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THE IMPACT OF INTER-AGENCY COLLABORATION TOWARD BORDER SECURITY IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract:

Since Malaysia's independence, several government agencies have been established to regulate border security, including the Malaysian Armed Forces, Royal Malaysian Police, Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency, Immigration Department of Malaysia, Eastern Sabah Security Command, Malaysian Border Control Agency, and other enforcement entities. However, the effectiveness of border security efforts has been hampered by issues such as inadequate coordination, overlapping authority, unconsolidated resource usage, and competitive asset procurement among these agencies. These challenges have been exacerbated by increasing non-traditional threats, such as human trafficking, smuggling, and illegal immigration, which pose significant risks to national security. Therefore, the aim of this research is to evaluate the impact of collaboration among agencies in protecting national interests and to examine the steps taken by Malaysia's government to preserve border security. This study found that when all these agencies cooperate to safeguard national borders, they become more effective and have a greater impact. Despite this, the level of collaboration remains moderate, with operations carried out according to each agency's area of responsibility, and still falling short of achieving a fully integrated joint concept.

Keywords:

Border Security, Collaboration, Inter-Agency, Internal Security, Regional Security

Introduction

Malaysia's strategic location, with its extensive land and maritime borders, presents significant challenges to national security. The country faces numerous border-related issues, including illegal immigration, human trafficking, smuggling of both halal and illicit goods, as well as the trafficking of drugs and weapons. These illegal activities are driven by the high profitability for individuals and syndicates involved, and they exploit the vulnerabilities in Malaysia's vast and diverse border areas.

The complexity of border security is compounded by the varying geostrategic threats across different regions in Malaysia. For instance, Sabah faces persistent security threats due to its proximity to the Philippines, while the states bordering the Straits of Malacca are susceptible to illegal entry from Indonesia. On the land border with Thailand, smuggling has been a longstanding issue, involving the illegal trade of goods such as food, fuel, clothing, animals, drugs, and weapons. These activities are often driven by differences in currency exchange rates and commodity prices between Malaysia and its neighbours.

The border security challenge is further illustrated by the fact that Malaysia's landmass is divided into two major regions: Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak), separated by the South China Sea. The total land area of Malaysia is 330,803 square kilometres, with a coastline of 4,675 kilometres, making it the 29th longest coastline in the world. Malaysia also claims an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of 334,671 square kilometres, extending 200 nautical miles from its shores, which includes much of the southern area of the South China Sea.

The strategic importance of Malaysia's maritime and land borders underscores the need for robust security measures to protect against both traditional and non-traditional threats. Given the critical importance of border security to Malaysia's national interests, it is essential to examine the effectiveness of inter-agency collaboration among the key enforcement bodies, including the Malaysian Armed Forces, Royal Malaysia Police, Malaysia Maritime Enforcement Agency, Royal Malaysian Customs, and Malaysia Immigration Department. Despite the government's reliance on foreign workers to fill economic vacancies, the influx of unregulated foreign workers poses significant security risks. The challenge is compounded by the difficulties faced by security agencies in coordinating efforts to prevent illegal immigrants (*Pendatang Asing Tanpa Izin* (PATI)) from entering the country. **Figure 1** provides a detailed map of Malaysia's geopolitical boundaries, highlighting the complex and extensive nature of its land and maritime borders.



Figure 1: Map of Malaysia in the Indo-Pacific

(Source: Google Map)

In response to such issues, the government launched *Operation Benteng* (May 2020 - December 2022) as part of the National Task Force (NTF) to address border security concerns and manage the COVID-19 crisis and unlawful entry into the country. It is a good initiative led by the Malaysian Armed Forces, which coordinated several enforcement authorities to preserve Malaysian territory and respond to all those criminal actions (Tharishini et al., 2021). It is uncommon before this that all enforcement agencies coordinate an operation with a methodical structure and assets. Several government institutions have been developed to handle border security, including the Royal Malaysian Police, the Royal Malaysian Customs, the Malaysian Immigration Department, the Malaysian Border Control Agency, and the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency.

