Strategic Position of Riau Islands Province: A Study of Modus Operandi of Drugs Smuggling in Indonesia

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Abstract:

The rampant case of drug smuggling in Riau Islands Province and the lack of study on its modus operandi created a gap in the current research on the topic. The objective of this study is to discover the modus operandi used, the kinds of drugs being smuggled, and the reason Riau Islands was chosen as a strategic location for the smuggling route. The data was gathered through a structured interview with the local agencies directly involved in the supervision and security against drug smuggling in Riau Islands Province. The research methodology uses interactive analysis and thematic analysis methods. The results show that the modus operandi used can be categorized as the usage of camouflage techniques such as deceptive packaging and hidden compartment; Smuggling on a person using body packing and body strapping; and conducting transactions on the high seas using large ship, speed boat, and luxury yacht while employing a ship-to-ship system, and a fishing boat. The three main drugs smuggled is Methamphetamine, Ecstasy, and Marijuana with several other in a smaller quantity. Lastly, Riau Islands Province is bordered by several countries, a major transportation route such as the Malacca Strait and the island of Sumatera. Due to the plethora of drugs smuggled and the modus operandi displayed, it is necessary for law enforcement to increase the supervision and ways to identify and counter the smuggler’s action and to secure the territory.

Keywords: Riau Island Province, Strategic Location, Modus Operandi, Drug Smuggling.

Introduction

Drug smuggling and its multiple kinds of modus operandi had been a continuous problem faced in different countries including Indonesia. According to Muhamad (2019), Indonesia is a lucrative place with a large drug market which is an invitation for international syndicates to smuggle their drugs into the country. This is because supply and demand keep drugs available and more widely available. Arifandy (2021) reported that the Indonesian National Police had succeeded in uncovering 19,229 cases involving a total of 24,878 people during January-June 2021. Riau Islands Province is one of the areas riddled with drug smuggling cases coming from abroad and is one of the strategic locations chosen as a transitional route for drug smuggling. The arrest of a foreign drug-smuggling ship in the waters of the Riau Archipelago, which borders the territory of a neighboring country, shows that international syndicates often use border waters to smuggle drugs. In addition to having a long coastline, the Riau Archipelago waters also have dozens of rat harbors scattered along the coast. This has made the Riau Archipelago waters the preferred route for international syndicates to smuggle drugs into Indonesia. Taken from the government website Kepriprov (2023), The Riau Islands
(abbreviated as Kepri) is a province in Indonesia. The Riau Islands province shares borders with Vietnam and Cambodia to the north; Malaysia and West Kalimantan province to the east; Bangka Belitung Islands province and Jambi province to the south; and Singapore, Malaysia, and Riau province to the west.

Previous studies on the matter reveal several information regarding the topic and this study are aimed to fill the gap of information by discovering the modus operandi used, the kinds of drugs being smuggled, and the reason Riau Islands was chosen as a strategic location for the smuggling route. This research focuses on drug smuggling incidents in the Riau Islands Province for the last 3 years (2020 – 2022). With limited time and funds, data will be collected from the Police, BNN, Immigration and Customs as optimally as possible.

Statement of the Problem

1. What is the modus operandi of drug smuggling carried out, especially at the border between Malaysia and Indonesia (Riau Islands Province)?
2. What kind of drugs are being smuggled through Riau Island Province?
3. Why was the Riau Islands Province chosen by the drug mafia as a smuggling route?

Materials and Methods

The study used qualitative descriptive research approach coupled with interactive analysis and thematic analysis method to analyzed the data. the researcher utilized Purposive sampling as a method of choice due to its suitability. The inclusion criteria in which the researcher selects his respondent are a) the agency needed to be directly involved in the supervision and security against drug smuggling in Riau Island Province; and b) the agency’s office must be located in either Tanjung Pinang city or Batam city. The data for this study were gathered through a structured interview with the local agencies chosen due to their direct involvement in the supervision and security against drug smuggling in Riau island province. Namely one (1) official from National Narcotics Agency and two (2) official from Barelang Resort Police station. In addition, the Customs and excise agency also gave plenty of relevant data through their answer to the researcher’s questions without an interview.

The researcher conducted a face-to-face structured interviews using a set of interview guide and recorded the interviews with only pen and paper due to the limitation of the agencies. Prior to the scheduled interview, the researcher presented the interview guide to the agencies. This resulted in one agency, which did not allow the researcher to conduct an interview, still able to provide the necessary data needed by the researcher. The researcher also collected secondary data from other sources such as the internet, past research, and journal that have relevance to this research.

Results

1. Modus operandi employed in the drug smuggling in Riau Islands Province were: Usage of Camouflage Techniques such as deceptive Packaging and using a hidden compartment; Drug smuggling on a person by sing body packing; and Transaction in the High Seas using ship, speed boat, and yacht as well as fishing Boat.

2. The three (3) major drugs being smuggled are Methamphetamine, Ecstasy, and Marijuana. Followed by uncommon drugs such as Cocaine, Amphetamine, and Methylphenidate. There are new and emerging drugs being smuggled such as Gorilla Tobacco and happy water.

