

# Border Security Crisis in Malaysia and its Impact on the National Economy

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## Abstract

Border security crisis is one of the important aspects in national security as it happened not only within the country but abroad, which affect the peace and well-being of the country, nation, people as well as national economy. This article will identify the extent to which the border security crisis in Malaysia affects the national economy. The study focuses on border security crises analysis that occur in countries bordering Malaysia namely Thailand,

Indonesia, Brunei, Singapore, and the Philippines, which had an impact on the Malaysian economy. The study carried out via qualitative methods by referring to primary and secondary documents such as official reports, academic journals, and online news. The analysis found that border security crisis occurring at Malaysia border, which come from countries bordering Malaysia has both negative and positive effects on the country. It is negative when the country suffers a loss millions of ringgits, but positive in term of solving the labour shortage problem and increased sales of goods, also facilitate border communities. This shows the gains have balanced the losses that faced by the country and still under control. However, it requires the country initiative to ensure it can continuously equal.

**Keywords:** Border security crisis, national economy, countries bordering Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, Brunei, Singapore, Philippines

## 1. Introduction

Border security is one of the most important aspects in national security due to security threats that occur at the border not only come from within the country but also from outside the country. Borders reflect national sovereignty because when they are invaded, it can affect the peace and well-being of the nation and the people as well as the national economy.

Border security also includes law enforcement to control the inflow/outflow of people/goods along national borders to maintain territorial sovereignty and national security. The increase in crime rates and the decline in national income are caused by the leakage (loopholes) of national border control due to geographical, economic, political, and cultural factors. The involvement of various responsible parties is necessary to deal with the problem of migrant smuggling, the entry of prohibited goods and the threat of terrorism to ensure territorial sovereignty and national income increment towards securing the people well-being. This situation can be addressed by reviewing existing legislation and policies, plus improving country's borders infrastructure.

Bath (1988) stated that Malaysia's border problem is similar with countries around the world. They found that the Malaysian border faces the same problems as the United States-Mexico border involving illegal cross-border activities such as immigration, smuggling, drug trafficking, border disputes especially maritime, pollution, and conflict over resources. However, they are of the view that Malaysia has been quite successful in resolving its border conflicts and settling disputes with its neighbours.

This article begins by analysing the security threats occur at the country's borders, including traditional and non-traditional security threats. Attina (2016) defines traditional security threats as an issue of military threats to the territorial integrity and political sovereignty of the states, where according to PS (2020), traditional security threats see security through the context of national security, i.e., sovereignty and national integrity as the focus and focal point. According to him, the Cold War and previous literature focused on traditional security threats to weapons and disarmament in increasing deterrence to protect the country from other countries where to successfully protect the country, it includes the idea of implementing alliances and agreements between various countries.

Cook (2017) defines non-traditional security threats as challenges to the survival and well-being of society arising from non-military sources mainly, such as climate change, resource scarcity, infectious diseases, natural disasters, irregular migration, food shortages, trafficking/smuggling people/goods and drugs and transnational crime. Kim and Blank (2012) then stated that non-traditional security threats are not entirely domestic in scope between countries but are also exposed to globalization and the communication revolution, which requires national leadership to foster not only international cooperation, but also needs to implement internal socio-economic and political reform.

Thus, the focus of the study in this article is to analyse the extent to which the border security crisis in Malaysia has affected the national economy, where the analysis will explore the crisis that occurs at the country's land and maritime borders coming from neighbouring countries bordering Malaysia such as Thailand, Indonesia, Brunei, Singapore, and the Philippines.

## **2. Border Security Crisis in Countries Bordering Malaysia**

### *2.1 Malaysia-Thailand Border*

Border security is a widespread problem throughout the region and on the Malaysia-Thailand border involving terrorists and cross-border criminal groups (Valentine, 2005). Malaysia was also shaken by the discovery of 139 graves where authorities detected in 28 transit camps built by human trafficking syndicates along the Malaysia-Thailand border in Wang Kelian, Perlis (Hamzah et al., 2016).

