



**Drug
Monitoring
Centre**

MONTHLY GLOBAL REPORT

**DRUG MONITORING CENTRE
(DMC)**

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DRUG MONITORING CENTRE (DMC)

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Introduction

Based in Lausanne, Switzerland DMC is a global centre aiming at researching and analysis of different aspects of drugs and narcotics including, Addiction; Education; Prevention; Harm Reduction; and Drug Policy. Weekly and Monthly Reports are essential parts of DMC's mission. Although small in size, as an ambitious and growing platform DMC is consistently enlarging its areas of focus and including more countries and regions under consideration and analysis. The current report of January 2021 addresses the drugs and narcotics circulation in Asia (Afghanistan, Iran, India, Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, and Malaysia); Europe (Italy, the Balkan Peninsula, Germany and Poland); and North America.

Asia

Afghanistan



Afghanistan as usual spent a busy month dealing with different aspects of drug circulation in the country. The Counter Narcotics Police of Afghanistan (hereafter CNPA) launched numerous operations nationally throughout the month of January 2021. Multiple operations took place in Kabul, Herat & Balkh provinces through which four suspects were arrested and 1245 tablet-K pills & some amount of opium & hashish were seized ([3rd January](#)). 11 arrested in Kabul, Parwan & Nangarhar province (4th January). In 6th of January an attack was conducted by General Command Police Special Unite (GCPSU) in Paktia province resulting in destroying of 5 heroin factories, seizure and torching of 45 tons of hashish (see picture); one AK-47 rifle, one pistol, one

radio handset & two hand grenades, two drug traffickers were killed.



45 tons of hashish torched. Photo: Afghan Ministry of Interior

The week of 7th to 20th of January was equally full of challenges for the CNPA and GCPSU and other units of Afghanistan security institutions: 58 suspects were arrested, and the seizures include 42 tons of hashish (Khogyani district of Nangarhar); 248kg of hashish & one AK-47 rifle (Nangarhar province); 21kg of illicit drugs (Kabul, Nimruz, Balkh, Herat & Khost), 100kg of opium, 191kg of bang seeds & one vehicle (Badakhshan, Ghazni, Logar, Nimruz & Helmand). The month ended with variant drugs seizure and arrests: 26 individuals were arrested across the country in connection to drug trafficking, while 4,225 tablet-K pills, 1kg of hashish, AFG 1,58000 & some amount of alcoholic drinks seized in Parwan, Balkh, Nangarhar & Takhar provinces.

Iran



Source: [Researchgate](#)

Iran as a transit country for drugs produced in Afghanistan is at the forefront of drug exportation from Afghanistan to the outside world, particularly Europe. The drug related events that took place

during the month of January include huge drug seizure and numerous arrests. 3rd of January was an important day in terms of drug seizure in Iran, during which two separate operations were launched by police forces and consequently huge amount of drugs have been seized in [Saravan and Mehrestan](#) counties: in one case [1,716 kilograms of opium](#) as well as some weapons and ammunition were captured, while in the second the police seized [377 kg of opium](#) together with some weapons. In relevant remarks last week, Brigadier General Taheri said that approximately [2.5 tons](#) of various kinds of illicit drugs have been seized in four separate operations in Sistan and Baluchistan province (see picture). On January 20 a significant amount of drugs including [150 kg of opium together with 101 kg of hashish](#) seized in the northern province of Gulestan. The drugs have been found in the residential house of the suspect.



Drug seizure in Saravan and Mehrestan counties, Iran. Photo: FarsNews

The Golden Triangle Region and beyond

The shared borderline region shared by Thailand – Lao – Myanmar countries is one of the densest regions in Asia in terms of production, circulation and consumption of variant drugs and narcotics. Reports as well as experts warn about the unprecedented rise of drug problems faced by the Golden Triangle and the wider region. During the month of January, the region witnessed significant incidents of drug seizure, arrests, and fatal episodes. The month started with the seizure of [100,000 yaba](#) tablets and the arrest of 4 persons in Myanmar (January 2nd). Followed by seizure of [4.6 million methamphetamine piles](#) near Thai-Lao border on January 4th, and, on the same day, [7.4 million Yaba pills](#) were seized in Chiang Mai of Thailand. (Formerly known as Yama, [Yaba](#) are tablets containing a mixture of methamphetamine and caffeine). In two separate incidents on 7th of January Myanmar police forces seized significant amounts of drugs namely [2 million meth](#)

[tablets](#) in South Shan and [1.7 million meth tablets, 58kg powder, 86.5kg crystal](#), in Tachilek Shan (see photo).



