all the Home Team agencies to enjoy better communication, coordination, command and control. Using the system, enforcement officers from different agencies can be deployed effectively during joint operations.

These systems however were just a taste of what was to come.

In 1997, CNB's technological transformation went from an amble to a sprint when CNB and the Information Technology Division of the Ministry of Home Affairs undertook a seven-month long Strategic Information Technology Planning study to fundamentally redesign major work processes. The ultimate goal of the study was to figure out how CNB could lean on technology as an enabler to multiply the agency's might.

Two key operational processes were identified for reengineering: the Supervision Order Compliance process and Investigation Sub-Process. The first is the process of managing the referral of drug abusers to drug rehabilitation centres and the compliance of drug supervisees to supervision orders. The second is the process of investigating cases from the time of arrest to the end of trial.

The S\$3.7 million Investigation Case Management System (ICMS) and the Supervision Case Management System (SCMS) were given the go-ahead in December 1997. The Investigation Case Management System was a more sophisticated version of the Case Management System rolled out in 1987.

The impact of the two systems was tremendous. They greatly slashed the number of hours the officers used to devote to administrative tasks such as preparing of case files and getting committal orders and supervision orders approved. The two systems also featured useful features such as the Digital Photo Capture module, which allowed CNB officers to verify that a person reporting for Routine Urine Test is indeed who he claimed to be. Both systems were eventually replaced by the Integrated Drug Enforcement Administrative System (IDEAS) in 2008.

"CNB is now undergoing a massive information technology upgrading," describes then Deputy Director of CNB Tan Seck Kang in 1997. "This is an investment that would definitely pay off dividends in a big way. As an expanding organisation with a wider scope of responsibilities and an increasing workload we are in critical need of information technology to help us keep in step with changing demands. Power in the new information age is the speed at which one can obtain relevant information and make sense of wide-ranging data."

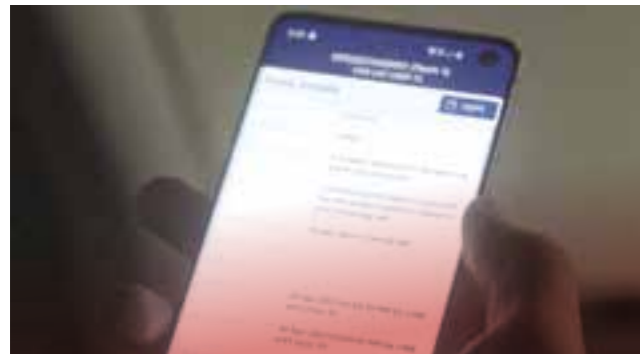
The change was electrifying for the officers.

Expresses Yang Lye Hock, then Assistant Director of the Financial Investigation Division, "The most exciting development happening in CNB is the massive introduction of technology to our work. You can feel officers are empowered and there is a climate of dynamism in the air."

A SINGLE-MINDED FOCUS ON INNOVATION AND REINVENTION

“**Operational effectiveness is a key driver for CNB and we will continue to improve our capabilities to attain higher levels of excellence. To achieve this we will need to infuse a culture of continuous improvement, constantly examining and reviewing existing approaches and practices and reinventing ourselves in order to adapt and stay ahead of the changing operating landscape.**”

Ng Seng Liang, Director of CNB (2005-2011)



In the new millennium, faced with an increasingly complex operating environment and new threats such as the emergence of new psychoactive substances on the local drug scene, CNB began leveraging on technology and pushing the envelope on innovation to meet these new challenges.

One example of this is the setting up of a specialised in-house forensic investigation facility in 2012.

The Drug Forensic Investigation Room elevates the physical and digital capability of CNB to conduct drug forensic investigations. The forensic investigators supports CNB Investigation Officers with their on-scene forensic

investigative skills including screening for the presence of drugs, printing and storing of drug scene documentation and digital forensic examination. They strengthen the integrity of evidence collected at the drug scene and ensure the proper submission of these evidence to laboratories for scientific analysis.

In 2020, CNB officers also began carrying the Mobile Diary to the scene of drug cases. This electronic handheld device leverages smartphone technology to digitally record and organise investigation activities, photos and information to facilitate subsequent forensic investigations. The electronic diary enables officers to document the scenes of a drug case efficiently and accurately.

The device was developed by the Ministry of Home Affairs' Office of the Chief Science and Technology Officer after it observed how CNB investigators and the Bureau's Forensic Response Team (FORT) Specialists have to capture many information quickly and accurately at the scene of a drug case.

The invention not only won the hearts of CNB officers, it also bagged gold awards in two public service competitions: the Ministry of Home Affairs 3i Product Innovation Champion and the PS 21 ExCEL Competition (National Level) Product Innovation (Merit Award).

A ROBOTIC ARM TO BACK UP EVIDENCE

In 2016, CNB debuted another creation of the Office of the Chief Science and Technology Officer: a robotic arm that backs up the SD cards of CNB officers onto DVDs and stores them.

The Automated Image Processing System was created so that CNB's Forensic Response Team could be more efficient

in producing case photograph albums for investigation purposes and for court proceedings.

Before the system was introduced, CNB's forensic specialists used to spend many hours manually backing up media and labelling, editing, printing and binding photographs for each drug case. This task is now taken over by the intelligent

system, which prints and sorts through photographs and binds them into case photograph albums in double-quick time. The system takes less than 30 minutes to produce seven case photo albums, compared to the eight hours a CNB forensic specialist would take to do the same. With the system, CNB forensic team could now spend more time on higher value work instead of manually poring over photographs.

In Singapore CNB was the first law enforcement agency to electronically document drug cases and the first to use robotic technology to automate the processing of case images into albums for investigation and court purposes.

The two innovations reflect just how far CNB has travelled along the innovation journey.

CNB TODAY – SMARTER, FASTER AND AHEAD OF THE INNOVATION GAME

“**While it can be disruptive and painful, change is inevitable and necessary. CNB cannot and should not let itself become outdated as it is entrusted with a mission that is vital to the country.**”

Ng Ser Song, Director of CNB

Some three decades after it first began its technological transformation, CNB is showing no signs of slowing down in its pace of transformation. If anything, the dogged agency is picking up speed when it comes to innovation and reinvention.

“The evolution of CNB in terms of technology has been quite revolutionary and fast, especially in the last few years,” observes Angeline Leow, Director of Corporate Services at CNB. “In the last few years we focused on how we should change the way we work, for example using robotics, in ways previously thought not possible. And we discovered that a lot of things can be done if we find the right science and technology partners.”

Just 20 years ago it would have been hard to imagine the Bureau's case files and investigation papers going fully digital. Today all work processes within CNB are 100% digital.

The Bureau also gave the world several innovations that are world first, including a fully automated urine collecting



machine (see box story **A World's First: The Cutting-Edge Urine Collecting Machine**).

The game changer, says Ng Ser Song, Director of CNB, is the tightening of the entire chain of work processes using technology. “Technological innovations such as the Mobile Diary, and Video Recorded Interview (VRI) help the Courts

try drug cases more effectively. The Mobile Diary helps to improve CNB's on-scene documentation and exhibit management protocols. The VRI records the conduct of the interview and the interviewee's demeanour. This provides the Courts with objective information that can assist it in making a judgment."

A lot of these technological innovations have been in response to unique challenges that no other drug enforcement agency had to face.

Singapore's labour crunch, CNB's singular job of enforcing against a very broad spectrum of drugs (due to Singapore's tough stance on drugs), and the Bureau's pressing need to relieve its band of overworked narcotics officers of menial tasks – CNB turned all of these challenges into opportunities for transformation. In the process it has become one of the smartest and most technologically advanced drug enforcement agencies in the world.

"While CNB is performing well at this present time, we realised that we needed a future-ready bureau to tackle the strategic challenges of the future," emphasises the Director of CNB. "Enforcement and investigation would get tougher with drug syndicates evolving and using technology to evade detection and an increasingly liberal mindset on the topic of drugs, particularly amongst the youths. Because of this we needed to transform to ensure that CNB is always ahead and remains able to achieve its mission. There is also a

manpower crunch across the Singapore public service that makes it imperative for us to improve our work processes in order to sustain the Bureau's operations in the long run."

Propelled by this sense of urgency, CNB has continually upped its technological might to stay ahead. Each year the Bureau pilots bold innovation projects, conducts proof of concept exercises and launches technology projects. In the process, the Bureau has deepened its capability in many areas.

Technology has allowed CNB to stay one step ahead in the drug game, points out Sebastian Tan, a former Deputy Director of CNB (2017-2021). Sebastian ranks CNB as a "tier-one" enforcement agency when it comes to technology, development and use of drug abuse detection.

What lies ahead for the Bureau is more stirring change.

Many technology projects are currently being implemented at the Bureau and there are many more projects in the pipeline for implementation over the next five years. These projects are part of CNB's grand technology masterplan.

"The culture of CNB is change oriented and innovation oriented. The Bureau is always striving for greater efficiency. It is continually focused on transforming to be a step ahead, with an eye to the future," declares Angeline. "With that attitude we have gone quite far. And I believe that same attitude will take us even further in the future."

“**In the last five to 10 years, things have evolved quite a bit. Drug syndicates have become much more sophisticated. They use technology to hide. They sell over Telegram. They use apps. That is a big challenge. In the past, drug networks were much smaller. You might have the main trafficker and one runner and they sell to a group of abusers. Now the main trafficker is not meeting his drug clients. He has moved his business online and he has no physical contact with the drugs. This is why we need to transform our detection capabilities so that we remain a step ahead of them.**”

Chong Fui Kim, Senior Assistant Director, Intelligence Operations Research

PUTTING A NARCOTICS LAB IN EVERY OFFICER'S POCKET

One nifty little device is giving CNB the upper hand in the fight against drugs.

When CNB implemented the use of the TruNarc Analyser in 2012, the Bureau essentially put a portable narcotics lab in the pockets of its officers.

CNB officers have to quickly and accurately identify unknown substances at the immigration checkpoints in order not to detain innocent travellers. In the past, chemical-based test kits were used to check whether a substance is an illegal drug. Using the TruNarc Analyser, however, an unknown substance can be accurately identified in a jiffy, greatly enhancing CNB's ability to detect illegal drugs and lifting the professionalism of its officers.

TruNarc's analyses are based on the Raman-spectroscopy, a highly accurate method for the identification of chemicals. The handheld device uses a low-power laser to vibrate through the suspected sample. It then scans its on-board computer library for a chemical fingerprint match (that is, a unique molecular pattern) to determine what the substance is. The laser is able to penetrate through clear plastic and glass, so that the substance does not have to be removed from its packaging. It also does not need to be in direct contact with the substance, reducing the risk of contamination and heightening evidence preservation.

IDEAS II – A GREAT LEAP FORWARD

The Integrated Drug Enforcement Administrative System II (IDEAS II) was two years in the making and costs S\$30 million. Since its launch in June 2019, IDEAS II has completely changed the way CNB officers work.

IDEAS II is a next-generation unified investigation and case management system that supports CNB officers in all stages of their work. This all-in-one system allows CNB officers to tackle any case management task.

With IDEAS II, CNB officers effortlessly access operational information on the go using mobility devices like mobile phones. This enhances their situational awareness and decision-making capabilities during operations.

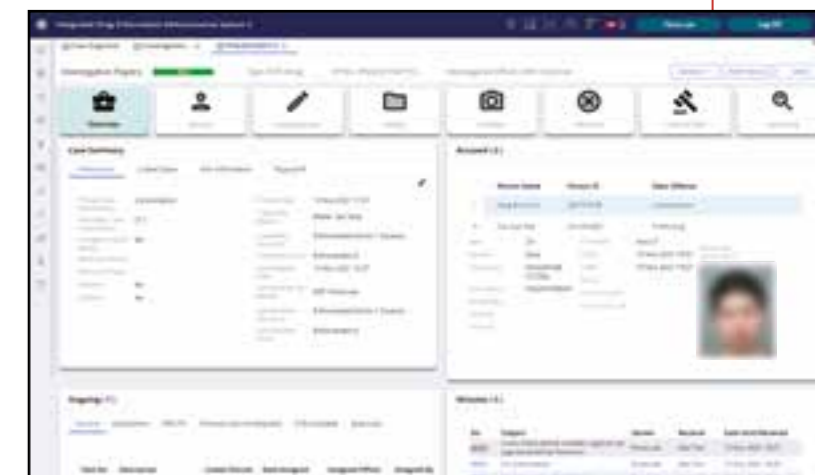
IDEAS II incorporates visualisation and analytical tools to help officers analyse data and link up information; analytics trawl through statements, charting the relationships between syndicate members and making it easier to identify key drug patterns and trends. Additionally IDEAS II makes the whole suite of investigation documents available on officers' laptops.

It also interfaces with CNB's partner agencies such as the Police and Singapore Customs, so that CNB

officers can share electronic investigation papers and obtain data from these agencies.

Despite its name, IDEAS II is actually the fourth generation of the original IDEAS. In its functions and data analytics capabilities, this latest version, however, is a far cry from the simple mainframe IDEAS that CNB debuted in 2008.

"IDEAS II captures everything that CNB does from start to end," describes CNB Director of Corporate Services Angeline Leow. "We thought through a lot of the officers' work processes in creating IDEAS II and the result is a system that standardises the entire set of work procedures of our officers, making them more efficient."



A WORLD'S FIRST: THE CUTTING-EDGE URINE COLLECTING MACHINE

As a drug enforcement agency, CNB tests the urine samples of those suspected of taking drugs to verify if they have consumed drugs. In addition, in its supervision of former drug addicts, CNB tests the urine of supervisees on a regular basis to make sure that they are not taking drugs.

For five decades now, CNB officers had been manually performing the tedious task of collecting these urine samples. The task involves the manual siphoning of urine from one bottle to another bottle using a pipette tube. The officers then have to manually cap and seal the bottle before attaching a masking tape and a clear tape.

This manual handling is not only unhygienic, it exposes CNB officers to health risks. It also takes officers away from doing other important work.

In 2017, Director CNB Ng Ser Song posed his team a challenge: Come up with a way to fully automate this process.

Two years later, CNB came up with the prototype for the Next Generation Reporting Centre (NGRC), the world's first machine that automates the urine specimen procurement process using robotics with no human intervention.

No other agency in the world has such a machine because no other agency tests urine with such rigour. CNB is unique in serving as both an anti-drug enforcer as well a supervisor of former addicts.

The NGRC comprises four machines that perform four processes: registration of the supervisee and his supervision officer, the authentication and labelling

of the bottles and the test tube, the siphoning of the urine and the re-signature of the label to verify the identity of the supervisee. Achieved using two robots, the machine is the only one of its kind in the world. All four processes are fully monitored and captured by CCTVs.

The impact of NGRC will be tremendous, says Angeline Leow, Director of Corporate Services at CNB.

It will make the urine collection process more efficient, faster and secure. The secure process is also resistant to tampering and contamination of urine samples; with no human intervention, there is no possibility of sample tampering and with every step captured on CCTV, the entire process is now transparent and able to stand up to scrutiny.

More importantly it reduces the biohazard risk faced by CNB officers and takes away a huge pain point for CNB's overworked and longsuffering officers.

"I am very proud of CNB for coming up with a concept and a solution that is revolutionary," says Angeline.



THREE DECADES OF BATTLING FOR HEARTS AND MINDS

“Sustaining preventive drug education is like waging a psychological war against drugs where information is power. Every student must know that it is dangerous to abuse drugs. Everyone in the street must be aware why he should stay off drugs. If we are able to achieve this, we would have won more than half the battle.”

Associate Professor Ho Peng Kee, Senior Minister of State for Home Affairs and Law (2001-2011)

One of the biggest transformations CNB wrought was in its role of propagating preventive drug education.

