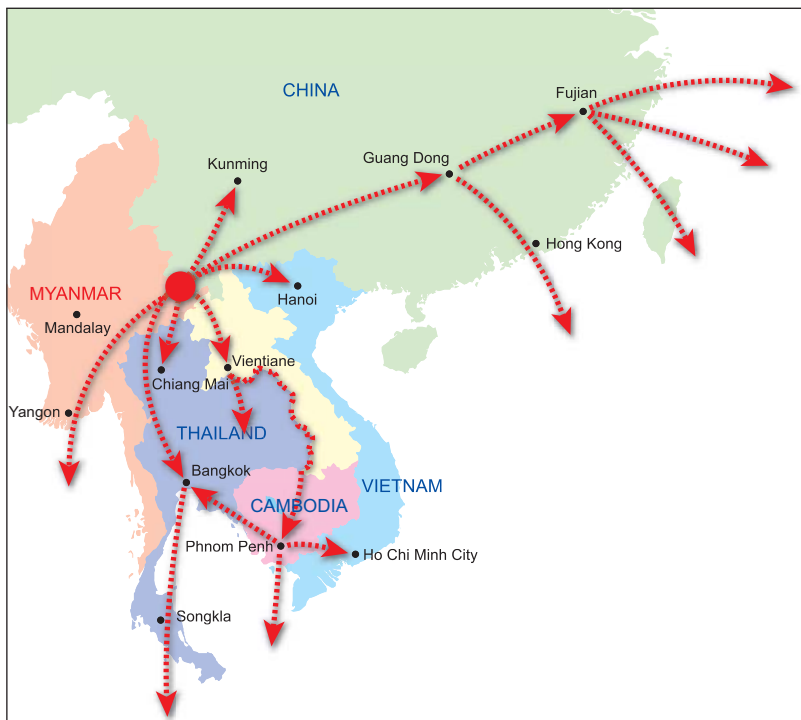




The Cambodia Weekly

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DRUG TRADE



An increased supply of amphetamine-type stimulants in Cambodia has led to a spike in users. A data collection network is helping authorities understand this and other national and regional trends.

See p. 6 and 7

SHIP'S IN

Sihanoukville Autonomous Port is seeking to cash in on lucrative cruise market in Asia
p. 3

GROWING FAST

After China, Cambodia will continue to grow faster than other East Asian economies says ADB report
p. 8



Photo: AFP

MARKET MANIAS

Due to early printing deadlines associated with elections we suspended our usual weekly coverage of global markets. We're using this opportunity to step back from the turbulence of the past few weeks and take a deeper look at what's really going on with the markets. Our regular market coverage returns next week. See p. 9-11

IN-DEPTH EDUCATION DRAFT LAW

See p. 4



Photo: Khem Sovannara

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A data collection network is helping authorities better understand the drug problem

BY ALANNA JORDE

Widespread methamphetamine use; an increasing trend towards injecting drugs; corruption that undermines efforts to clamp down on trafficking; an almost complete lack of knowledge among the general public about the dangers associated with drug use; and a dearth of health and social services for drug users—Graham Shaw paints a grim picture of the state of drug use in Cambodia.

“It’s a hell of a mess,” says Shaw, who has been working on drug-related issues in Cambodia for over a dozen years and is currently a World Health Organization (WHO) technical officer in harm reduction and HIV/AIDS. “It’s probably going to get worse before it gets better because of the lack of knowledge about drugs and what they do to you.”

Still, there has been at least one “success story” in the ongoing battle to curb drug use and trafficking of drugs in Cambodia, says Jeremy Douglas, regional project coordinator for the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

A drug data collection network the UNODC initiated with Cambodia’s National Authority for Combating Drugs (NACD) three years ago has vastly improved the country’s ability to collect, analyze and report critical information about the use and trafficking of drugs in the country.

DATA PAINTS A PICTURE

“It’s a very good success story. We’ve had very good cooperation from authorities. Four years ago there was very limited information sharing going on inside Cambodia. The network has opened up lines of communication that didn’t exist before,” says Douglas, who is based in Bangkok. “Clearly, Cambodia is making progress and some of the work done with NACD has been useful in places like Myanmar, Laos and Vietnam.”

The network is built around Provincial Drug Control Commissions (PDCCs), each with a PDCC Secretariat who is responsible for collecting and collating information from the provinces. Every month, basic data about drug use, and drug-related arrests and seizures is reported to the commissions, which have been established in 12 of Cambodia’s 24 provinces.