Therefore, the scope of this study is to evaluate the impact of inter-agency collaboration on Malaysia's border security, with a focus on how these relationships influence the effectiveness of enforcement and safeguarding national interests. The objectives are to analyze the roles and interactions of different agencies involved in border security and to assess the challenges and successes of these efforts in addressing the complex security threats facing Malaysia.

Literature Review

This study will focus on inter-agency collaboration enforcement at the Malaysian border, providing data and knowledge about the border threat, Malaysian capabilities in terms of legislation, policy, and enforcement activity at the Malaysian border. There is also the matter of the Malaysian government's measurement, as well as the implications for Malaysia's border security. Sienkiewicz-Matyjurek (2022) defines public safety networks as autonomous entities with complementary capabilities connected through interdependence and inter-organizational links. Collaboration is a tough and convoluted process, with half or more of collaborations failing. As a result, ambiguities, misunderstandings, and arguments may occur, and inter-organizational collaboration may become stagnant and paradoxical. Inter-agency collaboration refers to operations carried out jointly by public sector units established to handle a specific issue.

According to Gil-Garcia (2012) stated that there are various approaches to conceptualising government information exchange and integration. Some definitions emphasise its social and political dimensions, while others concentrate entirely on its technical characteristics. Data, corporate processes, systems, opinions, cultures, missions, practices, and vocations are all examples of integrations that can occur on a variety of levels. Benefits can be considered as a single organisational outcome or as a complicated set of improvements in organisational outputs, processes, and structures. Sayogo et al. (2021), advances in information and communication technologies (ICTs) enable government, business enterprises, and the public to organise, discuss, and seek solutions to increasingly complex social challenges through information sharing.

Dawes (1996) suggests categorising the expected outcomes of federal information-sharing programmes as technological, organisational, and political. Inter-agency Information Sharing (IIS) is described as the ability to exchange information between federal agencies. Leadership in an IIS project includes social processes that involve leadership positions such as conflict resolution, decision-making, and effort coordination. In general, technical benefits may help to establish more successful information systems for a wide range of stakeholders, including government agencies, individuals, businesses, and non-profit groups. Integration of information has the potential to improve the accessibility, integrity, and accountability of government data.

Collaboration and information integration across organisational boundaries are not simple jobs. There are various substantial challenges to inter-agency information integration in government. These concerns can be classified as political, institutional, organisational, technological, and data related. In the public sector, information integration refers to collaboration and information collecting among executive branch agencies and at a single level of government. It is feasible that it will happen in a variety of situations, including different levels of government, non-profit groups, and private corporations. Dawes (1996) makes several recommendations for the next steps in government inter-organizational information integration. Additionally, he recognised that inter-agency communication is essential for improving coordination and efficiency. Other social actors, such as private individuals, non-profit groups, and for-profit enterprises, can be included, and large-scale interagency coordination may result in a more integrated state.

Côté-Boucher et al. (2014) explain the problematization of border security in their paper titled "Border security as practice: An agenda for research". Border security actors' everyday activities provide practical significance to border security policies and programmes. Interviews and field observations demonstrate how security actors perceive the technologies, enforcement techniques, and administrative tools they employ in various ways. Meanwhile, the writers investigate the execution, modification, and renegotiation of border security policies and programmes. By concentrating on practice, we can gain a better understanding of borders and security that addresses the gaps and contradictions between rationalities and actions, discourse and practice. State officials' daily experiences remain a crucial missing ingredient in an increasing number of scholarly assessments of border-zone processes. These behaviours are obscured by aggregate statistics and are rarely recognised in formal policy. Even the police officers who do them are only partially aware of them, since they quickly become regular operating procedures.