Before 1992, preventive drug education efforts lacked focus. Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association (SANA) was then essentially the only organisation actively conducting preventive drug education. As a voluntary welfare organisation, SANA did not have the manpower nor the funds to sustain drug education programmes or ensure that its programmes enjoyed wide reach.

Neither was CNB much in the picture. It did not then have a unit or division responsible for drug education. Instead the Bureau gave talks and seminars as and when it was invited to do so.

In 1992, the Bureau formed a Preventive Education Unit. However this unit was extremely modest, staffed with just

one CNB officer and two officers seconded from the Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises (SCORE), which is today known as Yellow Ribbon Singapore (YRSG).

It was only in 1994 when CNB was appointed by the government as the lead agency for preventive drug education that anti-drug education efforts gained momentum.

From that point on, CNB officers became greatly involved in educating the public on the harms of drugs so as to build a community resilient against drug abuse, along with their usual work of putting away drug addicts, traffickers and drug syndicates.

A TOUGH NEW ASSIGNMENT

"It was a big shift when CNB was asked to take on preventive drug education," recalls former CNB Deputy Director Marvin Sim. "It was uncommon then for drug enforcement agencies to take on preventive drug education. Back then, few enforcement agencies in the world were doing this."



Former Deputy Director of CNB S. Vijakumar led the Bureau in this new undertaking. He found the going difficult.

“While suppression of drug supply is a matter of intelligence gathering and arresting and successfully prosecuting traffickers to disrupt the supply of drugs, demand reduction is more challenging. It requires us to establish connections with our target audiences on many fronts through the artful weaving of messages.”

THE FIRST LINE OF DEFENCE



The first decision CNB made in the early years was to not spread its effort thin over the entire Singapore population. Instead the Bureau decided to target those vulnerable to the enticement of drugs, especially impressionable young minds.

Those who start taking drugs when young are more likely to become

hardcore addicts when they reach adulthood. With that in mind, the Bureau initially focused on schools.

In February 1995, then-Director of CNB Sim Poh Heng conducted a crash course for the principals and administrators of all primary and secondary schools in Singapore on the dangers and threats posed by various drugs.

The Bureau also decided to pay special close attention to students at high risk of falling into the clutches of drugs. It designed intervention programmes like youth and adventure camps and day programmes for high-risk students and tracked this group assiduously right from when they were in primary school through to secondary school, the national service and even after their discharge from national service.

Tours were organised to DRCs to let high-risk students witness the harsh consequences that await them should they experiment with drugs. The bleak regime that the inmates go through at the time as well as the simulated caning sessions left an indelible impression on the students, as several school discipline masters reported to S. Vijakumar.

Former Deputy Director of CNB Sebastian Tan echoes that. “It is a tough task. Drug is an “out of sight, out of mind” problem. The drug problem is not something that affects most people in Singapore, and because of this, it is more difficult for anti-drug messages to resonate with the public as most people will think that it does not affect them. Our goal is to subliminally influence the general public so the anti-drug message resides somewhere in their subconscious and they build up some immunity against the seduction of drugs.”

Brochures, pop-up books and even cartoon playing cards with anti-drug messages were given to all students in public primary schools. Special guidebooks were prepared for their parents. Officers were despatched to every school for drug preventive talks. Support groups and community self-help groups such as the Chinese Development Assistance Council (CDAC), Yayasan MENDAKI and the Singapore Indian Development Association (SINDA) were tasked to keep an eye on students from troubled homes. The ill effects of drug abuse are also covered in the compulsory curricula of Singapore schools. The dangers and effects of drug abuse are covered in the health syllabus for Primary 4 and 5 students, in the science syllabus for some secondary school students, and in the Character and Citizenship Education syllabus for Secondary 1 students.

In addition, the Bureau organised a host of mass events including art and drawing competitions, anti-drug exhibitions and sport challenges and races.

The results were encouraging. Just one year after CNB took on the role, the number of new drug abusers arrested in 1995 registered a sharp fall of 27%. This was a big reversal from the persistent upward trend of the previous years. These early indications encouraged the Bureau that its preventive drug education strategies and programmes were on the right track.



ICONIC EVENTS THAT RIVETED A NATION

To have its anti-drug messages received by a broad segment of the Singapore population, the Bureau began to produce ambitious large-scale extravaganzas that became landmark events in Singapore.

In 1997, for example, the Bureau staged the High On Life Concert at the Singapore Indoor Stadium. The mega concert had 5,000 concertgoers dancing the night away in

an exhilarating show that featured international celebrity guests like popular Hong Kong actor and singer Ekin Cheng and British presenters Ant & Dec.

Two years later, CNB launched what would become one of Singapore’s biggest and longest running dance competitions. DanceWorks! enjoyed a loyal following among the young in Singapore until 2018. Over its 20-year run, the wildly popular dance event featured over 16,500 participants and entertained hundreds of thousands of young Singaporeans.



CO-CREATING CAMPAIGNS AND MESSAGES

In the new millennium, the Bureau began to think harder and more creatively about how its message could connect and resonate with its target audiences and “immunise” them against the lure of drugs. Instead of sticking to its usual top-down approach – which would put off young people - CNB began to co-create campaigns, messages and programmes with polytechnics and other tertiary institutes.

“The shift,” describes CNB’s Deputy Director (Policy and Administration) Sng Chern Hong, “has been from one-directional messaging to multi-channel dialogue and engagement.”

For instance in 2018, the Bureau worked hand in hand with Nanyang Polytechnic’s School of Interactive and Digital Media to develop Paranoia, a single-user Virtual Reality (VR) simulation. The simulation allows players to experience the

physiological effects of methamphetamine (or ‘Ice’) abuse include paranoia, hallucination and a loss of balance and co-ordination, giving players a shocking taste of how drug abuse can adversely impact their well-being. Styled like a game, Paranoia players were made to choose between two scenarios with different endings.

In 2018, CNB initiated the DrugFreeSG Light-Up event to commemorate International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking, which falls on 26 June every year. The spectacular event featured 12 building partners in the Marina Bay and Harbourfront (Sentosa) areas lighting up the façade of their buildings in green and/or white hues– the colours of the anti-drug ribbon that symbolise ‘health’, ‘vitality’ and ‘strength’. The event served to showcase the community’s support for a drug-free Singapore. Since then, the event has not only become an annual event, it has steadily grown in scale as it draws increasing support from the community. From the initial 12 partners in the first year, the number of partners grew to 18 in 2019, 21 in 2020 and 28 in 2021.





GOING WHERE THE AUDIENCE IS: CNB'S SOCIAL MEDIA PUSH

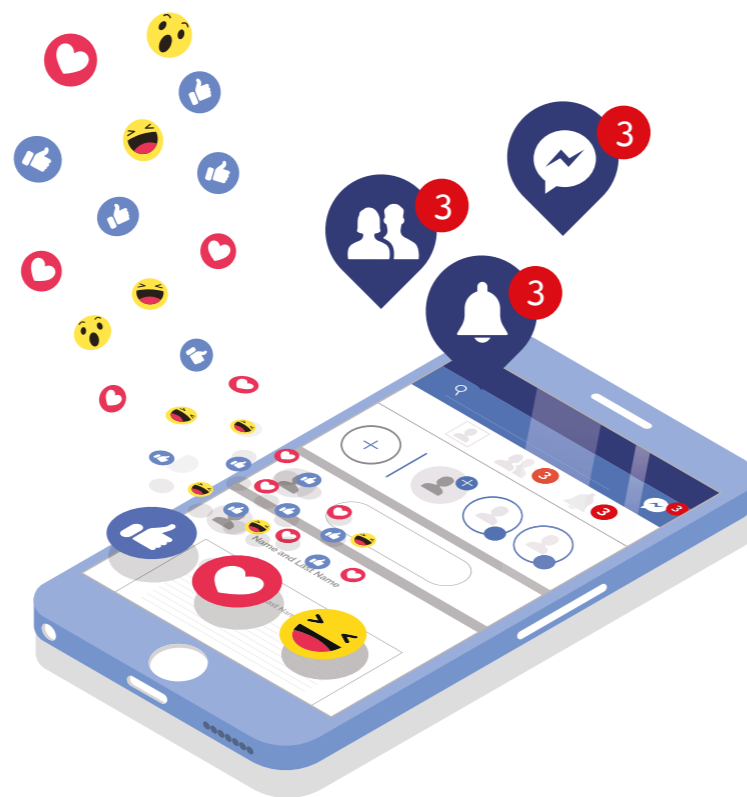
Today the Bureau connects with the public through Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. In 2019, CNB's Facebook page hit a milestone when its fan base crossed the 100,000 mark.

CNB has a team of three Communications staff focussing wholly on managing its social media efforts, an indication of the importance the Bureau places on social media communication. This team uses the internet cleverly to disseminate information about drug abuse, including sharing stories about its work and uploading snappy bite-sized articles on drugs.

"Because we know emotive content grabs attention, we produce short videos where ex-abusers share their stories and their journey to recovery. We also share statistics and the latest scientific findings in the form of engaging videos of infographics to counter pro-drug narratives," describes Deputy Director Sng.

The Bureau also expanded its reach to include mobile platforms. In 2017, the Bureau launched a mobile game app that it jointly developed with Nanyang Polytechnic's School of Interactive and Digital Media. 'Narcaution' features a protagonist who protects Earth from drug lords. The immersive game allows players to experience the effects of taking drugs during the game.

More recently, in February 2021, CNB held the first-ever DrugFreeSG Virtual Concert. The event was a hit, garnering over 165,000 views on the Bureau's Facebook page.



CEASELESS INNOVATION AND CREATIVITY IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

As CNB's Communications team grew more sophisticated, it increasingly draws on creativity as its weapon of choice in the fierce battle for minds and souls. In the new millennium, the Bureau began to wield out-of-the-box strategies and programmes that are bold, innovative and high in impact.

For instance the Bureau collaborated with Mediacorp to produce the television series Dare To Strike which featured a star-studded cast and location shoots in Singapore, Hong Kong, Taiwan and New Zealand. Screened in 2000, Dare To Strike tells the story of two anti-narcotics officers (Julian Cheung and Li Nanxing) and their efforts to bust drug lords.

More recently, CNB once again collaborated with Mediacorp on the drama series The Takedown. Aired from 2 November 2021 on Channel 8, the drama series revolves around CNB officers and their investigation of drug-related cases in Singapore.



The Bureau also got involved in music production. In 2006 the Bureau produced an anti-drug music video titled I Don't Get High to Fly that was screened over Channel 5 and made available on YouTube. A decade later, the Bureau commissioned former Singapore Idol Taufik Batisah to compose an anti-drug song, High on Love, which he performed at the 5th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Drug Matters.

More and more CNB leveraged technology to deliver anti-drug messages in immersive ways. In 2016, for instance,



CNB launched its revamped Drug Buster Academy Bus, a mobile anti-drug exhibition bus that uses augmented reality technology to show visitors the harmful effects of drugs on the body.

The Bureau also explored ambient marketing in October 2017 when it set up a pop-up "club". Installed outside The Cathay mall, the pop-up installation "GURD CLUB" ('DRUG' spelt backwards) allowed "clubbers" to experience a multisensory simulation of the short-lived highs and crashing lows of drug consumption. More than 2,000 mall-goers underwent the interactive experience.

Between 2018 and 2019, the Bureau also gave the public an eye-popping experience when it refurbished lifts using 3D stickers. Thousands of unwary lift users were treated to a blissful panorama of clouds and blue skies while waiting for their lift. But when they entered the lift, they found themselves "standing" on a "skyscraper's ledge". The illusion of falling brought home the message of how drugs mess with one's perception of reality and how drug euphoria is short-lived. The stickers were installed in eight educational institutions and in three public shopping malls.



Spurred by the popularity of such installations, the Bureau launched another campaign – “The Horrors of the Cannabeast” – in public spaces and educational institutions between December 2019 and February 2020. Based on the UFO catcher arcade games popular among youths, the campaign sought to dispel the myth that cannabis is a non-addictive and less harmful drug. The campaign offered youths an interactive experience of how cannabis abuse can affect their well-being negatively, with the goal of generating conversations about the importance of a drug-free community.

In 2019, CNB also explored incorporating augmented reality technology through the use of 3D virtual characters and videos in its exhibitions to enhance viewers’ visualisation of and interaction with anti-drug content.

WINNING HEARTS AND MINDS – AND AWARDS AS WELL

Many of these groundbreaking ideas and campaigns not only had impact, they were award winning.

A social media campaign titled #CNB247 saw the Bureau haul in a string of regional and local awards. First launched in September 2017, the series gives a behind-the-scenes look at the work of CNB officers, and tells riveting stories of the everyday life of CNB officers and CNB’s relentless fight to keep drugs off the streets of Singapore. CNB247 is currently live on CNB’s social media sites.

In 2019 an augmented reality-based game co-developed by CNB and Nanyang Polytechnic’s School of Interactive and Digital Media was selected for the Indie Prize China showcase, a global competition featuring the most creative independent projects of the gaming industry. Seal No to Drugs offers players an immersive gameplay experience while they learn about the dangers of drugs.

In 2020, A House is Not a Home, a short film co-produced by CNB and the Nanyang Technological University’s School of Art, Design and Media, was nominated for the National Youth Film Awards 2020 (Media Student – Live Action Category).

These awards and nominations not only bear witness to the quality of the Bureau’s work in preventive drug education, they show how far the Bureau has come since it first started with drug prevention school talks back in 1974.



#CNB247 took home the Best Use of Social Media (Silver) Award at the 2018 PR Awards; the Best Idea – Content Marketing (Gold) Award at MARKies Awards 2018 and the Best Use of Social Media (Gold) Award and Best Engagement Strategy by a Government/Community (Silver) Award at Loyalty & Engagement Awards 2018.



THE EVOLUTION WILL CONTINUE

From a team of three in 1992 focused on giving talks to a crew of 22 driving a sophisticated coordinated effort, the Bureau has grown and evolved immensely in its role of steering preventive drug education.

“Our programmes are now more visible and reach out to more people,” comments former Deputy Director Sebastian Tan. “In the last three to four years, our social media offerings have been very interesting and have become far less straitjacketed. We focus now on co-creating meaningful content like games and videos. The engagement platforms we use are more diverse. Our campaigns are more informed by research.”

Most importantly, CNB’s education programmes have won the hearts and minds of the public. In a public perception survey on the Home Team’s community programmes

and services conducted in 2019, more than eight out of 10 respondents rated CNB’s programmes as effective in educating the public on the dangers of drug abuse.

However, the evolution is far from over.

“Preventive drug education remains our first line of defence to suppress local demand for drugs. We must continue to strengthen the resilience of Singaporeans against undue influence. And we must continue to encourage support of a drug-free Singapore and build advocacy for that vision,” says Deputy Director Sng.

He adds, “The work is ongoing in terms of transforming how we conduct preventive drug education. Every stage of our evolution has been challenging. And every stage has also been inspiring. With each step, we are becoming that little bit more innovative and that little bit more adept.”

REINVENTING

AFTERCARE



The Bureau's involvement in looking after ex-drug addicts first began in 1978.

Drug abusers in Singapore have to undergo compulsory supervision after their release from DRCs or jail. This supervision was initially undertaken by the Probation and Aftercare Section of the then Ministry of Social Affairs. The success of Operation Ferret, however, meant that several thousands of addicts were sent for treatment and rehabilitation, leading to a sudden ballooning in the supervisee population.

The Probation and Aftercare Section did not have the manpower to supervise thousands of addicts nor the enforcement power to ensure compliance with the supervision order.

It was then decided that CNB would take over the supervision of drug addicts.

Said then Director of CNB (1978 to 1981) Tee Tua Ba, "Probation and Aftercare uses a lot of volunteers and our

view is that having contained the drug problem, CNB must now follow closely with the supervision of drug addicts to ensure that they do not go back to drugs."

This new role led to the formation of the Supervision Division in 1978.