The data is then passed on to NACD’s Drug Information Centre in Phnom Penh, where it is recorded and analyzed. The NACD Secretariat usually issues reports on a semi-annual basis for review at NACD

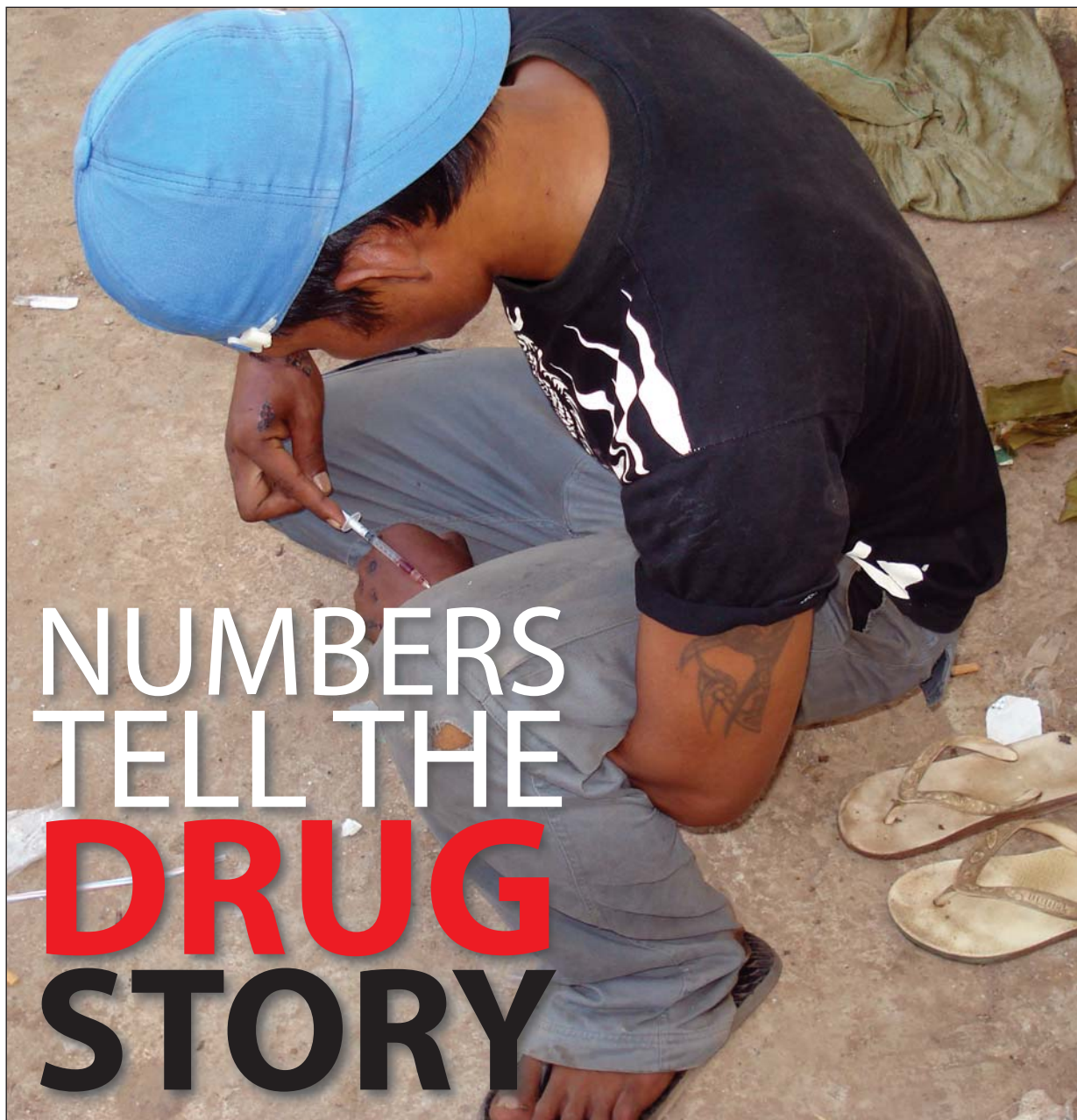
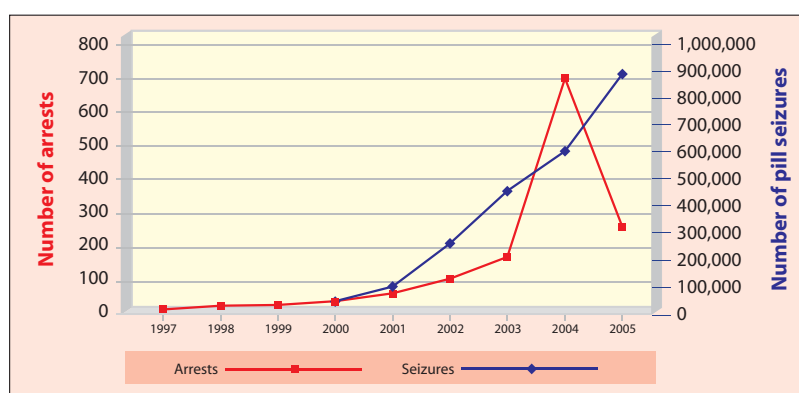


Photo: Korsang

Injection of illicit drugs is increasing in Cambodia. Most injection drug users share their syringes, increasing the risk of HIV transmission.