According to Salter (2013), ethnographic approaches are becoming increasingly popular in contemporary critical security studies. This issue argues for a 'ethnographic sensibility,' with writers making 'epistemological commitments' that extend beyond techniques. The authors describe how border agents understand and carry out their roles in various locations, as well as their interactions with the "global-local dispersion of concepts about how borders should be controlled." Border security theories, as well as their link to power and opposition, have long been contentious. Regardless of regional security objectives, bordering practices continue to be crucial to state building. Fusion centres, according to Lewandowski et al. (2017), can improve the clarity of a congested boundary by increasing domain and situational awareness. Fusion Centres bring together federal, state, local, and tribal agencies in a way similar to intelligence cross-checking to manage the country's borders jointly. Border security fusion centres have the potential to drastically improve intelligence collection, processing, and dissemination. Analysis capabilities to improve the ability to consistently analyse risks and be aware of situations.

The Alliance to Combat Transnational Threats (ACTT) represents an innovative use of the fusion centre concept in border security. The ACTT is an example of a joint effort involving many agencies that combines intelligence and operational operations for border protection. The ACTT was swiftly followed by the formation of the Joint Field Command (JFC) in Arizona and the South Texas Campaign, both of which were much smaller in scale. The FBI and DHS's lack of coordination is evident in their excessive use of sensitive information marked as Secret or For Official Use Only. While the ACTT in Arizona is commonly regarded as successful, a GAO audit discovered that state and local governments believed their agency's goal was not sufficiently examined. The Department of the Interior (DOI) is in charge of over 35 percent of the international border with Mexico. This frequently confronts the DOI's mission to protect sensitive locations against the US Border Patrol's border security duties. The missions are diametrically opposed, with DOI officials threatening the Border Patrol personnel with penalties and prosecution.

Noor Azmi et al. (2020) pointed out in "The Challenges Managing Malaysian Border" that Malaysia is strategically located in the midst of Southeast Asia, with Peninsular Malaysia functioning as a link between three continents: Europe, Russia, and Asia. It shares land boundaries with three countries and sea borders with five others. The hazards have expanded to include non-traditional threats such as terrorists and other transnational crimes. Malaysia's national boundaries can be separated into two categories: Illegal Crossing Places (Lorong Tikus) and 'official' land crossing sites. Padang Besar and Wang Kelian in Perlis are examples in Peninsular Malaysia, whereas Tebedu serves as the single recognised land boundary between Sarawak and Kalimantan. As a result, it was determined that Malaysia's borders are porous and prone to attack.

Aside from the stated legal crossing places, there are also established illegal crossing points along the Malaysia-Thailand border. Kidnapping and ransom demands have jeopardised Malaysian security and affected the tourism industry. Meanwhile, the Malaysia-Indonesian border is more vulnerable, exposing it to additional threats. Indonesian illegal immigrants endanger Malaysia's security. A major part of Malaysia's land border is intentionally underdeveloped and surrounded by jungle. The maritime boundary along Malaysia's border is likewise thought to be the most vulnerable to piracy, as international borders have grown so

porous that they no longer serve their important purpose of separating ideas, people, and products.

According to Abdul Rahim and Azhar (2019), security is vital for growth. As a result, security is crucial to a region's prosperity. Today's security measures could retard the development of related locations. However, securing a territory may lead to future stability and peace, which will aid the region's development. In reaction to the infiltration of Sulu militants on March 25, 2013, the federal government established the Eastern Sabah Security Zone (ESSZONE), which encompasses ten districts in eastern Sabah and covers an area of 1,734 kilometres. Following kidnappings and attacks in ESSZONE tourist destinations, a curfew was implemented on July 16, 2014, in Sandakan, Tawau, Kunak, Lahad Datu, Semporna, and Kinabatangan.