Recalled Lee Tai Huat, the Acting Chief Narcotics Officer tasked to set up the division at Rumah Miskin Police Station, "There were actually more than a thousand absconders when we took over."

Lee Tai Huat's first move was to set up standard operating procedures for surprise urine tests (SUT) and routine urine tests (RUT). Related Officer Lee, "In those days, SUT meant that officers would go with urine bottles and boxes to the homes and workplaces of supervisees to collect their urine samples. You tell our officers to do that now. They will laugh at you. But that was how it was done in those days."

For routine urine tests, supervisees then had to report to their CNB Supervision Officer at Rumah Miskin Police Station.

THE CARING, COMPASSIONATE FACE OF CNB

“

We will also be enhancing the quality of aftercare support and services for ex-addicts released from the DRCs. We see this as a crucial part of the overall anti-drug effort. Without effective follow-up after the addicts are released from DRCs, all our efforts to rehabilitate them inside the DRCs will come to nothing. Ex-addicts who genuinely want to change for the better should be given every assistance to make their re-entry into society as smooth as possible to prevent their relapse back to drugs.”

Wong Kan Seng, Minister for Home Affairs (1994-2010), in 1994

However the Bureau expected its men to do more than round up supervisees for urine tests. Because supervisees have to report for urine testing either weekly or twice weekly for up to two years following their release (currently up to five years), the supervision sessions form a regular and natural contact point between Supervision Officers and supervisees. The Bureau hoped that the Supervision Officers would use these sessions to guide their supervisees and help them reintegrate into society.

"In the past, it was straightforward. When supervisees did not turn up for their urine test, we would go look for them and if they tested positive for drugs we sent them back to the DRC. Now we try to find out why they relapsed: Is it because they have some issues with their work and how can we follow up with the other agencies to see if we can help them," describes Marvin Sim, former Deputy Director of CNB (2011–2015).

For the battle-hardened officers, however, it was not a role that came easy.

"From a law enforcement officer's perspective, he basically has to straddle two fundamentally different roles: the role of the arresting officer and the role of the aftercare officer," observes Marvin. "But I think this is the right approach. To me it is a very natural evolution to institutionalise the intervention regime."



TURNING LIVES AROUND

Some CNB officers proved to be exceptional in the role.

Under the compassionate care of Inspector Ravichandran Ramu, Team Leader of Enforcement 'A' Division, for example, hundreds of former supervisees have turned their life around. One became a pilot. Another a doctor. Yet more are successful and happy in their careers.

The drug addict who became a pilot in particular has much to be grateful for. He was a teenager studying at a polytechnic when he was arrested for taking marijuana. For the teenager and his family, it was a difficult stressful time. His anxious pilot father frequently called the Inspector on weekdays and weekends to seek advice.

Inspector Ravichandran did everything he could to help the teenager. He arranged for the teenager to be able to enter Johor Bahru in Malaysia to take flying lessons without having to seek permission each and every time. He also recommended for the teenager's order for urine tests to be revoked in his second year on account of his good conduct and attendance. This meant that the teenager would not be under a cloud while serving out his national service in the army.

When the teenager fell into a depression because his drug record meant that he could not realise his dream of becoming a fighter pilot with the Singapore Air Force, the Inspector counselled him to aim to become a commercial pilot instead.

Today, the former addict is a pilot trainer in the US.

"He called me last year to thank me for guiding him when he was down, when he thought his dream of becoming a pilot was over," says Inspector Ravichandran.



The pilot was not an isolated case. Inspector Ravichandran goes out of his way to counsel all his supervisees whenever they need help. Many supervisees call him late at night and over the weekends to talk about their problems. And the inspector does not mind at all. For the inspector, the role of caring for supervisees is a profound and meaningful one.

"We have the responsibility and the means to help drug addicts. We spend time with them and we earn their trust. We see them twice a week for two years. They know us and they trust us. Because of that they open up to us and let us help them."

Special encounters touch CNB officers and spur them on.

There was the time for instance when Staff Sergeant Goh Rui Sin of the International Operations Desk spotted her supervisee in the lockup. The supervisee had relapsed and was caught consuming drugs during an operation.

"She got someone to pass me a letter and the letter said, 'I am sorry for disappointing you, Madam.' So they do appreciate what you do for them. That episode made me want to do better. It made me believe in giving second chances and it made me work even harder to turn supervisees around."

Today CNB officers stoutly believe that their supervision make a difference. A recent survey conducted by CNB's psychologists showed that close to two-thirds of CNB officers believe that their engagement with supervisees help lower rates of drug relapse.

THE NEXT EVOLUTION IN AFTERCARE: COMMUNITY SUPERVISION SKILLS

The year 2021 saw an important evolution of CNB's aftercare with the launch of the Community Supervision Skills (CoSS) programme.

Under the programme, Supervision Officers are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to guide supervisees in overcoming challenges to their re-integration.

In addition Supervision Officers will attend to supervisees' reintegration needs such as financial, accommodation and employment needs. These needs will be uncovered through structured interviews conducted at supervision sessions. The Supervision Officers will then refer the supervisees to the Industrial & Services Co-Operative Society (ISCOS), which will follow up and channel the supervisees to the relevant social service agencies for assistance. The launch of CoSS is especially important with supervision period for supervisees now extended up to five years.

The launch of the programme followed a successful pilot in 2019. An evaluation of the pilot showed that Supervision

Officers were able to identify the needs of supervisees and get them help. The supervisees affirmed that the assistance received was useful, while Supervision Officers and supervisees both reported that the programme led to better working relationship between both parties.

The Bureau plans to roll out CoSS to all reporting centres.



SINGAPORE MAKES AFTERCARE MANDATORY FOR HIGH-RISK DRUG ABUSERS



In 2014, Singapore introduced the Mandatory Aftercare Scheme (MAS) to help released inmates with a higher risk of re-offending stay crime-free after their release. Prior to their release, these inmates undergo programmes to address their risks and needs. Following their release, they will be under the Singapore Prison Service's (SPS) supervision and receive counselling and casework to support them in their reintegration into society.

Drug offenders who are placed under the MAS would also be under CNB's supervision. Initially the supervision period for such drug abusers was up to two years after their release. In 2019, this was extended to up to five years.

THE FOUR DIFFERENT HOMES OF CNB

The Bureau did not just evolve in organisational structure, size and mission. In five decades, it changed its home four times.

THE MAKESHIFT FIRST HOME – CID BUILDING ALONG ROBINSON ROAD (1971-1973)

In 1972, the nascent agency moved into its first home. This was the CID Building along Robinson Road that formerly housed the Narcotics Branch of the Criminal Investigation Department.



The cramped quarters was not much of a headquarters. Though the team only consisted of 20 men, the building could barely hold them all. There was space only for three tiny offices into which a few tables could be squeezed in. Only Ahmad Malik, Officer-in-Charge of Narcotics, was assigned an office. The senior officers had to share one office, and the junior officers another office. Probably because of this cramped conditions, the early CNB officers got into the habit of getting out and about on the ground instead of staying in the office.

THE SPARTAN SECOND HOME – PEARL'S HILL POLICE HEADQUARTERS AT EU TONG SENG STREET (1974-1992)



The Bureau did not linger long at the CID Building. When a second batch of officers joined the Bureau a year after its formation, working in the tiny borrowed quarters became a daily exercise in patience. And so in 1974 CNB moved to its second home, the Pearl's Hill Police Headquarters at No. 99 Eu Tong Seng Street. Here the Bureau shared space with the Police Force.

This second home of CNB was hardly glamorous.

The offices were spartan with white coloured walls, bare cemented floors and simple tables and chairs that were shared by many. In these small offices, investigators used to work for hours with ribbon-based manual typewriters as the key tool of their work and humble ceiling fans spinning to keep them cool from the hot Singapore weather.

Officers who worked here recall vividly the cramped working environment and the disjointed setup with the different units scattered around the building in a random fashion. There was no functional layout of the rooms as arrangements were subject to the space given by the Police.

For Senior Clerical Officer Lim Swee Hiang what was most unforgettable about the Eu Tong Seng headquarters was the dreary routine of having to flush the toilets using pails of water; the toilets were often out of order and repair took a long time.

This was the Bureau's home for 18 years.



FINALLY A HOME OF OUR OWN – THE SHIFT TO NO. 2 OUTRAM ROAD (1992-2000)



When Sim Poh Heng became CNB Director in May 1991, he decided that it was insupportable for the Bureau to continue to be a tenant in another organisation's premises. The Bureau needed a home of its own for operational secrecy, to establish a separate identity and to expand in size.

He made it a top priority for the Bureau to shift out of the Eu Tong Sen location.

The premises of the former Pearl's Hill Primary School at No. 2 Outram Road was quickly acquired and renovated. The premises was chosen for two reasons: it has a big compound for operational vehicles. Secondly it is conveniently located next to an MRT station.

The three-storey building could hardly be termed commodious but it was a place the officers could call their own.

Assistant Superintendent Muhammad Azni remembers the great rush to prepare for the move. "It was quite a task. We had only six months from the time the layout plans were finalised to complete the renovation and move in by September 1992."

In 1992, 21 years after its formation, CNB finally moved into a headquarters it could call its own.

The shift boosted the image of CNB as a premier drug enforcement agency. "We now have a proper duty room, a proper operations room, adequate parking space and our own conference room" said Assistant Superintendent Muhammad Azni. There was also enough space for expanded units like the Research Division, Preventive Education Unit and Field Intelligence Unit.

Appropriately enough for an agency that feels like a family, the first home that is truly CNB's felt just like a home.

"Standing at the corridor you could see squirrels and lots of trees. It had a lovely feel about it," describes Chong Fui Kim, Senior Assistant Director of Intelligent Operations Research. Some officers, however, pushed the notion of home too far. They began housing their pets in the office. The initial trickle of animals became a torrent and the headquarters turned into a mini zoo.

It started with one Intelligence officer who brought in two hamsters. The hamsters procreated and had lots of babies. Colleagues in the unit adopted the babies and housed them in the office too.

"In the end we had more than 10 hamsters housed in a very elaborate housing set-up made up of four to six mini cages all connected to each other. My colleagues and I would pop by and play with the hamsters. It was a crazy situation," recounts Fui Kim.

And then there was the mini ocean world inside the Operations Research office.

It began small with one Operations Research officer buying a few tetras and a tank from an aquarium shop he spotted while on his lunch break. The tank was duly set up in the Operations Research office where the team greatly enjoyed the sight of the fishes swimming serenely about as they work. Other colleagues also tried having their own mini aquariums by their desk.

"Eventually we were down to one aquarium complete with water pump and aquatic plants and about 10 fishes. It was interesting to work in an office with a nice mini aquarium," says Fui Kim.

The Outram Road headquarters was cosy in another way – the meeting rooms were limited.

"Meetings were held in bosses' own office that was five metres by three metres. The 17 of us officers could barely squeeze in there and meetings could last all day. Then the Deputy Assistant Director would buy us paos (steamed buns) to eat. So we would all be squeezed inside this tiny room eating paos, practically sitting on each other's lap," relates Deputy Superintendent Xavier Lek, Senior Officer-in-Charge of International Operations Desk.

Other quirky features of the headquarters included the peculiar parking arrangement.

The rapid expansion in headcount meant that CNB's parking needs quickly exceeded what the compound could provide. To squeeze more space out of the small compound, CNB staff resorted to two hacks. The staff would park the cars end to end and either not lock their car doors or not engage the handbrake. To drive off, CNB officers had to do one of two things to the cars blocking their own vehicle. If the cars blocking them were unlocked, they would unbrake them and push them out of the way. If the cars were locked but with the handbrake unengaged, they would simply push them out of the way.

It was a happy place, says Fui Kim. "There was a kampong spirit about the place because it was surrounded partially by old trees and the open corridors in the converted school building gave the place a very relaxed vibe. It felt like a home."



A STATE-OF-THE-ART HEADQUARTERS - POLICE CANTONMENT COMPLEX (2001-present)



As the new millennium approached, the Bureau found itself once again bursting at the seams. In the space of eight years, CNB grew from a 200-man outfit to an agency with over 600 staff. The Bureau had outgrown its Outram Road premises and badly needed a new home.

In 2001, CNB shifted to the new Police Cantonment Complex located at the junction of Cantonment Road and Neil Road. This is an eight-storey state-of-the-art building of 7,000 sq metres – five times bigger than No. 2 Outram Road.

"We are now, so to say, "on the road to being on our own". We will have our own space that will be tailor-made to meet our requirements," expressed Yang Lye Hock, then Assistant Director of Financial Investigation. "The new Cantonment Building is going to mark a new era for CNB."

The Bureau shares the brand-new purpose-built building with the Police "A" Division and the Criminal Investigation Department. It is the first time the Bureau had the luxury of a staff canteen, gym, staff lounge, fully equipped auditorium with conference rooms, multi-purpose hall, exhibition room, heritage gallery and library.



National Security

5TH ASEAN MINISTERIAL MEETING ON DRUG MATTERS



CHAPTER

FIVE

DECADES
OF ACHIEVEMENTS

OF TRIUMPHS AND FRONTIERS

“**We are relatively drug-free. The cost of buying drugs is still high and the cost of being caught is very high. All of this keeps the society relatively free of drugs, healthier, with less crime and less homicides. A safer society for everyone. For that, we thank CNB. Thank you very much.**”

K Shanmugam, Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Law, in 2019

In 2003, Hans T. van der Veen, a researcher at the Amsterdam Centre for Drug Research in the Netherlands, wrote a pessimistic summary of the global drug war.

“In spite of ever-increasing resources dedicated to the reduction of supply and demand of illicit drugs, consumption levels are still rising all over the world. The drug industry is probably the largest and most profitable sector of international crime. ... As long as demand for illicit drugs exists, the drug war cannot be won, at least not by the coercive institutions of the state. ... Supply reduction therefore seems a dead-end strategy, as it is likely to produce little but counterproductive effects on the supply of illicit drugs and on the organisational strength of the trafficker networks that it attacks.”

According to the 2021 World Drug Report, around 275 million people used drugs worldwide in 2019. The latest global estimates is that about 5.5% of the world’s population aged between 15 and 64 years have used drugs at least once in 2019, while 36.3 million people, or 13% of the total number of persons who use drugs, suffer from drug use disorders. Between 2010 and 2019 the number of people using drugs increased by 22%, partly because of global population growth.

Singapore appears to be an exception to the dismal record in curbing drug abuse around the world. Singapore has managed to reduce the number of drug abusers arrested from 208 per 100,000 in 1994 to only 75 per 100,000 in 2020.



“**I am most proud of the fact that for 50 years, Singapore has a drug enforcement agency that kept the drug situation under control despite what is going on around us in the region. Looking around us, it is not like this in many countries.**”

Marvin Sim, Deputy Director of CNB (2011-2015)

This success, however, did not happen overnight. It has taken CNB 50 years of sustained effort and continuous refinement and strengthening of its anti-drug measures to arrive at this point. The road CNB took to get here is one paved with crucial victories and achievements.

TRIUMPH #1. A CITIZENRY THAT IS AWARE OF THE DANGERS OF DRUGS

One of the biggest factors behind Singapore’s success in curbing drug use is the very high awareness of the harms of drugs among its people.

Results from public surveys show that almost all Singaporeans think that drugs destroy health, families and the society. Over 97% of respondents in a 2018 survey conducted by the Singapore Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said they believe drugs to be harmful to the abuser, his family and the society. Close to 98% also said that drugs are bad for health.

This high awareness is built through heavy investment in preventive drug education. Between 1998 and 2007 CNB spent over S\$21 million on preventive drug education. This amounts to slightly over S\$2 million spent annually to raise awareness about the dangers of drug abuse.

This awareness is also pushed hard by a community of ardent advocates against drugs. Community leaders and grassroots organisations are among CNB’s most effective allies in promulgating anti-drug messages.