3. The reason Riau Islands province was chosen as a drugs smuggling route is mostly because of its strategic Location. The geographical border with several different countries and plenty of rat ports and uninhabited islands.
Discussion

The Modus Operandi of Drug Smuggling Carried Out in Riau Islands Province

According to the data gathered by the researcher, there are a plethora of modus operandi being used in the smuggling of drugs in Riau Island Province. Such modus operandi would be presented as follows:

Usage of Camouflage techniques

In this context, camouflage is a way to disguise something as another thing in order to deceive law enforcement.

Deceptive Packaging Using snack and beverage packaging as a cover to hide the drug inside. Packaging includes mixed nuts snacks, Chinese tea packets, coffee packets and instant drink sachets.

Hidden compartment, the smuggler will create a fake compartment inside an ordinary object to hide the drug. It takes form such as inside a sole of a shoe or a gas cylinder.

Drug smuggling on a person

In this method, the smuggler would carry the drugs either inside or within the body of the person.

Body packing or commonly known as swallowing is a method whereby the body packer swallowed multiple drug packets and attempts to smuggle them while the drugs are inside his/her body. "body packer" is an individual who conceals illicit substances or drugs inside their body to smuggle or transport them.

Body Strapping is another way used to smuggle drugs. In this method, the person would carry the drug packets on their body such as inside the hair bun below their hijab.

Transaction in the High Seas

Due to Riau Island Province being composed mainly of water territory, ships, and speedboats are mainly the way to smuggle drugs from other countries. High seas are defined as all parts of the sea that are not included in the exclusive economic zone, in the territorial sea or in the internal waters of a State, or in the archipelagic waters of an archipelagic State (UN.org, Convention on the High Seas, 1958).

The ship, speed boat, and Yacht. Considering 96 percent of Riau Island Province are sea. The smuggler conducting transactions in Out Port Limited (OPL-free waters) with the ship-to-ship system (transfer illegal drugs from one ship to another while at sea). mothership" or larger vessel acts as a central hub, "go-fast" boats are then used to transport the drugs from the mothership to another vessel or directly to ports.

Fishing boat. Fishermen come to pick the GPS embedded packages that another ship had dropped in the sea and put them in a predetermined hiding location to be distributed further. A smuggler would also disguise themselves as a fishermen using a fishing boat to get the drop.

The Kind of Drugs Being Smuggled Through Riau Island Province

There are three main drugs being smuggled through Riau Island Province. Those are Methamphetamine, Ecstasy, Marijuana.

Methamphetamine. Based on the data given by Barelang Resort Police, Methamphetamine has the highest quantity in grams being smuggled through Riau Island Province.

Cocaine. According to the result of the interview, Cocaine is the lowest in terms of quantity found and frequency of smuggling. This is due to the high price and low demand.

Ecstasy. Although less frequently to be smuggled than other drugs, Ecstasy has the highest quantity by pieces compared to the rest.

Methylphenidate. A very uncommon type of drug to be smuggled and only 1702 pieces were found by the customs and excise in the last three years.

Amphetamine. Another uncommon drug found being smuggled and only a in small amount.

Marijuana. Very common drugs that are found in smuggling. Second highest to methamphetamine in terms of quantity in grams.

Gorilla Tobacco. Relatively new kinds of drugs to be found, in the last 4 years, there is only
5,8037 gr of gorilla tobacco being smuggled through Riau Island Province

The Reason Riau Islands Province Chosen by The Drug Mafia as A Smuggling Route

The Riau Islands Province is a strategic place for the drug smuggling mafia because of its very close geographical location and direct borders with the countries where the drugs originate, so the Riau Islands is a transit point for smugglers to import drugs into Indonesia, as well as the geographical conditions of the Riau Islands which are in the form of islands and waters so that drug smugglers can exploit them in the maritime sector.

Geographical Factor. Bordered by countries and strategic islands directly adjacent to the countries of Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Malaysia. In addition, the Riau Islands Province is directly opposite the route of the World Trade Crossing, namely the Malacca Strait. Close to other strategic location such as Sumatra Island.

Uninhabited Islands. 96 percent of the area consists of sea territory and 4 percent is a land, 2,408 islands with 30% of those Uninhabited. According to information from the National Narcotics Agency, there are 28 (twenty-eight) official ports in Riau Islands Province, while unofficial (rat) ports are more than 300. Since there is not a lot of equipment to be used, it is difficult to constantly patrol the area.

Conclusion

Based on the study's findings, the following conclusions can be drawn:

The drug smuggling operations within the Riau Island Province exhibited a wide range of deceptive tactics employed by smugglers in order to evade law enforcement officials. Effective countermeasures to combat drug smuggling include leveraging intelligence information, both internally generated and obtained through collaboration with other law enforcement agencies, implementing passenger profiling techniques, conducting thorough examinations of carry-on items using x-ray machines, deploying K-9 units for inspections, and implementing body checks.

The study identified multiple types of drugs being smuggled into the Riau Island Province, with methamphetamine, marijuana, and ecstasy emerging as the primary substances due to their high demand and relatively lower price. This information provides valuable insight into the specific drugs that pose a significant challenge to law enforcement efforts in the region.

The strategic choice of the Riau Islands province as a preferred route for drug smuggling is primarily attributed to its advantageous geographical location. The province shares borders with multiple countries and boasts numerous remote ports and uninhabited islands, making it an ideal hub for illicit drug transportation and distribution networks.

Conflict of interests

No conflict of interest.

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