Cross-border crime, particularly smuggling, piracy, robbery, and kidnapping, is frequent in Sabah. Malaysia has had security issues for over two decades, with numerous occurrences of piracy, smuggling, and robbery in the Malacca Straits and Sulu Archipelago. Sabah's waters are extensive and permeable, resulting in the construction of numerous "backdoors" for entering Malaysia discreetly. Sabah's geographical location has resulted in a continual flow of illicit goods. Subsidised goods such as cooking gas, petrol and diesel, rice, sugar, flour, eggs and chicken are routinely trafficked outside the country. As a result, the Malaysian government must prioritise security over economic interests, relying on a network of law enforcement agencies and government departments tasked with protecting Malaysian sovereignty, such as the Royal Malaysian Police, the Royal Malaysian Customs Department, the Malaysian Department of Immigration, the Malaysian Border Control Agency, and the Malaysian Armed Forces. This will have a positive long-term impact by allowing for safe surveillance of trade routes along East Coast of Sabah.

Karulus and Askandar (2020) stated in their paper titled "Human Security and Development at the Border: The Case of Ba'kelalan, Sarawak, Malaysia" that the international border between Ba'kelalan and Long Bawan has evolved into a point of entry for Indonesian migrant labourers into Sarawak. Reduced interactions will lead to decreased unlawful activity and less difficult surveillance. The Ba'kelalan region is well-known for its timber-rich forests, which have long drawn loggers and developers. Logging practices have also presented serious threats to human security by depleting forest resources, engaging in illegal logging, and encroaching on protected areas. The government should act swiftly to ensure that the lands in Ba'kelalan are properly titled and accompanied by valid documents of ownership. Genuine land ownership makes the people feel more secure, protects the country's resources, and safeguards Malaysia's national sovereignty along its international borders.

Tharishini et al. (2021) reported that numerous forms of illegal cross-border immigration were recorded during the pandemic. These included human trafficking and smuggling, as well as the seizure and transportation of illegal items like the drug, cigarettes, and animals. Two actions aroused the government's attention: illegal immigration and criminal epidemic profits. Since 1970, Malaysia has been a major recipient of Rohingya migrants. As of the end of July 2021, the country was home to over 102,960 Rohingya. There are around 154,860 Myanmar nationals, 22,490 Chin citizens, and 29,390 members of other ethnic groups. Throughout the pandemic, the illegal wildlife trafficking continued. Unemployed fishermen who stay near the ocean may be tempted to engage in illegal activity.

Summary of Previous Research

Table 1 summarizes the key findings from previous studies on inter-agency collaboration and border security, highlighting their relevance to the current study.

Table 1: Summary of Previous Research

Author(s)	Year	Key Findings	Relevance to Present Study
Sienkiewicz-Malyjurek	2022	Public safety networks involve interdependent, autonomous entities; collaboration often faces challenges such as ambiguity and failure.	Provides a theoretical basis for analyzing inter-agency collaboration.
Gil-Garcia	2012	Government information exchange involves both social/political dimensions and technical aspects; benefits are multifaceted.	Supports understanding of how information sharing enhances border security.
Sayogo et al.	2021	ICTs enable government agencies, businesses, and the public to organize and solve complex challenges through information sharing.	Highlights the role of ICTs in facilitating inter-agency collaboration.
Dawes	1996	Information integration in government faces political, institutional, and technological challenges but is crucial for improving efficiency and coordination.	Informs on the obstacles and benefits of information integration in Malaysia.
Côté-Boucher et al.	2014	Border security practices reveal gaps between policy and implementation; daily experiences of security actors are crucial yet underexplored.	Emphasizes the importance of practice-based insights in border security.
Noor Azmi et al.	2020	Malaysia's borders are porous and vulnerable to both traditional and non-traditional threats.	Relevant for assessing the current state of Malaysia's border vulnerabilities.
Abdul Rahim & Azhar	2019	Security is crucial for regional development; the ESSZONE was established in response to security threats in Sabah.	Provides a case study of inter-agency efforts to secure Malaysia's borders.
Karulus & Askandar	2020	Border regions like Ba'kelalan face security threats due to illegal logging and migrant labor; calls for stronger land ownership laws.	Offers insight into specific regional security challenges in Malaysia.
Tharishini et al.	2021	The pandemic saw increased illegal cross-border activities, highlighting the need for stronger enforcement and inter-agency collaboration.	Contextualizes recent developments in border security challenges.