TRIUMPH #2. A POPULATION THAT IS FULLY BEHIND SINGAPORE’S TOUGH STANCE ON DRUGS

“**Our population is strongly supportive of our position because they know what drugs and traffickers will do to our society.**”

K Shanmugam, Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Law, in 2019

Singapore is able to maintain its tough stance on drugs because public support for its severe drug laws is very strong.

Close to 98% of respondents in the 2018 MHA survey agreed that Singapore should continue to maintain tough laws against drugs, and that drug consumption should remain illegal. About 90% felt that Singapore’s drug laws were effective in keeping the country relatively drug-free. The vast majority felt that Singapore should continue to maintain tough laws to keep drugs out of the country (97.8%) and that drug-taking should remain illegal in Singapore (97.5%).

The Bureau is a major contributing factor behind this high level of support because it is perceived as having done a good job in keeping drugs under control. In a recent survey, more than 85% of respondents said that CNB has done well in keeping Singapore drug-free.



TRIUMPH #3. A BUREAU THAT IS INCREASINGLY DEADLY TO DRUG SYNDICATES

Then Director of CNB (2005-2011) Ng Seng Liang once said, “We cannot allow foreign drug syndicates to establish a base in Singapore for their operations. It would increase the availability of drugs in Singapore and bring with it problems of organised crime such as money laundering and triad activities. Singaporeans may also fall prey to being recruited as drug couriers. To this end we will continue to work closely with our strategic partners to curb the supply of drugs to our shores and dismantle transnational drug syndicates.”

In the 1990s, CNB began shifting its focus from targeting small traffickers to hunting down syndicates. Of the 5,911 drug traffickers arrested by the CNB from 1977 to 1993, 4,286 (72.5%) were ant-traffickers, 918 (15.5%) were small-scale traffickers, and only 707 (12%) were large-scale traffickers. Between 1987 and 1993, the proportion of large-scale

traffickers arrested rose from 12.4% in 1987 to 46% in 1993, reflecting the big shift in enforcement strategy from focusing on ant traffickers to dismantling large-scale traffickers.

This targeting of syndicates led drug syndicates to rewrite the rules of engagement. Leary of Singapore’s tough anti-drug regime, syndicates began playing a very different game. In the past CNB raids would turn up five to 10 kilogrammes of heroin and up to 50 kilogrammes of cannabis because syndicates aimed to supply drugs for all addicts in Singapore. Now, to avoid the death penalty, syndicates deal in smaller quantities of drugs and have few customers.

Those who attempt to smuggle in large quantities find themselves stopped by an agency that is increasingly sophisticated and equipped to deal with the big guys. In 2020, for example, CNB intercepted many attempts to smuggle drugs into the country. The drug seized amounted to an estimated market value of around S\$12.18 million dollars. It also conducted major operations that dismantled 24 drug syndicates.

TRIUMPH #4. STREETS THAT ARE FREE OF DRUGS

“**The results speak for themselves. We are relatively drug-free, and the drug situation is under control. There are no drug havens, no no-go zones, no drug production centres, no needle exchange programmes. Our stance on drugs has allowed us to build a safe and secure Singapore for our people.**”

K Shanmugam, Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Law, in 2016

A clear indication of the success of CNB is that the streets of Singapore are free of drugs. In the 2018 MHA survey, around 93% declared that Singapore’s drug-free environment makes them feel safe.

This situation did not happen overnight. As late as the 1990s, addicts could go to certain locations in Singapore and buy

drugs from pushers loitering in the area. Effective and rigorous enforcement by CNB however meant that it is now not easy to buy drugs off the streets or to observe any drug transactions happening on the street.

Instead drug pushers take orders on the phone and arrange to deliver drugs to clients via dead drops. They also deal only with regular clients. Clients pay for the drugs via electronic transfer using ATMs.

This is an important achievement. Singaporeans highly cherish the safe environment of Singapore. It also allows the government to deliver on its promise of protecting the rights of Singapore citizens to live in an environment free of drug abuse.



TRIUMPH #5. A BUREAU THAT REMAINS WHOLEHEARTEDLY COMMITTED AND DEDICATED TO THE CAUSE

“**In the early 1990s, we were arresting between six to seven thousand people per year. Today, we are arresting between two to three thousand per year... That is three thousand less per year over a 20-year period... Every person not arrested, who has not become an abuser, is a life saved. So we have saved maybe 40, maybe 50 thousand lives, maybe more.**”

K Shanmugam, Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Law, in 2017



A basic tenet in any battle plan is the need to have a well-trained and equipped battle force strongly imbued with a sense of purpose. Singapore has that battle force in CNB.

The effectiveness of CNB has seen the number of drug abusers in Singapore more than halved since the 1990s.

Declares Director CNB Ng Ser Song, “The CNB officer has the values of professionalism, integrity, dedication and courage. All these exemplary qualities come down to our officers having the heart to serve the public and their continued commitment to their core duties as a CNB officer.”

EXPLORING NEW FRONTIERS: A BUREAU THAT IS INCREASINGLY AN ENGINE FOR INNOVATION

To make sure it stays one step ahead of the drug game, CNB has become an engine for innovation. Increasingly CNB is investing in developing tools that will allow the agency to respond swifter and more effectively, that will enhance sense-making, that will strengthen investigation protocols and that will improve investigation efficiency.



“**I think Singapore started off on the right foot. It decided right from the start to take a no-nonsense, non-negotiable stance to drugs that led to the rollout of strong laws and mandatory rehabilitation. Basically the foundation was set right. If the foundation had not been strong I think we would not be where we are today.**”

Sebastian Tan, Former Deputy Director, CNB

IT TAKES A COMMUNITY

“**CNB cannot win the fight against drugs alone. A drug-free Singapore requires the collective effort of the Government and community. We urge everyone to speak up and take a strong stand against drugs, so that we can keep Singapore safe and drug-free for our loved ones.**”

Ng Ser Song, Director of CNB

Since that day in February 1995 when then Director of CNB Sim Poh Heng walked into a town hall meeting filled with school principals and earnestly sought their help to spread the anti-drug message, CNB has been working incessantly to draft community allies into the anti-drug fight.

The Bureau has always recognised that it cannot be effective without the community’s support for its mission.

“It is a whole-of-society battle for the hearts and minds of the people of Singapore. It all comes down to getting across a basic and fundamental message to every generation: that we need to stay away from drugs,” articulates Ng Ser Song, Director of CNB.

THE POWER OF THE COMMUNITY

Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Law K Shanmugam frequently sounds the clarion call for support from the community. “The fight against drugs, both within and internationally, will continue to be challenging. CNB needs to continue to work with its partners to get as many hands into the fight as possible.”

The community has answered the call through the decades.

Scores of community organisations have played a vital part in the many different facets of the fight against drugs, from promoting anti-drug messages to helping ex-abusers find jobs and reintegrate into society.

These vital allies include self-help groups like the Chinese Development Assistance Council (CDAC), Yayasan MENDAKI and the Singapore Indian Development Association (SINDA); voluntary welfare organisations like Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association (SANA), Singapore After-Care Association (SACA) and halfway houses; government bodies like Yellow Ribbon Singapore (YRSG), the Singapore Police Force, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social and Family Development; educational institutions; corporations and individuals.

One of CNB’s earliest partners SANA, was established in 1972 to provide drug addicts with counselling, rehabilitation and aftercare services. Another invaluable early partner the Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises or SCORE (now renamed as YRSG) was established by the Ministry of Home Affairs in 1976 to improve the employability



of ex-abusers and to reduce relapse rate by preparing them for their eventual reintegration back into the workforce. The statutory board organises work programmes and vocational training for ex-abusers, instils in them strong work ethics and equips them with work experience and job skills.

Since the mid-1990s, SCORE, SANA and halfway houses have worked closely with CNB to offer support to ex-abusers in the form of job referrals and sponsorship programmes with private sector companies that provide skills training and jobs. Between 2015 and 2020, YRSG alone helped more than 2,000 inmates each year to secure jobs upon their release.

Another key partner in the drug fight is the National Council Against Drug Abuse (NCADA). Formed in 1995, NCADA is an advisory council to the Ministry of Home Affairs on policies and measures to curb drug abuse in Singapore and to mobilise public support against drugs.

Through the years, the Bureau has worked very closely with NCADA. Its support was invaluable in educating the

public on the drug menace and in rallying support for the government’s crusade against drug abuse. The Council complements CNB’s efforts by communicating messages on community responsibility and advocacy through nationwide media campaigns conducted over social media platforms, through outdoor advertisements and on mainstream media.

“It is not easy to get the anti-drug message across in Singapore because most people here don’t see drugs as a problem,” stresses Marvin Sim, former CNB Deputy Director. “And so our biggest challenge has always been in connecting with our target audiences and winning mindshare. NCADA gives us the national platform to reach out to the public on issues that we think are important to the drug situation in Singapore.”

One such platform is the United Against Drugs Coalition (UADC). Launched jointly by CNB and NCADA in 2017, UADC brings together organisations from the government, non-government and private sectors that together form a strong network of advocates committed to advancing the anti-drug message within their particular spheres of influence.

UNITING COMMUNITIES AGAINST DRUGS



Another distinctive strategy CNB employs is to recruit partners from the community to join the Bureau in promoting the anti-drug message.

The Bureau enlists partners such as parents, educators and counsellors to grow a community of advocates against drug abuse. Today the Bureau has over 1,000 anti-drug champions recruited from all walks of life including students and

working adults. The Bureau oversees the youth volunteers while NCADA manages the adult advocates.

It also began working closely with other agencies. Regular meetings with SANA, Police, the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social and Family Development and self-help groups such as the Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP), CDAC, SINDA and Yayasan MENDAKI were held to plan, promote and implement preventive drug education programmes.



In 2019 Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance Heng Swee Keat lauded the volunteers behind the Yellow Ribbon Community Project. "To reintegrate our ex-offenders into society, the support of the community is paramount... From less than 100 volunteers in 2010, there are now more than 1,000 of you trained to carry out this important work. Through your combined efforts over the years, you have reached out to more than 10,000 families. You have made a difference to countless lives, so well done!... The Yellow

Ribbon Project is a very powerful example of what we can achieve when we work together."

One of CNB's primary goals today is to foster an active citizenry that is galvanised and empowered. "Everyone in our community," stresses CNB's Deputy Director (Policy and Administration) Sng Chern Hong, "including parents, educators, like-minded individuals and organisations, have a role to play in safeguarding a drug-free Singapore for the future of our children and our children's children."

THE RIBBON OF UNITY



First launched by NCADA at the 1996 national anti-drug abuse campaign, the anti-drug ribbon is a symbol of the community's united stand against drugs.

The green and white colours of the ribbon stand for 'health', 'vitality' and 'strength'.

The anti-drug ribbon has been produced into collar pins and other commemorative items that are distributed to members of the public to create

awareness of the anti-drug cause. The ribbon also features prominently in NCADA's outreach events and activities.

In 2015 the ribbon was officially adopted by the Asia-Pacific Forum Against Drugs as its anti-drug abuse symbol. In 2016 it was adopted at the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Drug Matters as the symbol for preventive drug education and campaigns throughout ASEAN.

TWO HIGHLY TARGETED ANTI-DRUG CAMPAIGNS

For the first time, in 2017 and 2019, CNB created community-nuanced anti-drug campaigns.

Dadah Itu Haram

Launched in 2017 the "Dadah Itu Haram" (DIH) campaign is a ground-up initiative that encourages Malay-Muslim community members, groups and organisations to come together to spread the anti-drug message. "Dadah Itu Haram" means "drugs is forbidden" in Malay. The campaign is based on the fact that in Islamic teaching, taking drugs is "haram" or prohibited.

Since the launch, the campaign has got more than 300 volunteers and 300 organisations and businesses to pledge their support for the fight against drugs. In the

campaign, businesses spread the anti-drug message by displaying and distributing DIH collaterals. Anti-drug car decals, stickers and brochures are displayed at various Malay-Muslim community touchpoints, such as eateries, barbershops and mosques. The DIH message has also been incorporated into events such as theatre productions and dikir barat (Malay choral singing) competitions.

The campaign also saw the Bureau working with fishing groups and cycling groups to jointly hold fishing and cycling competitions.



Bothaiporulai Ethirthu Nirpom

In 2019 the Bureau used the same approach as the DIH campaign to launch the Bothaiporulai Ethirthu Nirpom (BEN) (Tamil for 'We Stand United Against Drugs') campaign to spread the anti-drug message to the Indian community.

The BEN campaign was highly successful, winning the support of 27 restaurants along Race Course Road and Chander Road where members of the Indian community congregate.



A GLOBAL NETWORK OF ALLIES

“**Drug traffickers recognise no national boundaries. The activities of international drug syndicates usually cover a number of countries. It is therefore not possible to combat it successfully without the assistance and co-operation of other international and national enforcement agencies.**”

Chua Sian Chin, Minister for Home Affairs and Education (1972-1984), in 1976



The Bureau is also an active participant in bilateral and regional meetings such as the Meetings of Heads of National Drug Law Enforcement Agencies, Asia and the Pacific; and Meetings of the ASEAN Senior Officials on Drug Matters.

As part of its international commitment, CNB also works with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to organise training programmes and conferences to showcase Singapore’s efforts in preventive education, treatment and rehabilitation. In 2019, for example, CNB hosted and co-organised several conferences with UNODC including the International Symposium of Forensic Drug Testing Lab Directors, the 11th Global Synthetics Monitoring: Analyses, Reporting and Trends Programme Regional Workshop for East and South-East Asia, and the Singapore-UNODC Joint Training Programme on Drug Prevention in Educational Settings.

To contribute to the region’s fight against drugs, CNB developed and launched the ASEAN Preventive Drug Education (PDE) Portal in 2018. The portal provides ASEAN PDE practitioners easy access to a wide range of resources and encourages the sharing of best practices. As host and manager of the portal, CNB has been working closely with ASEAN member states to showcase their PDE approaches,

The Bureau has always recognised that it cannot fight the drug war alone.

Sitting in a region close to where most of the world’s heroin, cannabis and methamphetamine are produced and where the major drug markets are to be found, Singapore has always worked together with international allies to stop drugs from flowing into the country.

“The drug menace is a complex problem that transcends national boundaries and CNB is a small organisation. Hence we need to work with other agencies and organisations and leverage their capabilities and resources to perform our mission effectively and efficiently,” stresses Ng Ser Song, Director of CNB.

When it was first formed, the new agency spelled out four strategies for supply reduction. Among them was enhancing cooperation with foreign anti-drug agencies. Through the decades CNB has remained true to this strategy.

CNB frequently conducts joint operations with foreign drug agencies such as the Royal Malaysian Police’s Narcotics Crime Investigation Department (NCID), the Australian Federal Police, the National Police Agency of Japan and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, to name a few.

programmes and resources for sharing with other member states.

The strong partnerships forged from these engagements allow the drug problem to be fought on both a regional and global scale.

The Bureau does not take these important relationships lightly. “Having strong partnerships with our international counterparts is critical to CNB’s success,” stresses Director CNB Ng Ser Song.

“**We need international cooperation more than international agencies need us because the drugs are coming in to Singapore from overseas.**”

Deputy Superintendent Qamarul Zaman Bin Hussin, Deputy Commanding Officer of Enforcement ‘L’ Division

AN INTERNATIONAL COALITION AGAINST DRUGS

To prevent syndicates from gaining a foothold in the country, CNB relies on international cooperation and joint operations to track down and eliminate international drug syndicates.

Internationally CNB works closely with the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the Australian Federal Police and drug enforcement agencies in Southeast Asia.

“A significant part of CNB’s success in fighting drugs can be attributed to bilateral cooperation with agencies like the Narcotics Crime Investigation Department of the Royal Malaysian Police,” states Director CNB Ng Ser Song.

In 2020, for example, CNB conducted 17 successful joint operations and joint investigations with its international counterparts.