NUMBERS TELL THE DRUG STORY



Source: UNODC

ministerial meetings.

Recognizing that drug use requires a comprehensive response, a drug working group has also been set up in each of the 12 provinces. It is chaired by the respective governor and made up of health, social affairs, education, police, and military officials as well as district governors and commune chiefs.

Although the quality of the data that is being reported is still far from perfect and “more work needs to be done, (it is) better than it was and every year it gets better and better,” says Douglas.

Data from the network is helping the UNODC “understand the drug

situation in Cambodia better than ever before,” Douglas points out. “If we are to counter the problem of illegal drugs, the UN and NACD need data to formulate effective responses.”

“It’s difficult to respond to something if you don’t know the nature and extent of the problem,” agrees Shaw. “This data is essential to programming, planning and formulating policies.”

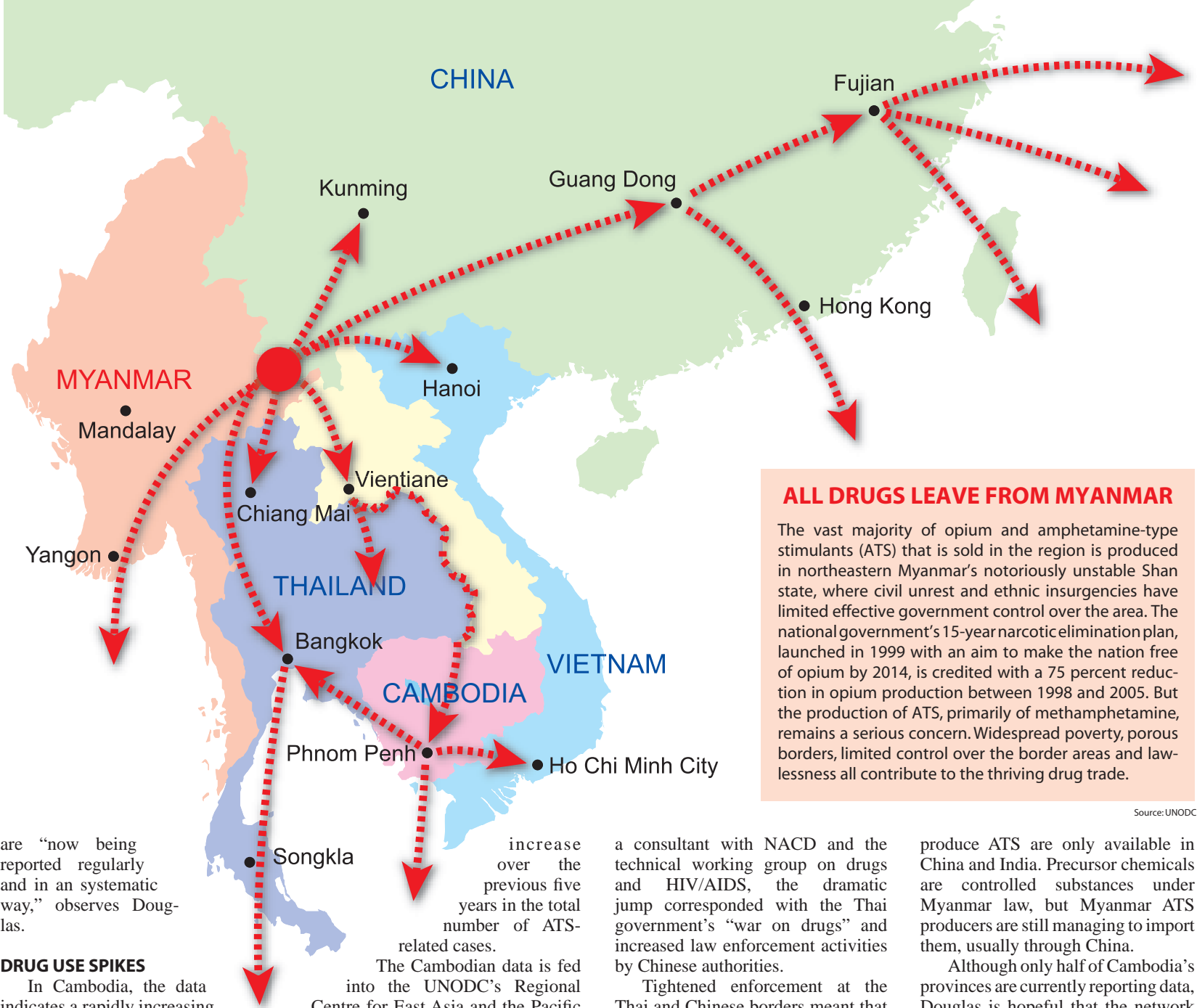
There has been an increase in drug-related arrests and seizures since the network was established, but an even more important measure of its success is that these figures