Source: Illustrated by author

Theoretical Framework

Public Safety Networks Theory

Public safety networks refer to a system where different autonomous entities with complementary capabilities collaborate to ensure public safety. These entities could include various government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and private sector partners that are connected through interdependencies and inter-organizational links. In the context of Malaysian border security, the public safety networks theory helps explain how multiple agencies—such as the Malaysian Armed Forces, Royal Malaysia Police, Malaysia Maritime Enforcement Agency, and Malaysia Immigration Department—work together to protect the nation's borders. The theory acknowledges that each agency operates independently but must collaborate effectively to manage complex security challenges.

The theory highlights that collaboration is often complex and prone to failure due to ambiguities, misunderstandings, and conflicting interests among the entities involved. This is particularly relevant in border security, where different agencies may have different priorities or methods of operation. The theory also emphasizes the interdependence of these agencies, meaning that no single entity can effectively manage border security on its own. This interdependence necessitates coordination, communication, and sometimes compromises between agencies to achieve common goals.

Inter-Agency Information Sharing (IIS) Framework

The Inter-Agency Information Sharing (IIS) framework focuses specifically on the ability of different government agencies to share information effectively. It is an extension of the information integration theory, with a particular emphasis on leadership, coordination, and social processes involved in sharing information. For Malaysian border security, the IIS framework provides insights into how leadership roles within agencies influence the success of information-sharing initiatives.

The IIS framework underscores the importance of leadership in resolving conflicts, making decisions, and coordinating efforts among agencies. In border security, effective leadership is crucial for ensuring that all relevant information is shared in a timely manner and that agencies work together towards common goals. The framework also balances the technological aspects of information sharing (e.g., databases, communication systems) with social processes (e.g., trust-building, conflict resolution). In practice, this means that successful border security operations require both robust technology and strong relationships between agencies.

Dawes (1996) suggests that successful IIS initiatives result in improved technological, organizational, and political outcomes. For Malaysian border security, this could mean more efficient border patrols, better coordination between agencies, and stronger political support for border security measures.

These theoretical frameworks provide a multi-faceted approach to understanding inter-agency collaboration in Malaysian border security. Public safety networks theories offer insights into the structural and operational challenges of collaboration, while the IIS framework highlights the social processes and on-the-ground realities of these efforts.

Impact Of Inter-Agency Collaboration

The government is developing and implementing several policies and activities to address the issue of non-traditional threats, which are the country's primary risk factors today. If the situation is not contained, it will have a huge impact on the country's political, economic, and social stability, costing millions of dollars. Collaboration among enforcement agencies has been effective in preventing foreign threats from crossing the country's borders, despite being a relatively recent practice. Despite having limited assets and staff, the agency has achieved many successes because of its extensive expertise and skills. The following are the further outcomes of this collaborative effort.

Internal Inter-Agency security

The Malaysian Border Control Agency (*Agensi Kawalan Sempadan Malaysia (AKSEM)*) was established in 2015 (dissolved in September 2021) to conduct anti-illegal activity activities up to the national border. The Home Affairs Ministry stated that AKSEM is made up of five entities: the Royal Malaysian Police, the Immigration Department, the Royal Malaysian Customs Department, the National Anti-Drug Agency, and the National Kenaf and Tobacco Board (BERNAMA, 2017) responsible for preventing smuggling and other unlawful activity near the country's land boundary. This act strengthens AKSEM's authority in the country's land border regions, including Sabah and Sarawak. This function allows AKSEM to carry out anti-illegal activities' operations up to the national border. This will empower all AKSEM enforcement authorities to increase security controls.