SINGAPORE’S MOST TRUSTED INTERNATIONAL ALLY IS ALWAYS JUST A PHONE CALL AWAY

“**Foreign agencies have a very high regard for CNB. The level of trust in CNB is high. Foreign agencies know we mean business. They know that we are up to the task and that we are efficient.**”

Deputy Superintendent Qamarul Zaman Bin Hussin, Deputy Commanding Officer of Enforcement ‘L’ Division

One of Singapore’s most important allies in the fight to keep drugs from entering the island is the NCID. With hundreds of thousands of people entering Singapore each day from Malaysia, CNB needs every assistance possible from the NCID to prevent drugs from slipping through the checkpoints.

“Over 90% of our drugs come in from Malaysia through our checkpoints. Hence NCID is our single most important strategic partner,” reveals former Deputy Director of CNB Marvin Sim. “A strong partnership with NCID, and especially the division in Johor, is essential in our fight against drugs. To work together on drug operations, there must be a deep level of trust because both parties have to exchange highly

sensitive information. If there is no deep trust, it is impossible to work together.”

Happily for Singapore, the Bureau’s partnership with NCID has been outstandingly successful. Over the span of 20

OPERATION SEA KNIGHT – JOINING FORCES TO TAKE DOWN A SYNDICATE

The Bureau’s stalwart relationship with NCID owes much to the success of Operation Sea Knight, a major successful bilateral drug operation between the two agencies.

Operation Sea Knight was set off by the seemingly insignificant arrest of a local trafficker in August 2007. On probing, CNB case officer Qamarul Zaman Bin Hussin learnt that the trafficker was acting as a distributor for a wanted male Singaporean who had set up an extensive base in Johor, Malaysia.

Qamarul Zaman was then an Inspector in the Intelligence Division working on local cases. “We contacted our Malaysian counterpart to assist us in following up on the supplier because we do not have jurisdiction in Malaysia. They began to investigate and develop the case.”

In Singapore, with the help of intelligence updates supplied by NCID, Inspector Qamarul Zaman and his team uncovered a network of traffickers in Singapore that was distributing drugs for the Malaysian syndicate. A spate of raids followed. With each raid, CNB snipped off more of the drug distribution network in Singapore. In five separate operations mounted between August 2007 and March 2008, CNB nabbed the right-hand men of the syndicate and four Malaysian drug couriers. The Bureau also arrested 36 drug traffickers and end users. The total haul seized in Singapore were 5.9 kilogrammes of heroin, 256 grammes of Ice, 279 tablets of Ecstasy and 802 tablets of Erimin-5 as well as three Malaysian registered cars, three Singapore cars and S\$50,000 in cash.

In Malaysia, NCID pursued the leads supplied by CNB and managed to identify the leader of the syndicate. The agency also verified that he was operating a drug processing laboratory in Johor. In several raids on the syndicate, NCID busted a heroin drug processing laboratory and three drug stores (warehouses for storing drugs). They arrested 10 Malaysians and two Singaporeans and seized 30 kilogrammes of heroin #3, 70 kilogrammes of heroin #4, 55 slabs of heroin base (weighing 25 kilogrammes), 20 kilogrammes of Ice, 12 kilogrammes of ketamine, 110,000 tablets of Erimin-5 and 22,616 tablets of Ecstasy. They also found RM1.1 million and S\$39,000 in cash.

It was a very successful operation for both Malaysia and Singapore, with the dismantling of a major syndicate, the

years, the two agencies have joined hands to dismantle many syndicates and seized millions of dollars’ worth of drugs.

demolition of a heroin manufacturing plant and the seizure of two mammoth hauls of drugs.

“Apart from the results, Operation Sea Knight further strengthened the level of trust between NCID and CNB,” notes Qamarul. “It was very important that we provided that first lead to NCID. The success of the operation spurred continual engagement between the two agencies. Building on the triumph of Operation Sea Knight, we have been able to develop very strong rapport with our Malaysian counterparts.”

In the years following the success of Operation Sea Knight, Qamarul and his team worked assiduously to foster the relationship between the two agencies with frequent meetings, both formal and casual.

Explains Qamarul, who now holds the rank of Deputy Superintendent and who is currently Deputy Commanding Officer of Enforcement ‘L’ Division, “We have to build good relations with our Malaysian counterparts on all levels so that they trust us and are willing to share information. On our part, we have to continually provide good leads to demonstrate that we are reliable and that we are highly motivated.”

Today, 14 years after Operation Sea Knight, the two agencies remain close-knit. In fact they work together so closely, they are almost like one team, says Deputy Superintendent Qamarul. “Our relationship is such that help is always just a phone call away.”

“**I would like to stress that the fight against drugs must be fought with close cooperation between counterparts. No drug enforcement agency can do it alone.”**

Ng Ser Song, Director of CNB

CRIPPLING AH KONG: THE SENSATIONAL FIVE-AGENCY OPERATION THAT STRADDLED FIVE COUNTRIES

The takedown of the powerful Ah Kong syndicate points up the importance of international cooperation between drug agencies.

In the 1970s, the Ah Kong gang headed by four Singaporeans was one of the most powerful syndicates in the global heroin trade. From their headquarters in Amsterdam, the four masterminded a heroin trade that spanned the Golden Triangle and Europe. With the help of a team of “managers”, it was once said that Ah Kong could smuggle S\$100 million in pure-grade heroin in a single shipment to any destination.

Ah Kong drug lords ran their heroin operation like a corporation. At the helm were four Singaporean ‘executive directors’ – Kay Check Wee alias Golden Kay, Tan Tong Meng alias Ah Meng or Roland, Lim Kheng Lim alias Yow Teh and Wee Ah Tee alias Ah Goo, all fugitives from Singapore. Golden Kay and Ah Meng had fled the country in early 1970s because they were wanted in connection with gangland killings.

Amsterdam was then the world’s centre of heroin distribution, and was largely controlled by the 14-K triad made up of Hongkongers.

Ah Kong was originally in the protection racket in the Chinatown area in Amsterdam but subsequently found the drug business to be a more lucrative business. Penniless but ambitious the fugitives from Singapore plotted to get a bigger slice of the drug pie. The Ah Kong gang achieved this overnight by brutally massacring the ring leaders and members of the 14-K triad.

By 1976, Ah Kong had successfully driven Hong Kong, Taiwanese and Thai gangs out of Holland, and had become the major player in Amsterdam’s vast drug empire.

Ah Kong grew from a 10-man outfit to a multimillion dollar drug empire with over 100 Singaporean and Malaysian “employees” in major cities of many countries. The gang leaders wore Armani and Hugo Boss suits, with revolvers

hidden underneath. From the start, the syndicate avoided Singapore, not wanting to risk capital punishment. Nevertheless CNB could not allow Ah Kong to operate freely worldwide because it threatened the nation’s reputation.

In 1975, CNB’s Surveillance Division began piecing together intelligence on the Ah Kong syndicate.

In particular CNB conducted surveillance for a long time to establish the identity of members of the gang who flew in to Singapore to stay in the gang’s “safe house” in the plush, prestigious neighbourhood of Orchard Road. It was a stressful job transporting large amounts of heroin regularly from the Golden Triangle to Amsterdam via Thailand and Malaysia and members of Ah Kong would regularly head to the safe haven in Singapore for rest and recreation between assignments.

To take down its biggest and most dangerous foe yet, CNB began exchanging information with Interpol, the Paris-based international police organisation in 1977. CNB also shared the identities of the syndicate leaders as well as intelligence on the modus operandi of the syndicate with the law enforcement agencies of countries frequented by Ah Kong members, which included Malaysia, Thailand, Germany and Holland. To gather more information, CNB officers were despatched to Amsterdam on undercover missions.

By 1978 the stage was set for a massive strike. In what is perhaps the biggest international anti-crime operation Singapore ever cooperated in, simultaneous raids against Ah Kong strongholds were launched in five countries. In one fell swoop, more than 50 of the syndicate’s ring leaders, traffickers and couriers in Holland, Germany, Denmark, Malaysia and Singapore were arrested. The operation nabbed three of the syndicate’s “executive directors” – Golden Kay, Ah Tee and Ah Lim. Roland Tan Tong Meng alias Ah Meng escaped and went into hiding.

DRUG LORD'S HAVEN AT ORCHARD ROAD



In Singapore alone, CNB rounded up 40 key members.

All were caught in the gang's safe house. When the go-ahead for the operation was given, CNB officers swooped in and raided the house. The timing was perfect as ring leader Ah Tee and some of his henchmen were gathered in the house.

When arrested, Ah Tee tried to negotiate for a release. Recalled then Director Tee Tua Ba (1978-1981), "The gang leader Ah Tee asked to see me. He tried to persuade me that

they had done no wrong against us as they did not traffic in Singapore but in Europe. His argument was that CNB should not arrest them. Of course I was not taken in by what he said."

Close cooperation between five drug agencies spread across two continents had demolished a notorious international drug syndicate with a massive drug distribution network in Western Europe. The multi-agency operation dealt a death blow to Ah Kong. It also proved to the world that CNB was a force to be reckoned with.

THE LONGEST EVER TRAILING OF A TRAFFICKER



Another operation that showcased the close cooperation between CNB and the Royal Malaysian Police's Narcotics Department (now known as Narcotics Crime Investigation Department) involved the longest ever trailing of a suspect over land.

In November 1995, CNB received information that a syndicate in Malaysia was smuggling large amounts of cannabis into Singapore. Extensive investigations revealed that this syndicate was based in Johor Bahru and was headed by one Mat Arif. He operated along the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia and masterminded the smuggling of an average of 50 kilogrammes of cannabis to Singapore via the Causeway once or twice a month.

In January 1996 CNB started to work with the Narcotics Department to gather intelligence on the syndicate. And so both agencies were aware when Mat jumped into a car to make his regular cannabis delivery at 7pm on 10 February

1996. He was followed closely behind by two more cars containing members of his syndicate. What happened next was perhaps the longest trailing operation ever launched by both agencies.

It began with Narcotics Department officers tailing Mat and his minions as they travelled 600km from Kelantan to Singapore.

When the three cars approached the Causeway, the information was relayed to CNB officers who took over the covert trailing. Mat and his minions were allowed to enter to meet up with accomplices in Singapore. As they were about to leave Singapore again, CNB moved in and arrested all the gang members at 6am on February 11. The traffickers put up a tough fight and some CNB officers were injured.

With the arrest of the mastermind and 24 other people and the seizure of over 33 kg of cannabis, the major cannabis-trafficking pipeline into Singapore was effectively crippled.

CHAPTER

04

CNB

TODAY



A FORMIDABLE FORCE

“**The Bureau has undergone a phenomenal evolution from its formation in 1971 to the sophisticated agency that it is today. The high regard in which CNB is held by its counterparts speaks volumes about how far CNB has come.**”

S. Vijakumar, Deputy Director of CNB (2002-2008)



In 50 years, the Bureau has undergone a phenomenal evolution from a tiny outfit formed to tackle the emerging problem of abuse of MX and cannabis to an outstanding organisation that is able to take on major drug syndicates.

It has grown considerably in size. Since that first ragtag crew put together from officers seconded from the Police Force and the Customs and Excise Department, the agency has grown 35 times in size into a strapping outfit with more than 800 enforcement and civilian officers.

It has also grown in complexity. From the initial single Enforcement Division, the agency now encompasses four operational divisions (Intelligence, Enforcement, Operations and Investigation) and four staff divisions (Communications, Corporate Services, Staff Development and Policy, Planning and Research).

One of the foremost changes in CNB is its development of deep capabilities and expertise.

The current Bureau is a far more sophisticated creature than it was in previous decades. Today CNB boasts numerous units with deep specialised technical skills and unique capabilities such as the Forensic Response Team, Special Investigation Team, Financial Investigation Unit, Internal Investigations Unit and Psychology Unit.

Each team has its own distinctive mix of highly trained analysts, digitally-savvy specialists, experienced investigators, innovators and critical thinkers.

“We take pride in our tradecraft in the fields of enforcement, intelligence and investigation,” declares Director CNB Ng Ser Song.

In particular, the Director speaks with pride of the Bureau’s Special Task Force. “I dare say that our Special Task Force officers are among the best in the country. Our Special Task Force unit is one of the most frequently deployed tactical resources across the entire Home Team. This team conducts high-risk raids week in, week out during which these officers put themselves in great danger to apprehend capital drug traffickers. Over the years, the Special Task Force has accumulated a staggering amount of experience through the countless operations it mounted. This exposure has enabled the Special Task Force to continuously improve its tactical skills to meet the demands of the operating environment. The team’s success rate is a testament to the training the officers receive and the learning culture within CNB.”

Another unit that has accrued tremendous experience and know-how is the Major Investigations Team. The unit handles an extremely high caseload of capital cases every year. These capital cases demand high quality, intensive, prolonged investigation.

Points out Director Ng, “Each case requires the team’s investigators to wear many hats: the management of drug scenes, the recording of statements, the conducting of analysis of digital evidence and the collating of intelligence. Each phase of investigation and each piece of evidence presented must stand up to intense scrutiny because of

Singapore’s harsh punishment for drug trafficking cases. The team must make sure that it has covered all the bases. Despite the huge pressure placed on these investigators, they have never failed us. Under tremendous scrutiny, they have consistently delivered outstanding work that have resulted in scores of convictions over the years.”

AN EFFECTIVE FORCE

“**Because of your kind support and assistance through information provided to us, we have successfully dismantled the transnational drugs smuggling syndicate between Congo and Indonesia.**”

Heru Pambudi, Directorate General of Customs and Excise, Indonesia, in 2020

Today CNB has a global reputation as one of the toughest and most effective drug enforcement agencies in the world. The Bureau’s relentless enforcement against drug syndicates has kept a lid on the drug trade in the Republic. In 2020, for example, CNB conducted more than 500 operations across Singapore, including at the country’s land, air and sea checkpoints, that led to the dismantling of 24 drug syndicates and the seizing of S\$12.18 million worth of drugs.

Effective enforcement also led to one of the lowest rates of drug consumption in the world. Singapore is regularly cited as one of the few countries that have kept drug abuse under control, with the number of abusers capped at slightly over 3,000 every year.

Today Singapore is a society where people can walk freely on the streets and where the community comes together to support an addict on the long and difficult journey to full recovery.

“The drug situation in Singapore is largely under control,” says former Deputy Director of CNB Sebastian Tan. “To the average person, drug activities are not apparent. People feel safe in their neighbourhood.”

A key factor behind Singapore’s success in fighting the drug problem is its team of highly motivated and effective officers. “The dedication and commitment of CNB officers is without question,” says Deputy Superintendent Tai Kwong Yong, Senior Officer-in-Charge of Changi Team. “Every moment, every day, these two qualities are evident. Our officers are not just physically present; they are mentally and emotionally invested in the job.”

Deputy Superintendent Tai is himself the embodiment of efficiency and dedication; in 2015 he was conferred the Commendation Medal and in 1995, he was conferred the Efficiency Medal, for his outstanding efficiency and exceptional devotion to duty.

“Drug enforcement is backbreaking work,” attests former Deputy Director of CNB Marvin Sim. “You can work for weeks and months to build a case to dismantle a syndicate and you have to go to the ground every single day to make arrests to enforce against drug abusers. Not many people realise how challenging it is.”

While raids that make newspaper headlines make the job look glamorous, in reality, enforcing against drugs is grunt work that drug enforcement officers get done day in, day out. “That is the most difficult challenge: for a drug enforcement agency and its men and women to remain as wholeheartedly committed and dedicated to the cause as the day the Bureau was formed. At CNB, we have achieved that.”

“The CNB officer of today is capable of wearing multiple hats and is equipped with diverse skillsets. What makes CNB outstanding is that our officers are bonded by a sense of camaraderie that is rare and unique. With this distinctive camaraderie, each individual officer’s effectiveness is exponentially multiplied when CNB officers work together in closely knitted teams,” says Director CNB Ng Ser Song.