သိမ်းဆည်းရမိသည့် မူးယစ်ဆေးဝါးများ၊ ဆက်စပ်ပစ္စည်းများ၊ လက်နက်/ခဲယမ်းများနှင့်အတူတွေ့ရမည့် 1.7 million meth tablets, 58kg powder, 86.5kg crystal, in Tachilek Shan

In January a fatal variant of a drug cocktail known as the "powdered milk ketamine" (K-nom pong) emerged in Bangkok, on 10 January the drug took the lives of 7 individuals in Bangkok. On 13 January 30kg of crystal methamphetamine and 15kg of ketamine were seized by Thai police forces (see Photo by [Chanat Katanyu](#)). The drugs originated in the North and were seized in Kamphaeng Phet. According to [Bangkok Post](#), 'Gangs in Taiwan, China and Thailand have colluded to smuggle ketamine into Thailand for re-export to lucrative markets in Malaysia and Hong Kong, a source in the Office of the Narcotics Control Board (ONCB) has revealed.



30kg of crystal methamphetamine and 15kg of ketamine were seized by Thai police forces. Photo: [Chanat Katanyu](#)).

The revelation was made after "powdered milk ketamine", a new variant of the drug, was found to have killed seven people in Bangkok. The number of those who died due to the drug rose to [10 persons](#) later. In connection to this case, on January 26 [the Bangkok Post](#) reported that a big Taiwanese drug dealer and the mastermind behind the lethal "powdered milk ketamine" (K-nom pong) which took the lives of 10 persons was arrested in Bangkok's Sukhumvit area. Throughout the month of January drugs particularly meth tablets floated in the region. On 14th January, [400kg crystal meth and 2 million meth tablets were seized](#) in Thailand on a route used extensively in 2020 from Laos. The [crystal packaging](#) contained signatures of organized crime and hinted to their potential involvement.

Malaysia: On January 17th the biggest narcotics seizure in Malaysia's history took place (see photo). The [Johor Baru](#) police launched coordinated raids surrounding the city for two days (14 and 15 January) leading to the seizure of [3.2 tones of Ecstasy powder worth RM192 million, 26.1kg of liquid Ecstasy worth RM939,600, and 117kg of Eramin 5 powder worth RM8.7 million](#). Moreover, according to Johor police chief Commissioner Ayob Khan Mydin Pitchay, 'besides the chemical products, police also seized various machines and tools used by the syndicate, as well as four vehicles worth RM960,000. He added that the machines and tools were imported from China, including the raw materials for producing the drugs, which could last for about three years. Two (Johor Baru) locals were arrested in connection to the case. [Commissioner Ayob Khan](#) added that "The raids on Thursday and Friday were part of a follow-up investigation following a drug bust between Jan 9 and 10, which led to the arrest of 15 suspects. "Four of the 15 suspects informed the police about the locations where they stored the drugs, which led us to one factory and two houses, which the syndicate had been renting since 2018 to carry out its drug activities, ".