According to AKSEM's statistics on seized items and goods for 2019 and 2020, the overall value decreased by 36% in 2020 to RM 19,097,176.00 from RM 26,280,140.00 in 2019. According to the statistics, the value of seizures decreased while the kind of seized products increased particularly consumer goods, petrol, and vehicles. This could be attributed to the economic impact of bordering countries, where various consumer goods are much less expensive than in the country. The data also revealed that there was just one occurrence of firearms smuggling in December 2020, proving that security at the country's border is secure as a result of patrol effectiveness and ongoing surveillance by the agencies involved, including AKSEM. Following the AKSEM's transformation into the RMP in September 2021, the General Operations Force (*Pasukan Gerakan Am (PGA)*) is currently the sole agency responsible for security and border enforcement. The reform and integration of AKSEM into RMP will enable the PGA to concentrate more on border control and enforcement, notably in Perlis, Kedah, Perak, and Kelantan.

Report from *Operation Wawasan*, there has been a consistent decrease in cases and a notable increase in monetary value due to the effectiveness of the operations conducted from 2020 until June 2022. The total value of seizure in 2020 were RM 37,861,336.79, compared to RM 25,713,835.30 in 2021 and RM 6,192,212.55 until June 2022. This success is because of enforcement agencies involved in assisting the *Operation Benteng* operation to curb the COVID-19 outbreak. Apart from the PGA, other agencies involved include the Malaysian Armed Forces, MAQIS, Royal Malaysian Customs Department, Ministry of Domestic Trade and Consumer Affairs, Malaysian Border Control Agency and Immigration Department (Kosmo, 2020; Muhammad Thomas Angom, 2022).

The National Task Force (NTF) (6th May 2020 - 31st December 2022) was established consisting of 19 security agencies (later 18 agencies after the AKSEM were officially dissolved on 30 September 2021) tasked to protecting the country's borders during the Covid-19 epidemic. The NTF has mobilised *Operation Benteng* under the authority of Act 342 (Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases 1988) to combat the entry of Illegal Immigrants (PATI) into the country and stem the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic, as directed by the National Security Council (MKN) on April 29, 2020 (mymilitarytimes, 2022). The NTF is involved in mobilising the assets and personnel of all three key components (land, sea and air) of *Operation Benteng* to ensure that control of the country's borders can be reinforced. The NTF was able to seize RM1.1 billion worth of items, including drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes, and made 7,490 arrests involving 1,444 skippers, 23,894 illegal immigrants, and 1,377 smugglers.

According to the Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency (MMEA), the seizure was valued at RM856,179,920 and was carried out as part of *Operation Benteng*, which began in May 2020. All these values concerned cases of people trafficking, drugs, illicit items, and other controlled products confiscated by the National Task Force during *Operation Benteng*. The coordinated operation, which involved various agencies, resulted in 5,572 illegal immigrants being detained. Prior to that, the MMEA was involved in *Operation Naga* from 2019, which served as a benchmark for the effectiveness of collaboration among various enforcement agencies. As a result of this benchmark, the MMEA was able to report the arrest of 490 foreign fishing boats, incarceration of 3,589 foreign crew members, and seizure of RM735 million in goods (Ahmad, 2022). This demonstrates that actions such as *Operation Benteng* and *Operation Naga* have a deterrent impact on foreign fishing vessels and illegal immigrants from entering the nation illegally. Meanwhile, the number of cases went up from 21 to 26 between 2019 and 2020, with cases under the Immigration Act rising from 167 to 175 cases. This success indicates that with the existence of cooperation between agencies related to MMEA, the number of reported cases indicates that the maritime borders of the country are still under control by not showing the significance of high case increase differences.