AN ORGANISATION

UNLIKE ANY OTHER

The Central Narcotics Bureau has always stood apart from the pack.

It is one of the few agencies in the world to take a comprehensive and integrated approach to the drug problem, and one of the few agencies to focus on tackling the issue of drugs from both the demand and supply end. The Bureau's

RAZOR-SHARP FOCUS

One of CNB's key hallmarks is its laser-like focus on its mission.

From the onset CNB was set up as an agency dedicated to one single goal: to rout Singapore's drug problem. Every step the Bureau has taken since, every strategy it has embraced along the way, has been steered by that goal. That razor-sharp focus has allowed the Bureau to deliver outstanding results through the decades despite its modest size.

"That single-minded focus is the reason for CNB's continued success," puts forward former Director CNB Eric Tan. "CNB stands out as a dedicated anti-drug agency in contrast to other countries where the police, customs and anti-drug agencies are all involved in enforcing drugs."

Like a samurai sword, CNB's sharp focus hands the Bureau a crucial edge in attacking the complex, multifarious drug problem.

"CNB embodies the clear vision that is needed to get to the heart of the anti-drug fight, which is that you have to deal systematically with the drug problem from start to end," stresses the former Director. "The Bureau is one of the few drug enforcement agencies in the world to deal with the drug problem holistically. It is always clear that all the innovation, training and enforcement it undertakes is for one purpose only – to allow it to fulfil its mission. That has kept CNB from being distracted. It also means that CNB does not have to deal with inter-agency rivalry and that it gets the resources that it needs."

Many countries talk about comprehensive, integrated drug enforcement but rarely do the pieces come together, points

unique mandate, together with the extraordinary band of men and women tasked to fulfil that mandate, has created a drug enforcement agency that is like no other in the world.

From its formation to the present time, CNB has always been driven by a razor-sharp focus and an empowering mentoring culture. More unexpectedly, it is also an agency with a heart.

out former Deputy Director of CNB Sebastian Tan. Unlike other drug enforcement agencies, CNB is wholly accountable for managing the drug situation in the country and therefore must take a comprehensive and integrated approach to enforcement. "Foreign drug enforcement agencies that have KPIs to meet and fragmented roles – for example, a purely enforcement role – may take a narrow view when it comes to the drug strategy they choose to adopt. An agency, for example, may choose to take five years to carry out a big strike without having to weigh the consideration that in that space of time, a lot of drugs will have gone out onto the streets. The Bureau, in contrast, is highly aware that for every decision it makes, there is a trade-off. It has to take into consideration the implications of allowing a syndicate to traffic drugs for five years in order to net a bigger catch."



THE SECRET BEHIND THE SUCCESS OF CNB MENTORSHIP

From the very start, mentorship has been a special facet of CNB.

Thrown into battle immediately on joining the Bureau, the pioneer batch of Narcotics Officers went through a baptism of fire. That experience taught the zealous band of young officers many invaluable things: how to trail suspects without being spotted, how to disarm drug-crazed addicts, how to speak the street lingo and more. But perhaps the most important lesson they learnt was how to be good mentors.

That intense hard battle beating back the heroin scourge taught the pioneer troop that they needed to get their wet-behind-the-ears juniors up to scratch in double quick time. And so the battle-tested veterans took it upon themselves to train the batches that came after them.

Batch after batch of recruits, decade after decade, this tradition of mentorship has continued to be a particular hallmark of CNB, and like a torch, mentorship continues to light the way for young officers, shaping them into outstanding leaders and officers.

“**From the senior investigators, you pick up skills on how to gather information and whom to gather information from. They will also give you a grounding on how to sieve out information gathered and how to test the information obtained.**”

Superintendent (1A) Terence Tan, Deputy Director of Investigation

Much of the know-how of how to handle drug cases comes from the rich experiences of the officers.

They include tips such as this:

"Good interview skills come with plenty of practice but ultimately you have to outsmart the suspect or accused you are interviewing. It is a mind game that is played constantly with the interviewee and the interviewing officer must be

able to read, analyse and capitalise on the motivations for the interviewee to talk." says Marvin Sim, former Deputy Director of CNB.

Mentoring sessions are particularly important for CNB because the drug landscape is a fast-evolving one and CNB officers have to continually learn and relearn how to respond to changing drug modus operandi and drug environments.

For example: "EntryPoint Officers of the Enforcement Division have to constantly learn new search methods and change their profiling and search techniques whenever drug couriers change theirs," comments Assistant Superintendent Iqbal bin Mohamed, Officer-in-Charge of Community Engagement Unit. "It is an understatement to say that we need to be a learning organisation."

Mentoring sessions may not always appear as such. For the outsiders, these sessions may appear to be engaging exchanges of war stories among colleagues. However junior officers listening to the rounds of tales will learn things not found in training manuals or in training courses and they will pick up shrewd stratagems acquired through veterans' hard-earned experiences, says Superintendent Cindy Goh, the Senior Assistant Director of Operations Division.

At the former branch office of CNB called the Major Investigation Branch Building, a small corner was a hot mentoring spot. Recalls Superintendent Goh, "That little corner at the end of the building had a few wooden sofas with cushions, a few tables and a tiny pantry with coffee and tea. This was the one place you would get to see your colleagues. You would go in and see someone who looked like he had not slept or showered. You'd ask him what case he is on and that would start the ball rolling. This was where all the stories were exchanged. The stories were very exciting and everyone had his war stories. It is a fantastic way to learn. What you get to hear are things found nowhere in training manuals or training courses. They all come from rich experience."

The Bureau's strong mentoring culture has enabled CNB to accrue outstanding organisational knowledge and be an exceptional learning organisation.

However, these mentors passed on more than just first-rate tradecrafts; they also passed on a passion for the cause, a sense of mission and a spirit of camaraderie that is out of the ordinary.

THE MENTORS WHO LEFT A LASTING IMPACT

Beyond the enormous value of passing on inimitable tradecrafts taught in no classroom, mentorship plays a crucial role in shaping the attitudes, convictions and passion of the men and women of CNB. The many mentors of CNB leave huge footprints in the hearts and minds of their juniors, and deeply shape their careers.

For Station Inspector Muhammad Fardlie, a team member of the Special Task Force, two mentors inspired and moulded him into the officer that he is today.

In 2003, then rookie Muhammad Fardlie was posted to Tuas Checkpoint where he encountered his first mentor, a grizzled battle-worn veteran who was aloof and not manifestly welcoming.

"I asked him if I could learn from him. He said, "We go to the canteen and we can talk." Over a cup of coffee, he began to share the tricks of surveillance and enforcement. It was enough to fill a training manual.

It turned out that he was a whiz at field craft. "He was amazing on the ground; he was always able to obtain information out of suspects and he was always one step ahead."

Time and again, his mentor demonstrated his skills. Once, when the two were the backup for an undercover buy operation, he told Fardlie not to stand so close to the prearranged transaction spot. "He told me: "We go there

instead." At that time I was wondering why we would pick a spot so far away from the transaction. But as it turned out, the trafficker thought it was too crowded where the buy was supposed to take place, so he actually walked over to where we were. He was always a few steps ahead in the game."

He trained Station Inspector Fardlie up through tough love.

"One day we were supposed to arrest one guy who was inside a parked van. That day I was riding pillion on his bike. He told me: "I will block the van with my motorbike and you go arrest the guy." I asked him: "What if he drives the van forward to smash your bike?" his response was: "That is why you have to move fast."

On another operation, his mentor told Fardlie and a female officer to arrest a suspect.

"I said to him: "Just me and the female officer?" He replied: "It should be ok, this guy is not so big-size."

The two officers moved in for the arrest. The pair struggled long and hard before they managed to subdue the suspect and make the arrest. And still his mentor was nowhere to be seen. "Afterwards I asked him why he didn't move in. His reply was: "I thought you two would be ok."

Today Station Inspector Fardlie is grateful for that rough and tough training. "It trained me to be able to react fast, to be able to handle stress well and to be competent in my line of work. He largely laid the foundation for my professional success."

The other mentor that greatly influenced Station Inspector Fardlie, however, is the polar opposite.

Inspector Lee Hon Cheng is a thinking man who is meticulous and thorough and who thinks things through before he acts. "He is constantly trying to improve things, even something as routine as filing. He is always anticipating problems that might arise and is always two steps ahead of future problems. From him, I absorbed the attitude of always seeking to improve processes."



THE ENFORCEMENT AGENCY WITH A HEART

“

Though it is our job to catch drug traffickers, we know that their families are innocent. That is why we make sure the children in the household are cared for and why we take care to treat the offender with respect while he is in his home and in the presence of his family members.”

Superintendent (1A) Cindy Goh, Senior Assistant Director of Operations Division

Contrary to the image of hardnose narcotics officers who ruthlessly hunt down traffickers and addicts and move on unperturbed, the officers of CNB are compassionate and sensitive individuals who care about the impact of an arrest on the lives of families.

From the beginning, the men and women of CNB appreciate that while enforcement is important, the saving of lives is more important. This ethos stems from CNB's involvement in the aftercare and supervision of former addicts; the Bureau is one of a very few drug agencies around the world that focus on guiding former addicts and helping them reintegrate into society.

MORE THAN JUST AN ENFORCER

It is particularly heartrending when children are involved.

"Seeing heartbroken wives, disappointed parents and crying kids can make even the toughest CNB officer feel emotional," confesses Station Inspector Muhammad Fardlie.

Inspector Ravichandran Ramu, for instance, found himself deeply affected by what he saw during a routine raid in 2000. The inspector and his partner had knocked on the door of a rented flat where the drug addict lived. The Team Leader of Enforcement 'A' Division relates, "We heard footsteps moving around inside and a female voice telling us that she can't open the door right now."

The CNB officers decided to "kick down the door" or force open a locked door using a sledgehammer. What the inspector and his partner saw next made them recoiled in shock: the smashed door had just narrowly missed slamming into a baby's head by mere centimetres.

"CNB is not just about arresting people," stresses Inspector Ravichandran Ramu. "My teammates and I have this conviction that while enforcement is important, just as important is the mission of helping addicts turn their life around."

Because of this, a successful raid is often a bitter-sweet moment for CNB officers. "Whenever we arrest a trafficker or addict there is a tinge of sadness behind the arrest because we know that there would be a broken family left behind: a heartbroken parent, wife or children," expresses Deputy Superintendent Xavier Lek, Senior Officer-in-Charge of International Operations Desk.

"I looked inside the flat and saw the mother hurriedly chasing the Dragon in the kitchen. She had already poured the heroin into a spoon. We almost crushed her baby's head but all she cared about was finishing the drug. She just stared at us as she smoked the heroin. She had been in such a hurry to smoke the heroin that she just dropped her baby and ran to the kitchen. That was sad and I could never forget that incident."



A CULTURE OF COMPASSION

“**We do all we can to find ways to help drug supervisees. Most addicts have mothers and fathers who are themselves also addicts so it is a tragic circle. I will do anything I can to help families escape this circle of chaos and addiction so that an addict’s family – especially his sons and daughters – will not enter the system.**”

Inspector Ravichandran Ramu, Team Leader of Enforcement ‘A’ Division

It is a very common occurrence for CNB officers to bring young children back to the Bureau together with their arrested parent because there was no caretaker for them at that time.

In February 2021, for instance, CNB officers found themselves babysitting a toddler when his caregiver was arrested for drug trafficking. The officers took turns to feed the little tot and change his diapers before handing him over

to the Child Protective Service. The boy’s fate is uncertain because his biological mother was later also arrested for drug consumption.

“When we make an arrest and there are children involved, our first priority is always the welfare of the children. We make sure they will be looked after,” says Superintendent Chee Tuck Seng, Head of General Investigation L Division.

“We try to distract them so they don’t notice their parents are in handcuffs. We bring them food and toys and play with them. We always take them to another room away from their parent to reduce the trauma,” describes Staff Sergeant Goh Rui Sin, a team member of the International Operations Desk.



A HEAVY EMOTIONAL TOLL

In the course of hunting down desperate and drug-crazed addicts, CNB officers have had traumatic encounters that troubled and saddened them.

Deputy Superintendent Xavier Lek, for example, continues to be haunted by an experience that happened a decade ago. Conducting a raid, the Deputy Superintendent had visited an apartment located on the top floor of a HDB flat. There were just two persons in the flat including the suspected drug addict.



Recounts Deputy Superintendent Xavier, “When we knocked on the door, through the locked gate, I saw the suspect turn around and say very casually to his friend in Hokkien, “I go first.” He began walking to the back of the flat. At this point I was confused because it was a one-room flat and there was no exit at the back of the flat. Then, without a word, he disappeared from a window at the back of the flat. I was shocked by that incident because it was totally unexpected and it was my first high-rise falling case. For years after the incident his words kept haunting me. I kept asking myself: “Could I have said something to dissuade him?”

That is why it takes more than sound tradecraft to be a good investigation officer, comments Wong Png Leong, an interpreter with the Investigation Division. “A good investigation officer has to be mentally and emotionally strong. Many times I have seen investigation officers trying to comfort the family members of the accused persons despite being treated harshly by them.”

AN UNEXPECTED BOND

Sometimes investigators form an unexpected bond with their adversaries.



In 2000 as the investigation officer of a trafficking case involving a large amount of heroin, Superintendent Cindy Goh spent months interviewing the convicted trafficker in the lockup. He was eventually executed one morning. In the afternoon, the Superintendent received a call from the trafficker’s sister.

Relates Superintendent Goh, “She told me her brother had instructed the family to give me a call to thank me after he has passed away. The message was that he knew that he had done wrong and that I did what I had to do. He wanted to thank me for treating him well throughout his incarceration. He told the family of one particular incident where he had an upset stomach and I had arranged for someone to get a cup of milo for him. That call moved me. He and his family and I were on opposing sides and it would have been natural for his family to hate me. That incident was for me an affirmation that what I am fighting for is a worthy cause. It is also a reminder to me that we officers should do our job in a professional manner. We should treat offenders with decency. We nab the bad guys but we don’t get personal and we don’t hate.”

LEAGUE OF EXTRAORDINARY MEN AND WOMEN

The men and women of CNB are truly in a league of their own, extraordinary in their commitment to the cause, their tenacity, their tradecrafts and their esprit de corps.

In the opinion of CNB Director Ng Ser Song, he leads the best of the best.

“CNB has achieved much over the years and the credit for this goes to the officers who are the beating heart of the organisation and the reason for its successes. Our officers are chiefly the ones working on suppressing drug supply and demand. Their work is dangerous and their hours long and unpredictable. The job often comes with many personal



sacrifices and can at times take a toll on their personal lives and health. Despite this, they continue to do the job willingly and with dedication, all in the name of fighting drugs.”

WHERE MISSION MEETS PASSION

“**I come to work every day with a sense of mission. I know that we are doing something good even if in the course of my work I have to break up a family, even if the suspect whom I put behind bars is the main breadwinner.**”

Deputy Superintendent Geoffrey Soh, Head of General Investigation HQ

“When I first started, I thought the work was very exciting. There was a drama on channel 8 that was just like it,” says Inspector Rodney Tan Kheng Chuan.

A few years into the job, however, the inspector changed his mind.

“I was arresting drug offenders who are breaking the hearts of their family members. I began to see that what I am doing is something that is necessary for a better society,” says the Team Leader of Intelligence Operations.

Ask any officer in CNB and he will tell you that his job is dangerous and tough with long, uncertain hours. Yet you would be hard-pressed to find a more passionate and dedicated group of men and women in any other organisation. This is because the officers of CNB believe wholeheartedly that their job is worthwhile and important.

Superintendent Terence Tan, the Deputy Director of Investigation, is one such officer.

In university Terence majored in social work where he encountered young people led astray by bad influences and who subsequently got into trouble. He decided there and then that he has to do something about things rather than wait for things to happen or for someone else to do something.