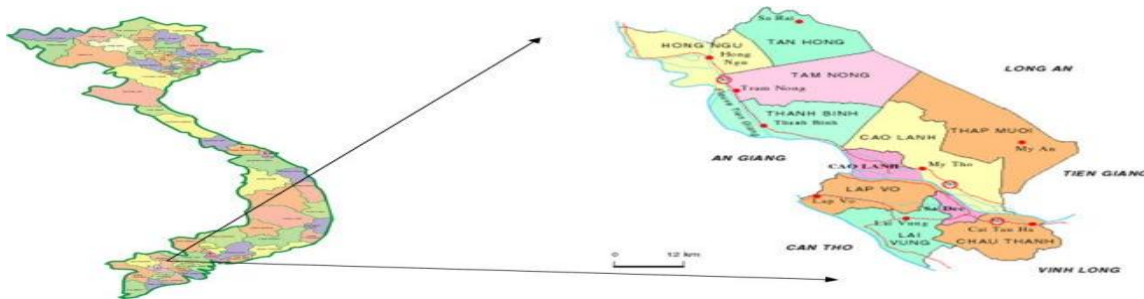


Drug seizure by Johor Baru police. PHOTO: HRH CROWN PRINCE OF JOHOR/FACEBOOK

During another operation, the Malaysian police seized ‘RM2.08mil worth of methamphetamine after crippling an international drug trafficking syndicate that had turned the historic city into an illicit drug transit point. State police chief Deputy Comm Datuk Abdul Majid Mohd Ali said his men made a breakthrough to disband the syndicate with the arrest of six key members - including two Indonesians’ reported [TheStar](#). Four cars, two motorcycles and a speedboat were among the items confiscated.

On 16th January, [5 arrested and over 1.5 million Yaba](#) meth tablets seized by Myanmar police. Three days later [Myanmar police stopped 500,000](#) meth tablets meant for Thailand. While the Thai police on their side seized some [30 kg crystal meth](#).

Vietnam: The Delta Province of Mekong (see the map) in Vietnam is another route for illegal narcotics distribution in the Mekong region.



Location and Map of Dong Thap Province. Photo: [Researchgate](#)

[VnExpress](#) reported (Jan. 20), authorities in Dong Thap province have seized around 90 kilograms of trafficked narcotics, the largest amount ever discovered in the Mekong Delta province, leading to three arrests. The drugs which consisted mainly of heroin and other kinds of narcotics came from Cambodia. The case is under investigation and those involved in the traffic face death penalty.

In spite of the fact that Vietnam has one the strictest laws on drugs, the movement of drugs sounds unstoppable.



Drugs from Cambodia are busted by authorities of Dong Thap Province, January 17, 2021. Photo by Tien Phong Newspaper.

On January 25, Thai police arrested four members of a drug gang with more than [600,000 meth pills](#). The operation was continuation of a previously launched action plan. According to police officials, ‘the action began with the arrest of a suspect, Amarin Thanapikornkul, alias Jay, with [2,000 meth pills](#) on Dec 29 (2020). On Dec 30, two more suspects, Narasak Saengprom and Rakkiat Suksabai, were arrested and [42,000 meth pills](#) seized. With information from Mr Krisda, police searched house No 60/207 at the Eua-arthon housing village in tambon Sila of Muang district and found [570,036 meth pills](#) inside three cardboard boxes’. [BongkokPost](#).

The Month ended with a significant seizure of drugs in the Golden Triangle which included [480 kg crystal meth](#) coming from Myanmar towards Western border of Thailand. The narcotics circulation circle is likely to expand from Mekong to the wider region of south of Asia, Afghanistan and penetrating into central Asia: The seizure of [269000 meth tablets and arms](#) seized in Mizoram of [India](#) from [Myanmar](#) has been reported on 25th of January which showcases the expansion of drugs flow in the wider region.

Europe

Italy & The Balkan

Italy (*January 01 to 10, 2021*): In the last ten days the Italian authorities have conducted several anti-drug operations. In Viterbo the police seized four kilos of pure cocaine and 24,680 euros in cash, arresting nine people. In Rome the police seized two kilos of marijuana and 8490 euros in cash and arrested a man, while in another operation in Fiumicino the police seized 4.35 kg of marijuana and arrested a person hiding it at his residence. Two traffic stops went sideways in Fermo: the police seized 2 kg of marijuana and 2.2 kg of cocaine while arresting two men who were hiding the drug in their cars. Drug seizure and arrests did also take place in the region of Friuli, Tuscany, Sicily and Lombardy: 5 kilos of marijuana seized in the province of Udine; 750 gr of cocaine and 80,000 euros in cash seized in Prato; 6.729 kg of cocaine seized in Catania; 606 gr of cocaine and 15,000 euros in cash seized in Milan. Finally, the police arrested 32 people in a maxi blitz in Cagliari. The criminal group was using the money collected from the trafficking of cocaine, hashish and marijuana to finance millionaire robberies of security vans and vaults.

Balkans (*January 01 to 10, 2021*): On New Year’s Eve the police seized 252 kg of marijuana in Thessaloniki (Greece). A few days later in Barcelona (Spain), the police seized 301 kg of marijuana while arresting 6 Albanian citizens that had been cultivating the drug in an industrial area of the city. During a large anti-drug operation that took place in Skrapar (south of Albania), the police seized 176 kg of cannabis and arrested 23 people. Among those arrested, there were police and public officials as well. Finally, in the Albania - Greece Green Border, the police seized 55 kg of marijuana while arresting two Albanian citizens.