The task to maintain sovereignty in the Eastern Sabah Security Command (ESSCOM) was reported to be going effectively, particularly in 2021, indicating that it is capable of deal with a variety of threats in the area. The Senior Minister of Defence, Datuk Seri Hishammuddin Tun Hussein (2021-2022), stated that the Ministry of Defence and the MAF need to enhance ESSCOM initiatives as well as coordinate strategies to strengthen Sabah's defence against ransom, piracy, smuggling, illegal immigration (PATI), militants, and terrorists. ESSCOM's security operations have been divided into five major operations, including *Operation Gasak*, *Operation Bersepadu*, *Operation Benteng* or *Operation Cegah PATI*, Road Check Point (RCP), and Curfew Zone enforcement. The operation's success in 2021 is due in large part to the ESSCOM's tight cooperation with the MAF, RMP, and MMEA, including seizing drugs worth RM 3.34 million and expelling over 1,407 illegal immigrants (Roslan, 2022). If looking at the arrest figures for 2019 and 2020 based on the type of inspections, seizures, and arrests, then can observe that there is a 112% decrease in incidents of ship and boat arrests, with 463 cases in 2020 compared to 984 cases in 2019. The number of arrests decreased by 88 in 2020, compared to 210 in 2019. This demonstrates the effectiveness and impact of inter-agency cooperation under ESSCOM in mitigating threats along Sabah's East Coast.

Many illegal immigrants were detained as a result of the government's aggressive approach to the issue of illegal immigrants, particularly through joint inter-agency operations, and there is no doubt that a few illegal immigrants managed to escape into the country and work illegally as the demand for foreign labour in the country is at an all-time high. As a result, under the command of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Malaysia's Immigration Department regularly undertakes large-scale operations to detain illegal immigrants (PATI). After the PATI Recalibration Plan expired on December 31, 2021, a particular operation was performed. According to Home Minister Datuk Seri Hamzah Zainudin (2020-2022), as of October 2021, 147,705 illegal immigrants had registered for the Return Recalibration Program, resulting in the deportation of 124,423 people and the collecting of RM 71,368,700 in compound payments. The program's success was facilitated by the establishment of specific counters at several exit points to accelerate the repatriation procedure of illegal immigrants. In addition, 212,926 undocumented individuals applied for legal worker status through the Workforce Recalibration Programme. Of them, 34,318 passed the screening procedure, 20,889 failed, and 157,719 were still pending inspection by Malaysia's Immigration Department. All illegal immigrants who fail to comply with this check will be automatically deported under the Return Recalibration Program (Adnan, 2021).

The Workforce Recalibration Programme (WRP) 2.0, highlighting the government's efforts to legalise foreign workers in Malaysia. Present Home Affairs Minister Datuk Seri Saifuddin Nasution Ismail announced that employers had three months to complete the legalisation process for foreign workers. This initiative aimed to allow the Immigration Department to verify the legality of employers and foreign workers, checking for proper registration and visa compliance. Non-compliant employers would face legal action under relevant sections of the Immigration Act 1959 and 1963 (Qistina, 2024). By the end of WRP 2.0 on December 31, 2023, a total of 1.1 million foreign workers were registered, with 518,000 undocumented migrants receiving new work permits and being integrated into various sectors, including manufacturing and agriculture. This follows the success of WRP 1.0, which registered 418,649 undocumented migrants between November 2020 and December 2022. Despite these efforts, Malaysia faces a deficit of 400,000 foreign workers needed to meet the workforce cap of 2.4 million by 2025. Ongoing collaboration between the Home Ministry and the Human Resources Ministry is essential to address this shortfall and fulfil workforce quotas. This programme demonstrates the significance of inter-agency collaboration in ensuring border security, legal compliance, and economic stability in Malaysia.

The statistics of arrests according to enforcement action by Immigration Department of Malaysia for 2019 and 2020, found that there is a decrease in the number of arrests by 42% to 52,567 individuals in 2019 while only 36,818 individuals in 2021 and 58,508 individuals between January 2022 until February 2024. Most of them are from Indonesia, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Filipina, Thailand, Pakistan dan Nepal (Berita Harian, 2024). Individuals arrested were among the illegal immigrants arrested during operations, detained at the entrance and handover as well as employers who employ illegal immigrants. This proves the effectiveness of the program and impact of between inter-agency cooperation with Immigration Department of Malaysia in curbing threats on especially regarding the immigration act.