“THE MISSION BECAME A PERSONAL CAUSE.”

“**We do it because the mission became a personal cause. I see so many people with good futures who had their life ruined. The job became a calling, a personal mission.**”

Staff Sergeant Goh Rui Sin of International Operations Desk

Explains Superintendent Tan, “I joined CNB as an officer because I strongly believe that the root of the problem is that drugs are being trafficked by unscrupulous characters who have no qualms about ruining some impressionable youth’s future. The drug trafficker is whom I want to get at and remove. You won’t earn big money by becoming a drug enforcement officer. But the satisfaction from the job and the constant reminder that you are ridding society of yet another scum keeps you going on and on.”

His colleague, Chong Fui Kim, Senior Assistant Director of Intel Ops Research, echoes this view. “There is no question that drugs are bad. Knowing that our mission is to protect our society - that makes the job fulfilling in itself.”



The hallmark of CNB officers is their commitment for the job and their belief that they can make a difference. “For CNB officers there are no real working hours,” points out former Deputy Director of CNB Marvin Sim. “You usually get called back for operations which means you are on all the time. The traffickers dictate your working hours. They decide when they want to do a transaction and that is when you work. Working for CNB requires real commitment, passion for the job and a belief in the mission. It needs you to strongly believe that the job is important and that you can make a difference.”

For many CNB officers, the CNB mission became a personal cause after they witnessed many tragedies in the course of their work.

Twenty years ago, Deputy Superintendent Geoffrey Soh arrested an addict who pimped out his wife in order to support his habit. “It is the lowest of the low - a husband forcing his



wife to prostitute herself. It shows how tragic drug abuse is, how it degrades people and destroys families. Witnessing that made me even more committed to the mission.”

Superintendent Royce Chua, Senior Assistant Director of the Training Unit, recalls not being able to put handcuffs on an arrested drug addict because his arms were extremely swollen from the repeated injecting of drugs. “Immediately after the arrest we had to bring him straight to the hospital.”

The people of CNB are a different breed of people, says Deputy Superintendent Qamarul Zaman Bin Hussin, Deputy Commanding Officer of Enforcement ‘L’ Division. “We are a mission-driven type of people because we see so many tragic things on a daily basis. We see children taking drugs, parents smoking drugs right in front of their children and futures being destroyed. When you have worked at the Bureau for more than 30 years, you find yourself going all out in every operation because you want to make a difference. I know that by doing my job, I am doing something good for the nation as well as for my religion.”

SENTINELS AND WARRIORS

“**Our job is to take out key players and our role is very important. Hence each and every one of us is highly committed to the cause. Nobody really knows who we are but we all believe we are doing something very important.**”

Deputy Superintendent Xavier Lek, Senior Officer-in-Charge of International Operations Desk

For the officers, going to work feels like going on a battlefield. “To me it is a war against drugs,” declares Superintendent Royce Chua. “We are sentinels, we are warriors. We are a solid wall of defence against drugs.”

Echoes Station Inspector Muhammad Fardlie, “On weekends when I get called, I would love to say I am not free. But the thought that the team would be one man short is unbearable. One man makes a lot of difference. That is why whenever there is work, all officers will turn up. Some will even volunteer.”

Because of this sense of duty and responsibility, officers are willing to head out at any hour to do battle.

“Even at 3am, 4am, I was willing to pick up the call, get changed and go in for an operation. We are like Spiderman: you have the power, you have to put aside your life and go save some lives,” articulates Superintendent Chua who spent nine years doing investigation and enforcement.

This isn’t a job for everyone, stresses Superintendent William Tan, Senior Assistant Director with the Intelligence Division. “We work long hours and put our safety and health on the line because we believe that every child in Singapore has the right to live, play and grow up safely in a drug-free environment.”



“**I was never home earlier than my family members. One day my three-year-old standing near the front door saw me coming in at 9pm and she said: “Daddy today you are home so early.” That hit me hard. It made me feel bad for my daughter and I realised I had to do better but the nature of the job made it impossible. When my work required me, I would be there. One of my fears was that one day my daughter would ask: “Who is that strange man in the house?” I feel bad that I love my job more than my family. It should not be the case but it is true.”**

Deputy Superintendent Tai Kwong Yong, Senior Officer-in-Charge, Changi Team

A RELENTLESS UNSTOPPABLE FORCE



When CNB officers go on the hunt, the sight is both impressive and unnerving.

“We hunt like a pack of wolves,” describes Inspector Lynette Chng, Team Leader of International Operations Desk. “And we never back off.”

The tenacity of CNB officers is the stuff of legend. Once the Bureau has set its sights on a target, its officers will pursue the target to the ends of the earth.

Stresses Inspector Chng, “We are very coordinated and committed in our mission. Above all we are relentless when we are after a target. No matter how much effort it takes, we will wait patiently for the right moment to strike, so as to bring the offenders to justice.”

“The greatest hallmark of CNB is tenacity,” declares former Deputy Director of CNB Sebastian Tan. “CNB officers just don’t give up. I have seen this time and again.”

When on a case, CNB officers go all out in following up on leads. The processes of a drug operation are very long – from piecing together the intelligence to chasing down the suspect and finally putting him in the lockup – yet all officers involved will insist on staying the course till the trafficker is nailed.

“Most people would be very annoyed if they are about to go off work at 7pm and the boss suddenly loads them with a piece of work. It’s different at CNB,” describes Superintendent Cindy Goh, Senior Assistant Director of Operations Division. “It may be 9pm and an officer may have just finished interviewing a suspect but if during the interview the suspect revealed that he bought drugs from this guy who is at this location right now, my men would come up to me and say: “Madam can I go down and pick up this guy?””

“This is what makes CNB effective and what keeps traffickers on their toes,” states Sebastian. “They know that CNB is tenacious. We don’t care how long it takes or whether we are going to get to go home. We are going to get the job done.”

This tenacity has been part of the culture of CNB through the years. From the very start, the Bureau has been singularly mission-focused and mission-driven.

Reveals Deputy Superintendent Tai Kwong Yong who has been with CNB for 39 years, “I’ve tailed a drug trafficker on motorbike for 12 hours at a stretch. I have done stakeouts for five hours alone, when I couldn’t go to the toilet or eat for fear of losing the suspect. I’ve slept on my motorbike and on the floor. But so long as I get the culprit, I feel very fulfilled and satisfied.”

A TENACIOUS CHASE ACROSS THE ISLAND

Just how tenacious is CNB? The Bureau once hunted down a trafficker who had just received a huge consignment of Ice in a chase that went all around the island.

All the Bureau had to go on was a blurry photograph. “We had nothing concrete, just a blurry picture of a man on an e-scooter and an idea of the general direction he was heading towards,” describes Inspector Lynette Chng, Team Leader of International Operations Desk.

The division viewed all the CCTVs around Singapore and placed a squad of 50 officers on the ground to sniff out the trail of the trafficker. In the end, after hours of zigzagging across the island, the division finally ran the suspect to ground. There was a great sense of achievement at the successful arrest.

“We were able to catch him because of the cohesiveness of our team,” says a proud Inspector Chng. “To me, the operation showed resourcefulness, determination, teamwork and commitment to the cause – all the hallmarks of CNB. I was proud of my division. I’ve always known the Intelligence Division is capable but this operation opened my eyes to what it is truly capable of.”



THE EMBODIMENT OF COURAGE

“**It takes courage to be a CNB officer.**”

Inspector Khoo Feng Yen, Team Leader of Enforcement ‘F’ Division

Drug enforcement is a job that takes courage – and CNB officers have that in spades.



Each year, CNB officers are wounded in their line of duty. Officers have been slashed with parangs, cleavers and vicious sharp knives. There are also officers who have been ran over by vehicles or choked by traffickers desperate to escape.

Terence Tan, then the Officer-in-Charge of Supervision F, once clung to the open door of a moving car driven by a drug trafficker desperately trying to escape. “In such a situation, you don’t have time to think. You just react. Yes the job can be dangerous.” For that act of courage, he received the Minister’s Instant Award.

“In CNB we do not plan a war and fight it through a simulated war game. We just don’t have the time to engage in too many simulations and exercises. Every day we are faced with real life-and-death situations,” says Inspector Dickson Tan.

Despite this, CNB officers charge into battle without hesitation each time.

As former Director CNB Eric Tan puts it, “CNB is a chiong⁴ organisation. The culture is everything can, as long as you nab the bad guy and do things legally.”

⁴ A Hokkien word meaning “to charge or to attack”.

UTMOST COMMITMENT TO FOILING DRUG VILLAINS

In the pursuit of drug traffickers, CNB officers sometimes take risks that seem unconscionable.

There was that time Deputy Superintendent Geoffrey Soh, Head of General Investigation HQ, spider-walked across the ledges of two 14-floor units to arrest a suspected drug abuser.



About 20 years ago, Deputy Superintendent Soh and his team raided the hideout of a drug abuser at a 14-storey apartment close to the former Ellenborough Market. Afraid that the abuser would get rid of the evidence by flushing the drugs down the toilet if they attempt to break down the door to his unit, Deputy Superintendent Soh decided to gain access to the unit instead by walking across the ledge of the neighbouring apartment.

"It was just one small step and there was a metal bamboo pole holder that we could hold on to. But if I had slipped and fell, it would have fatal. We only realised the risk we took at the end of the operation."

That perilous climb ended in the arrest of the suspect. "That kind of stunt was not uncommon," says Deputy Superintendent Soh casually. "We are a gung-ho group of people."

Even then after being handcuffed, the abuser dashed to the window in an attempt to escape by jumping down. Fortunately Deputy Superintendent Soh and his team were able to subdue and calm him down. The episode shows how desperate a drug abuser can be to avoid being arrested.

AN ABILITY TO REMAIN COOL UNDER THE TENSEST SITUATION

They have seen it all and have been through all kinds of dangerous exploits and so CNB officers can remain cool and unflappable even in the tensest situations – such as being held hostage at knifepoint.

In 1995 Deputy Superintendent Tai Kwong Yong and his teammates went to a flat looking for a former drug trafficker who did not turn up for his urine test. The suspect's mother took a suspiciously long time to let the officers in, saying her son was not in the flat. The officers began to search the flat. Deputy Superintendent Tai checked out the toilet in the master bedroom but did not spot the trafficker hiding behind the toilet door. The next thing he knew, the trafficker was charging at him with a cleaver in his hand.

Relates Deputy Superintendent Tai, "I was retreating when I tripped over the toilet ledge. He overpowered me, grabbed me by the neck and placed the cleaver against my neck. I couldn't see how close the cleaver was to my neck so I was quite calm. I was more afraid for the safety of the elderly mother because the whole situation was very volatile."

There were three narcotics officers in the bedroom, a frightened elderly woman urgently beseeching her son to surrender and a hysterical drug trafficker who kept shouting at his mother to not interfere.

"The first thing we did was to persuade the mother to leave the room. Once the mother had left the bedroom, I told him that it is better that he surrender immediately or things would get worse for him. He asked me: "What can you do for me? Can you promise me that I won't be sent to the DRC?"

The trafficker was desperate not to be sent to the DRC where he would have to undergo cold turkey treatment.

"We told him that we can't promise him that but his urine may not test positive. It all depended on when he last took drugs and the quantity of drugs he took. Ten minutes later he surrendered. He assessed that he had a 50-50 chance of a negative test and that gave him hope. I felt a little fear but not too much as my focus was on ensuring the safety of the mother. And I was confident we could convince him to surrender."

DEDICATION TO THE TRADECRAFTS

“ In my time as Director, I have come to really admire all the officers of CNB – both the enforcement officers and our civilian staff. I am proud to have been given the opportunity to lead this group of committed officers. With about 5,000 raids and operations conducted by CNB each year, our officers are always on the move to tackle traffickers who are desperate and very dangerous criminals. CNB officers have every reason to be proud. I know I do.”

Ng Seng Liang, Director of CNB (2005-2011)

The Bureau started life as an undersized department facing an enormous task. It succeeded because of the commitment of officers who place their life on the line daily apprehending often desperate drug offenders attempting to flee the clutches of the law.

The dedication of the officers includes an ardour to master the crafts of their trade.

Sergeant Yogaraj of the Special Task Force embodies this dedication.

Ungainly and uncoordinated, Sergeant Yogaraj was not a natural when it comes to driving. In fact, when he joined CNB, he was possibly the worst driver the Bureau had ever known.

Station Inspector Muhammad Fardlie recalls, "He had a licence but he was so bad, I told him he had to improve his driving in order not to hinder the team."

To his surprise, Sergeant Yogaraj not only took the advice to heart, he decided he had to buy a car in order to put in the hours of practice needed to improve his driving. Two years later, with constant hard practice, Sergeant Yogaraj became one of the best drivers in the force.

"That shows the level of his dedication," comments Station Inspector Muhammad Fardlie.

Some time later, the Bureau sponsored Sergeant Yogaraj for motorcycling lesson. Again, this was something the maladroit officer was not good at. Despite his nervousness

on the motorcycle, Sergeant Yogaraj practiced hard and obtained his licence. Zealously, he again decided he had to up his riding skills. He went on to buy a motorcycle just so he could practice and improve his skills.

"That is the style of CNB officers," explains Station Inspector Muhammad Fardlie. "We are all very determined to be good at every aspect of our job. We will all practice until we get good at a skill. The attitude is: I want to be really good at what I do so I would not let my team members down. For us officers, it is about the team, the partner beside you, the man beside you, and the fact that you need to ensure that he is safe and you are safe so that when the day is over, we can all go back to our families. That is how we all feel."



“THE BIRTH OF MY BABY CAN WAIT. I AM ON OPERATION.”

For one dedicated officer, an operation took precedence over the birth of his baby.

Deputy Superintendent Xavier Lek remember a 24-hour operation that ended in the arrest of several key players in a heroin syndicate.

“While everyone was preparing to go back home, this colleague told me that he was going to the hospital. His wife had just given birth to a baby girl. For that operation, we were on standby from the early morning hours to about 6am the next morning. Throughout he did not say a word about his wife having gone into labour. He was very focused and professional throughout the operation.”

AN UNCOMMON CAMARADERIE

“**You are never alone. There is always someone to turn to. There is always someone who has your back. You can always count on your fellow officer to protect you.**”

Staff Sergeant Goh Rui Sin, Team Member of International Operations Desk

The massive workload and the dangers they faced together was a forge that cast an unbreakable bond between the pioneer 20 CNB officers. It moulded a group of officers with an uncommon sense of fellowship. This exceptional esprit de corps became a hallmark of the Bureau not just in the formative years of CNB but in the five decades that followed. This camaraderie is evident on a daily basis.

“We spend late nights together, we have late night suppers together and we face down countless dangers together,” says Superintendent Chee Tuck Seng, Head of General Investigation ‘L’ Division. “Because of this, there is a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood. My fondest memories are out on the field, when everyone is working towards a common goal – that is a great feeling. We will never let each other down.”

“The camaraderie is very, very strong,” states Deputy Superintendent Geoffrey Soh, Head of General Investigation HQ. “Whenever you need assistance, you just have to ask. Everyone would be willing to help. Even on Chinese New Year, I would lend a hand on a case.”

The bond is so close, communication between members is almost telepathic.

Declares Station Inspector Muhammad Fardlie, “I don’t even have to finish a sentence, my teammates will know what I mean. Sometimes we don’t even need to say a word. We just need to look at each other to know what we are planning to do next.”

Above all, the trust between the officers is absolute.

“Drug traffickers and drug addicts are a dangerous and violent bunch. They will harm you to get away. Sometimes you see them threatening their own family members or threatening to end their own life at the point of arrest. So you need to cover each other’s back and you have to trust 100% that your colleagues will look after you. We have total trust in each other because it is trust built up over years in the field,” states Superintendent Royce Chua.