Italy (*January 10 to 16, 2021*): In the period from January 10 to 17, different Italian regions experienced significant events related to drugs. In Milan, the financial police

seized [1.5 tons of marijuana](#) while arresting 11 people. Meanwhile in [Rome](#), the police seized 105 kg of hashish, 5 kg of marijuana, 529 gr of cocaine, arresting 3 people. The central region of Marche experienced important events as well: in the province of Pesaro the carabinieri seized [1.5 kg of cocaine](#) and arrested 10 people, while in the province of [Jesi](#) the military found and seized 1,255 marijuana plants, about 8 kg of marijuana already dried, about 800 grams of cocaine and over one hundred thousand euros in banknotes. Drug seizure and arrests did also take place in the region of Sicily, Campania and Liguria: [40 kg of marijuana](#) seized in the province of Marsala; 8.3 kg of cocaine and 3.1 kg of opium seized in [Naples](#); 8 kg of hashish in [Genova](#).

Balkans (January 10 to 16, 2021): In the southeastern province of Korce the police arrested 2 people with [21.5 kg of cannabis](#), while in Tirana, the capital of Albania, a man was arrested with [14 kg of cannabis](#). Further, in the Albanian - Greece border the police arrested a person with [35.880 kg of marijuana](#). Lastly, during a large anti-drug operation conducted in London, the police seized [4 kg of cocaine and 340,000 £](#) in cash, while arresting four Albanian citizens(see picture).



London police seized [4 kg of cocaine and 340,000 £](#) in cash, while arresting four Albanian citizens

Italy (January 17 to 24, 2021): During a big operation in the southwestern province of Salerno, the carabinieri of Reggio Calabria [arrested 49 people](#) held responsible for mafia type associations, drug trafficking and illegal possession of weapons. In the northeastern province of Cuneo the police found [22 and a half kilos of cocaine](#) in the car of an Albanian citizen. Other two Albanian citizens were arrested with [14 kilos of cocaine](#) by the police of Rimini. The cocaine landed in Belgium from Colombia and then it was transported to Italy via Germany and France. In the central province of Fermo, the financial police found [two greenhouses with 41 marijuana plants](#) at a house used as a drug lab. Meanwhile, in the southeastern province of Teramo the carabinieri [arrested two Albanians and seized 15 kg of hashish and 11 kg of marijuana](#). It is believed that the drug was probably intended to satisfy the local market and the nearby [Picena](#) area. Moreover, the mobile squad in a joint

operation with the border police seized [613 kilos of hashish](#) landed to the port of Livorno from Spain, while arresting two Italian citizens. See picture



Border police seized [613 kilos of hashish](#) landed to the port of Livorno from Spain

Further to this, in the region of Sicily the carabinieri found [33 kg of hashish](#) packed with cellophane and adhesive tape abandoned in the shoreline of Trapani. One day later, another package containing [30 kg of hashish](#) was found abandoned on the coast of the municipality of Torrenova in the northeast of Sicily. Drug seizures and arrests did also take place in the regions of Friuli, Liguria, Emilia Romagna, Lazio, Sardegna and Tuscany: [10 kg of hashish and about 100 gr of cocaine](#) seized in the province of Pordenone; over [1 kg of cocaine seized and 6 arrests](#) in the province of Savona; [3 kg of cocaine, 1.45 kg of marijuana and 15,660 euro](#) in cash in the province of Modena; 3 arrests and [1.12 kg of cocaine and 1.813 kg of hashish](#) seized in Rome; [3.6 kg of marijuana and 52,000 euros in cash](#) in the province of Cagliari; 3 arrests and [1.35 kg of cocaine](#) seized in Florence.

Balkans (*January 17 to 24, 2021*): Spanish police seized more than [two tons of cocaine and arrested 12 people](#) involved in a large scale drugs smuggling network with connections to Paraguay and Brazil. The drug landed at the port of Algeciras in southern Spain from South America hidden in charcoal shipments. Meanwhile in Tirana, the capital of Albania, the police [arrested a man with 63 gr of cocaine](#) in his car.