Effort For Regional Security

Regional security/defense cooperation is still a sensitive issue in Southeast Asia. This is due to ASEAN Member States (AMS) emphasis on sovereignty and non-interference, as well as

numerous unresolved boundary disputes. In some circumstances, ASEAN's defence and security connections have been fraught with distrust and conflict. Overall, the status quo has greatly improved. AMS are now working together in ways that would have been unthinkable in the 1980s and early 1990s.

The Sulu Sea Trilateral Patrols and the Malacca Straits Patrol (MSP) are two of the most well-known examples of ASEAN security and defence cooperation. The former was created to improve protection along one of the busiest maritime lanes, as well as to ensure that littoral states took the initiative rather than foreign parties. Malaysia was concerned about the importance of large countries in protecting the Straits, believing that the presence of one or two major powers would attract other contending states, bringing unwanted problems to its borders (Musa and Zulkifli, 2022). Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines launched Trilateral Patrols in the Sulu Sea to address a variety of security concerns and threats. There was very little external pressure, just like with the MSP. Even though all three coastal nations have ongoing conflicts in or around the area, and their forces have periodically collided, they were able to negotiate an agreement.

Given ASEAN's structure, security collaboration in the area is more likely to be detected through collaboration among neighbouring and littoral AMS in dealing with a specific issue, rather than participation by all or even most AMS. The situation may gradually improve when several AMS issues are handled, and regional security/defence cooperation is strengthened. Malaysia's proposed ASEAN Militaries Ready Group (AMRG) for humanitarian aid and disaster relief (HADR) could be one such way. It envisages AMS deploying military forces for an expedited force that operates solely for humanitarian objectives under the ASEAN flag. Participating soldiers, on the other hand, would be subject to their national command systems and would only be engaged if requested by the relevant country (Trung, 2020).

The ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) and the ADMM-Plus are critical components of Southeast Asian security and defence cooperation (Pitakdumrongkit & Klaisringoen, 2019). Its current focuses are disaster assistance, counterterrorism, military-medical, marine security, demining, peacekeeping missions, and cyber security. Several defence-related challenges were discovered during Singapore's ASEAN chairmanship in 2018. Among these are the previously proposed ASEAN-China maritime exercise, the expansion of the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES) to all ADMM-Plus countries, and the creation of a set of parameters for air encounters between ASEAN military aircraft (Parameswaran, 2018). Furthermore, the choice in 2017 to host ADMM-Benefit annually rather than biennially is a huge plus.

As a result of this progression, ASEAN's Dialogue Partners now could play a positive role in fostering and improving regional security/defense engagement on a deeper and more extensive scale. The Dialogue Partners, particularly the superpowers, must reiterate that the purpose is to expand ASEAN cooperation for the sake of regional security. A peaceful and constructive ASEAN is critical to the entire Asia-Pacific region. Making the ADMM-Plus a platform for strategic competition to advance national goals will be detrimental for all involved in the long run.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study has demonstrated that inter-agency collaboration is crucial in safeguarding Malaysia's borders against various non-traditional threats. The objectives of the study—to assess the effectiveness of inter-agency coordination in border security and to analyze its impact on reducing illegal activities have been achieved. The findings reveal a significant decrease in the number of cases and illegal immigrants returned, highlighting the success of these collaborative efforts.

The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence of the effectiveness of inter-agency collaboration in border security. It also offers insights into the practical challenges and successes of such collaborations, both within Malaysia and in cooperation with ASEAN allies. The addition of new assets and resources, as well as the integration of various agencies' efforts, has enhanced the country's ability to prevent and respond to external threats more effectively and economically.

Looking forward, there is a need for continued research into the long-term sustainability of these collaborative efforts, particularly in adapting to evolving security threats. Future studies could focus on exploring the role of emerging technologies in enhancing inter-agency coordination and improving border security. Additionally, assessing the impact of regional cooperation frameworks, such as those within ASEAN, on Malaysia's border security strategies would provide valuable insights for both national and regional security policies. By building on these findings, policymakers and security agencies can continue to strengthen Malaysia's border security, ensuring the safety and stability of the nation in an increasingly complex global environment.

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