The culture at CNB is very different from other organisations, observes Staff Sergeant Goh Rui. “We spend a lot more time at the Bureau than we do at home. Everyone goes through the same struggles and hardships so we understand what each other is going through. We talk about our personal life. We give each other good advice. You are never alone. There is always someone to turn to. There is always someone who has your back. You can always count on your fellow officers to protect you.”



EACH OTHER’S BEST FRIENDS AT WORK AND OFF WORK

“**When a colleague leaves the force, he takes a little part of me with him.**”

Superintendent Chee Tuck Seng, Head of General Investigation ‘L’ Division

Over the many years of working closely together, the shared triumphs and tribulations in the field turn teammates into best friends.

“I joined when I was 23 and single. Now I am 41 and married with one child. All my closest friends are in the Bureau and we all got old together. It is like my team and I grew up together in Bureau. The conversations I have with my teammates 18 years ago are completely different from our



conversations today. Today, instead of talking about hangout spots, we are comparing different strollers. But still we have a shared history and shared memories,” describes Station Inspector Muhammad Fardlie.

What is remarkable is that despite the long hours they spend together on operations, CNB officers are always looking to spend more time with their colleagues both at work and off work.

It is a common sight to see off-duty officers hanging around the office to catch up with their colleagues long after they were supposed to head home.

“Most of us don’t go straight back after work. We tend to hang around and start talking and forget that we are already off work for the day,” reveals Inspector Ravichandran Ramu. “Once I finished work at 5.30pm and I was yakking away with my colleagues till 10pm before I remembered I was already off work. This is because your colleagues are your best friends. I have no time to make friends so all my friends are in CNB. They are my best friends and my family support.”

“We love to eat together or drink together,” says Station Inspector Muhammad Fardlie. “We do hobbies like mountain biking and fishing together. All of us in the Special Task Force Team fish and mountain bike together weekly or fortnightly.”

They even go on holidays together with family members in tow. “It’s like CNB is our second home. It is like our colleagues are our extended family members,” points out Staff Sergeant Goh Rui Sin.

WHERE COLLEAGUES BECOME FAMILY

“**At CNB the bond is really special. Even though you are of higher rank, you don’t get called “Sir” or “Madam”. You get called “abang⁵” or “bro”. But the respect is still there.**”

Deputy Superintendent Qamarul Zaman Bin Hussin, Deputy Commanding Officer of Enforcement ‘L’ Division

“CNB is like a family. When one of the guys is affected, it is like we are all affected,” states Superintendent Chee.

Team members come together unreservedly to offer solace and support when a fellow officer suffer a loss or experience a sad event.

“When grandparents and parents of colleagues pass away, you will see all your colleagues at the wake and funeral. It is our way of showing support. It is common for CNB officers to help out at wakes for relatives of colleagues,” reveals Superintendent Royce Chua.

⁵ Abang is Malay for “elder brother”

The definitive confirmation that they are family: they use each other's stuff without asking.

In his younger days, when he used to splurge on higher-end toiletries, Station Inspector Muhammad Fardlie kept a set of his expensive toiletries at the CNB office. He relates, "A colleague would just help himself to my cologne and toiletries."

The same with shoes.

"Our colleagues would take one pair of shoes from the office shoe racks and go out in them and then the owner would say: "What happened to my shoes?" You don't see this in any other office. But we all look past all this. The attitude at CNB is: what I have, is my teammates'. We are that close. We are family."



THE ODDEST CASES. _____

THE STRANGEST PEOPLE.

In fifty years of dealing with drug addicts and drug traffickers, CNB officers have seen all sorts of situations, handled all types of people and heard all

kinds of stories. Some situations and characters, however, leave the officers flummoxed.

THE PERPETUAL FAINTER _____

The first time Inspector Ravichandran Ramu encountered the perpetual fainter, it was during a routine arrest for drug consumption.

Enforcement 'A' Division immediately called the ambulance because he thought the suspect had a heart attack.

Describes Inspector Ravichandran, "The ambulance staff attended to him, checked his vital signs and told me that he was faking it. At the hospital, the doctors also said he was faking it. But they couldn't discharge him."

As soon as Inspector Ravichandran moved in to arrest the suspect, he fainted dead away. The Team Leader of

The fainter was warded in hospital and eventually released on bail. Two weeks later, Inspector Ravichandran Ramu attempted to re-arrest the suspect. Once again, the suspect fainted dead away. This time, while warded at the hospital, the suspect went on the run.

The inspector successfully hunted him down. Once again, on arrest, the suspect pulled the same trick. This happened two more times. However eventually the suspect was caught with a lot of drugs. Because he was a suspect in a capital case, he was placed in Changi Hospital's prison ward. He eventually received the death sentence.

THROWING THE BABY OUT WITH THE DRUG _____

In the early 2000s, Deputy Superintendent Xavier Lek, the Senior Officer-in-Charge of International Ops Desk, was doing a routine check on a cluster of one-room rented HDB flats in Hougang Avenue frequented by street pushers.

"We made eye contact and I had just started saying "Stop I'm from CNB" when I saw that his arm was already in motion to throw the black plastic bag out of the stairwell opening. In his anxiousness to get rid of the plastic bag, he had swung the toddler out too."

Aware that pushers often take the stairs to avoid being cornered in the elevator, he and his team elected to take the stairs. Deputy Superintendent Xavier Lek, who was ahead of the team, spotted a man coming down the stairs carrying a one-year-old baby on his right arm and clutching a black plastic bag in the same hand. The two men met at the fifth-floor stairwell.

Without a second thought, Deputy Superintendent Lek lunged forward and bear-hugged the man and the baby in his arms. Just in time, the other officers arrived at the stairwell and assisted to handcuff the pusher. A search of the bag revealed that it held drugs and the drug pusher was duly arrested.

THE SANITARY PAD HAUL _____

On one occasion, a team of CNB officers got an unusual haul.

During a raid, the trafficker had hurriedly dumped drugs out of the window of his 11-storey flat. A CNB officer stationed below the flat found one bag of drugs but he was convinced there were more bags of drugs to be found.

about it. We tried all ways to get the bag down from the tree. It took a while and finally the bag dropped to the ground." Eagerly the officer opened the bag only to find a soiled sanitary pad.

Recalls Station Inspector Muhammad Fardlie, "He saw a tied plastic bag hanging from a tree and he got really excited

"Everyone laughed at him for a month after that incident. We kept coming up with ways to insert comments about sanitary napkins when he was in the room."

THE HAUNTING STAKEOUT _____

One stakeout left a haunting impression on Staff Sergeant Goh Rui Sin.

In 2013, her unit has received information that there would be an attempted drug deal in Lim Chu Kang Cemetery. Three teams in three cars slowly cruised the cemetery for two hours. While they did not catch sight of any drug dealing, they did have some surreal encounters.

"There was an eerie oppressive atmosphere in the cemetery. It was pitch dark. And there was a lot of strange things going on in that cemetery. We saw people in front of a tombstone praying for lottery numbers. One of them lifted his head to look at us. We also glimpsed some shadowy figures at tombstones that we could not make out. We couldn't tell if they were human or otherwise."

CHAPTER

05 READY

FOR THE FUTURE



THE ROAD AHEAD

“**We are a major transport hub. Two hundred million people go through our shores - airports, shores, land checkpoints. Because of the wealth factor, our people can pay. Therefore, it is an attractive destination, both as a transshipment and as a destination source. That is one major challenge.**”

K Shanmugam, Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Law, in 2017

Since its formation, CNB has reinvented itself time and again to better battle drug abuse and trafficking.

Over five decades, the Bureau’s anti-drug strategies have evolved considerably, shaped by developments in drug trends and the regional drug landscape.

For CNB this evolution is likely to continue for a long time - for a daunting road lies ahead for the Bureau.



KEEPING SINGAPORE DRUG-FREE AMIDST A CHALLENGING ENVIRONMENT



Today Singapore’s defence against drugs is under siege on several fronts.

On the international front, recent regional and global developments are undercutting Singapore’s efforts to keep the state drug-free. At home, a proportion of the young population of Singapore joins the horde of new addicts each year. Meanwhile the emergence of new psychoactive substances and the darknet is testing the Bureau’s capability, agility and adaptability.

A CHALLENGING DRUG SITUATION

“**We have a serious problem in our region. East and Southeast Asia is the largest market for meth. Production and trafficking hit an all-time high in 2018. It is the second-largest market for opium and heroin, and is a growing market for New Psychoactive Substances or ‘NPS’. The developments have a great potential impact on us.**”

K Shanmugam, Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Law, in 2019



The present regional and global drug situation looks daunting.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has described the illicit methamphetamine market in Southeast Asia and the wider Asia Pacific region as “staggering” and “unprecedented”. According to its World Drug Report 2019, Southeast Asia is the world’s fastest growing methamphetamine market. In 2020, UNODC puts the value of the methamphetamine market in Asia as more than US\$60 billion.

According to UNODC’s report titled Synthetic Drugs in East and Southeast Asia: Latest Developments and Challenges 2021, the methamphetamine market in East and Southeast Asia has continued to expand unabated in 2020. The total amount of methamphetamine seized in East and Southeast Asia has continued to increase, reaching another record level in 2020 with preliminary data showing at least 169 tons of

methamphetamine seized, a 19% increase over the 142 tons seized in 2019.

Demand for methamphetamine in Southeast Asia appears to have grown in parallel with increases in its availability. Despite record quantities seized in 2020, many countries in the region reported further decreases in prices of methamphetamine, which signals that the market continues to be driven by supply.

The report warns that the crystal methamphetamine supply surge has been accompanied by a rise in use connected to record low wholesale and street prices. Thailand has experienced a tenfold increase in the number of crystal methamphetamine users between 2016 and 2019, and price data reported by Cambodia and Malaysia showed decreases from 2019 to 2020. “The drop in the price of methamphetamine in Southeast Asia is a serious problem, clearly showing supply reduction strategies have not worked as intended,” says Inshik Sim, UNODC Regional Coordinator.

In the last decade, the regional illegal drug market in East and Southeast Asia has expanded continuously with seizures of methamphetamine in the region reaching record high levels and retail prices of the drug falling to its lowest points ever. Many countries across the globe have crossed the tipping point in their fight against drugs and are now resigned to treating the symptoms.

Sitting right centre in this region, Singapore has not escaped the impact of these developments. The amount of methamphetamine and cannabis seized in Singapore in recent years has increased. Methamphetamine arrests in Singapore doubled between 2008 and 2012 and methamphetamine is now the most commonly consumed drugs among new addicts.

What is especially concerning is that drug producers in the Golden Triangle seem to want to take the route through Southeast Asia to get its stock to the west.



EMERGENCE OF NEW PSYCHOACTIVE SUBSTANCES

In 2017 Minister for Home Affairs and Law K Shanmugam told Parliament, “We also face a challenge from new drugs - new psychoactive substances where people take drugs and mix them with contaminants to lower the cost. There are rogue chemists who modify pharmaceuticals. CNB, for example, in the past two years, has seized more than 3.5kg and 4,000 tablets of New Psychoactive Substances, which have been falsely marketed as both being legal and safe.”

New psychoactive substances (NPS) are compounds that are designed to mimic established illicit drugs. Their abuse has been linked to adverse physical and psychological reactions, including paranoia, seizures, hallucinations and death.

They pose a serious problem for Singapore.

Locally, NPS has become the third most commonly abused drug since 2018. In 2020, 285 NPS abusers were arrested in Singapore. This is a sharp increase from under 10 in 2017.

The malleability of NPS makes them a particularly hard class of drugs to enforce against. Drug syndicates can easily alter the chemical structures of existing NPS to avoid

detection. They are cheap and easy to produce and hard to detect. They are also fast expanding in number, type and availability across the globe. In 2009, 166 NPS were detected worldwide. By December 2020, there were over 1,000 NPS in the market.

These trends indicate that NPS is an increasing threat in Singapore and a threat that CNB has to quickly learn how to deal with.

To this end, the Misuse of Drugs Act will be amended to strengthen CNB’s enforcement levers against new psychoactive substances, particularly those that have not been listed as controlled drugs.



YOUNG DRUG ABUSERS

Young abusers in Singapore are another source of worry for CNB. In recent years, young abusers form the bulk of first-time abusers in Singapore. In 2020, for example, first-time drug abusers below the age of 30 years old arrested made up 62% of all first-time abusers nabbed.

Insidious influences are swaying the youths of Singapore. They are highly exposed to the internet and social media platforms that promulgate liberal drug views and policies such as harm reduction strategies, decriminalisation of drug abuse and the legalisation of cannabis. They are also bombarded with portrayal of drugs in the media and pop culture that normalises and glamourises drug abuse.

Today a growing number of young people in Singapore hold more liberal views towards drugs. Recent surveys underscore this trend.

In a 2018 survey conducted by the Ministry of Home Affairs, while 83.6% of Singaporeans above 30 believe that cannabis is harmful to health, only 67.5% of Singaporeans below 30 hold that same view. In the same survey, 89.2% of Singaporeans above 30 think that cannabis should remain illegal in Singapore, only 79.9% of Singaporeans think the same.

These trends make preventive drug education increasingly important - especially among the young people of Singapore - and a top priority for CNB.

FENDING OFF THE GLOBAL PUSH

Singapore faces another challenge in the form of the global push for countries to adopt alternative drug policies like decriminalisation and harm reduction, and a louder call to loosen controls over cannabis. Such movements, coupled with the proliferation of misinformation in the mass media that normalises drug use, may influence Singaporeans’ perceptions of drugs and erode public support for Singapore’s tough stance against drugs.

The Bureau’s response to these calls for alternative and liberal drug policies is to increase its engagement with regional and international partners and to be a constructive and balanced presence at international fora to generate support and safeguard Singapore’s vision for a drug-free world.



THE THREATENING DARKNET



Darknet markets increasingly pose a threat for CNB. A recent development, darknet markets consist of websites that are similar to online shopping platforms such as eBay or Amazon. The key difference is that sellers and buyers are able to transact online without disclosing personal details. Hence they are a relatively low-risk way for addicts to buy drugs.

Since darknets first took off in the 2010s, drugs have become the main products sold on darknets. Drugs are estimated to account for around two-thirds of darknet market activities. Almost any type of drug is accessible to buyers with a few clicks, including NPS.

Access to such markets can be achieved in a number of ways such as ‘invitation-only’ markets where users need to be referred by a current user.

While the sales volumes of drugs on darknet markets are currently modest, they are significant and have the potential to grow.*

* Source: European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction and Europol (2017), *Drugs and the darknet: Perspectives for enforcement, research and policy*, EMCDDA–Europol Joint publications, Publications, Office of the European Union, Luxembourg

ADAPTING TO _____

MEET TOMORROW'S CHALLENGES



To be ready for the future, CNB recognises that it must continue to improve its capabilities and achieve higher levels of excellence. To realise this goal, the Bureau is fostering a culture of continuous improvement and is constantly examining and reviewing its existing approaches and practices and reinventing itself to adapt to the changing operating landscape.

The men and women of CNB are up for the challenge. "CNB is resilient. We have always adapted to change, from the shifting drug landscapes to changes in drug trends, and we have successfully adjusted our strategies accordingly," says Superintendent Chee Tuck Seng, Head of General Investigation 'L' Division.

That said, the Bureau is also realistic about the drug problem. Points out Sebastian Tan, former Deputy Director of CNB (2017-2021), "There are no easy solutions to the tough challenges the Bureau is presently encountering such as NPS and online drug trafficking. The drug situation constantly evolves and the problem of drugs is a wicked one; it can't be totally eradicated ; we can only mitigate them."

"The road ahead," stresses Director CNB Ng Ser Song, "requires our absolute commitment, courage and conviction, be it in drug enforcement, preventive education or international engagement and advocacy. It is not going to be an easy journey, but I am confident that our officers will prevail and continue to keep Singapore safe from the harms of drugs for the next 50 years, and beyond."