Spanish police have seized more than [two tons of cocaine and arrested 12 people](#)

Italy (January 24 to 31, 2021): In the province of Enna, located at the center of the region of Sicily, the police arrested [23 drug dealers](#) who were attacking and sometimes even kidnapping the non-paying clients. Still in the region of Sicily, and more precisely in the province of Agrigento, the police arrested in flagrante a farmer who was cultivating about [2 thousand marijuana plants](#) weighing almost one hundred kilos. Meanwhile in the province of Rimini, on the southeastern end of the Emilia-Romagna region, the police arrested a whitewasher with [75 kg of hashish, 20 kg of marijuana, 400 gr cocaine and 60,000 euros in cash](#). Moreover, in the northwestern province of Genoa the police arrested at the airport a [drug courier who had ingested 111 cocaine eggs](#) weighing about one and half kilos, while in a second operation two people have been arrested and [1.2 kg of cocaine seized](#). Drug seizures and arrests also took place in the regions of Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna and Campania: [7 arrests and 500 gr of cocaine, 1.548 kg marijuana and 1910 euro in cash seized](#) in the province of Como; [3.024 kg of hashish and 3.580 kg of marijuana](#) in the province of Parma; [6.6 kg of marijuana](#) in Naples.

Balkans (January 24 to 31, 2021): In Troncal del Caribe (Colombia) the National Police [arrested two people and seized 300 kilos of cocaine](#), while previous to that a man was arrested with [59.7 kilos of cocaine](#) in Maicao. Meanwhile in Thessaloniki, the police seized [324 kilos of cocaine](#) and arrested two Albanians and a Croatian as they met to decide to discuss the process of selling the drugs.

German

The biggest case in January 2021 in Central Europe was intercepted by customs officers at the airport in Frankfurt am Main [6.5 tons of a chemical](#) called "MAPA" (methyl alpha-phenyl acetoacetate), the chemical can potentially produce some 26 tons of drugs in the market. MAPA is a pre-precursor used in the illicit manufacture of amphetamine and methamphetamine. From this precursor it is possible to obtain BMK from which "speed" is formed by a simple reaction (see photo).



Photo: [Republika](#)

The illegal substance was shipped from factories in China and Hong Kong. The substances were hidden in 254 packages, and their cost was estimated around 29 million Euro. First packages with MAPA were sent to a German logistics company in the Rhine-Main area. Investigators from the Zollfahndungsamts Frankfurt am Main (Frankfurt Central Investigation Bureau) ordered an investigation on the company, and announced their findings: those precursors were meant to drug dealers in Belgium and the Netherlands. According to the International Drug Control Council (INCB), the intercepted substance began to appear on the black market in 2017. Since then, police forces in several European countries have been regularly intercepting the substance, which, according to the Council, "has no legal use", except for the production of synthetic psychoactive substances.

Poland

The policemen from Gdańsk detained two men prosecuted by the European E-Justice. One of them was also prosecuted by the Polish justice to serve over 5 years of imprisonment, for drug trafficking. The second 51-year-old man during the police intervention, pretended to be an officer of the international police organization – Interpol, while the investigations revealed his identity: a Dutch citizen wanted by the Dutch police (facing for 8 years of imprisonment) for involvement in drug smuggling.

North America

The month of January resulted in many seizures illicit substances all over North America and here are some of the key data points from this month. The largest seizure of cocaine was [US\\$8.5 million](#), which was seized off the coast of San Juan, Puerto Rico (see the photo).



Photo: [The Cleaner](#)

A large seizure of [1,930 pounds of methamphetamine](#) took place in Denton County, Texas. Next, a drug bust in Laredo, TX, USA resulted in [28.92 lb of Heroin](#) being seized. Lastly, 70 pounds of Marijuana was reported to have been seized in Adams County, CO, USA (see the photo).



Over \$650,000 worth of heroin seized at border (Courtesy: US Customs and Border Patrol).
[News4SA](#)

To pin-point where drug seizures and drug related arrests were the most prevalent in North America: in Canada the province of Ontario seen 10 published recordings and in USA, New Jersey and Texas both seen 3. However as seen in the paragraph above, Texas has seen very large quantities of drugs seized compared with the smaller quantities seized in the north. Zero overdose related deaths were reported in the media.