PORTRAIT OF A DRUG USER

- Most Cambodian drug users are male
- More than half are aged between 18 and 25 years; about 20 percent are between 10 and 17 years
- Based on expert extrapolation, there is thought to be any where from 10,000 to 75,000 drug users in the country with the consensus being around 25,000, of which 2,000 are probably intravenous users
- 63 percent of Cambodia’s drug users are reported to use ATS, 61 percent take methamphetamine pills (known as *yama*), 16 percent take opiates, and 7 percent take inhalants, usually glue
- There has been an increase in *yama* as well as a shift to high purity “ice” (also called crystal or crystal meth). “Ice” is much more potent and addictive than *yama*, which costs as little as \$1.50 per tablet on the street while a hit of heroin can be as low as \$1.25.

Source: UNODC data for 2005

MAJOR TRAFFICKING ROUTES FOR AMPHETAMINE-TYPE STIMULANTS



ALL DRUGS LEAVE FROM MYANMAR

The vast majority of opium and amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) that is sold in the region is produced in northeastern Myanmar's notoriously unstable Shan state, where civil unrest and ethnic insurgencies have limited effective government control over the area. The national government's 15-year narcotic elimination plan, launched in 1999 with an aim to make the nation free of opium by 2014, is credited with a 75 percent reduction in opium production between 1998 and 2005. But the production of ATS, primarily of methamphetamine, remains a serious concern. Widespread poverty, porous borders, limited control over the border areas and lawlessness all contribute to the thriving drug trade.

Source: UNODC

are "now being reported regularly and in a systematic way," observes Douglas.

DRUG USE SPIKES

In Cambodia, the data indicates a rapidly increasing availability of methamphetamine and a limited but relatively stable quantity of heroin. The overall trend in heroin seizures shows a gradual decline. But 2004 saw an increase of over 400 percent in the number of amphetamine-type stimulant (ATS) tablets seized in the country compared to 2003.

Mirroring the exponential increase in ATS seizures is the number of ATS-related arrests: 510 cases were handled in 2004, an increase of 32 percent over 2003. That represents a 14-fold

increase over the previous five years in the total number of ATS-related cases.

The Cambodian data is fed into the UNODC's Regional Centre for East Asia and the Pacific each quarter, along with drug data from 12 other countries in the region, which helps analysts like Douglas identify emerging regional trends in drug use and trafficking.

"Drug trends are transnational and very dynamic here in the region. Things are shifting fast with (methamphetamine)."

The spike in drug use, seizures and arrests in Cambodia underscores the transnational nature of illicit drug use and trafficking.

According to Eduardo Hidalgo,

a consultant with NACD and the technical working group on drugs and HIV/AIDS, the dramatic jump corresponded with the Thai government's "war on drugs" and increased law enforcement activities by Chinese authorities.

Tightened enforcement at the Thai and Chinese borders meant that drug traffickers had to find alternative trade routes, which resulted in drugs from Myanmar—the region's "super producer" of ATS, heroin and opium—being "squeezed down the Mekong River through Laos, increasing availability in Cambodia." The spike in drug use was a case of "supply preceding demand," said Hidalgo.

Cross-border complicity is an important aspect of illicit ATS production in Myanmar because the precursor chemicals required to

produce ATS are only available in China and India. Precursor chemicals are controlled substances under Myanmar law, but Myanmar ATS producers are still managing to import them, usually through China.

Although only half of Cambodia's provinces are currently reporting data, Douglas is hopeful that the network will be expanded to all 24 provinces by the end of 2007.

The UNODC also plans to work more closely with NACD, WHO and other agencies to share data to get a more complete picture of the link between drug use and the spread of HIV in Cambodia.

There are also plans to complete a first-ever survey of the number of drug users in Phnom Penh, injection drug users, their risk behaviors and HIV status based on voluntary blood tests, says Shaw.

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