The geographical condition of the Malaysia-Thailand border, which consists of land, rivers, and hills, challenges the enforcement and national security forces to monitor movement in and out from both sides of the country. The existence of many rat lanes along the Malaysia-Thailand border increases the cross-border crime threat. This is exacerbated by changing strategies and new tactics used by criminals to penetrate the control and surveillance of the authorities. There are also incidents of crime involving the use of firearms which are seen to be increasing even though under the law of the country, the possession of firearms is illegal. It is feared that firearms in this country have been smuggled in from neighbouring countries.

In Kelantan, Kedah and Perlis, there is smuggling of controlled and subsidized goods (such as oil and rice) and daily groceries, trading activities of *ketum* and firearms. Dahari et al. (2019) stated that serious criminal cases involving small and light firearms such as shootings and mafia-style murders using firearms and explosions in public places which becoming more common at the Malaysia-Thailand border and is believed to be caused by the smuggling of small and light firearms.

Refers to the statistics, the number of Malaysians and Thais entering and exiting through the Immigration, Customs, Quarantine and Security (ICQS) in some areas of the Malaysian-Thailand border, especially in Kedah, Perlis, and Kelantan, reaches millions every year as follows:

Table 1. Arrivals (Entry) and Departures (Exit) Through ICQS Kedah, Perlis and Kelantan for the years 2017 and 2018

	<b>YEAR 2017</b>	<b>YEAR 2018</b>
<b>Arrival (Check-in)</b>		
Malaysian		
ICQS Kedah	1,078,161	1,316,436
ICQS Perlis	349,830	362,967
ICQS Kelantan	330,577	326,033
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,758,568</b>	<b>2,005,436</b>
Thai citizen		
ICQS Kedah	422,353	1,417,488
ICQS Perlis	405,028	348,731
ICQS Kelantan	719,802	445,041
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,547,183</b>	<b>2,211,260</b>
<b>Departure (Exit)</b>		
Malaysian		
ICQS Kedah	1,198,064	390,699
ICQS Perlis	457,248	432,431
ICQS Kelantan	381,054	376,528
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,036,366</b>	<b>1,199,658</b>
Thai citizen		
ICQS Kedah	239,188	283,955
ICQS Perlis	347,880	265,469
ICQS Kelantan	608,710	330,201
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,195,778</b>	<b>879,625</b>

Source: National Security Council (NSC) Kedah, NSC Perlis and NSC Kelantan

Based on the table above, the pattern of arrival and departure of Malaysians who pass through the Malaysia-Thailand gateway is higher than Thais where the number of Thais is only higher than Malaysians on arrival in 2018. Then the number of arrivals also increased in 2018 compared to 2017 but the number of departures decreased in 2018 compared to 2017. This table also shows that there is a high number of people leaving and entering Malaysia from both countries every year where Thai people who enter Malaysia in high numbers but leave Malaysia with a lower number, which can be summed up as being among those who may reside directly in Malaysia.

Malaysians were also found to be traveling to Thailand where 2017 showed a lower number of arrivals than departures but in 2017 the number of arrivals was higher than departures, showing an improved pattern. This high number of exits and entries presents a challenge to the officers who control the Malaysia-Thailand border entrance to make a comprehensive control, and this causes many smugglers to use the border as illegal routes to carry out smuggling activities in the busyness of the border officers. It can also be seen that the actual number of admissions is higher if counted together with admissions through illegal routes or rat lanes.

In addition to cross-border crime, food safety is also an issue that plays an important role in the context of society at the Malaysia-Thailand border. Despite the continuous food supply

derived from agricultural production and imports, the accessibility dimension has not yet been met. This failure, contributed mainly by the economic situation, has caused households and individuals to feel insecure. As a result, it affects their well-being (Mat & Ku Amir, 2019).

Thai farmers who cultivate paddy fields in Perlis, Malaysia mostly do not have permits or work illegally, only a few have been given permits. Immigrants from Thailand (young girls) often work as prostitutes in the main cities of Malaysia because of the high wages. Smuggling of goods is also active at the Malaysia-Thailand border, particularly involving counterfeit branded goods and rice that can be found much cheaper and of better quality in Thailand. Tobacco companies in Malaysia, especially in Kelantan, use tobacco from Thailand, causing a loss of national revenue. Drug smuggling is the biggest until it becomes an illegal business involving millions of ringgits and has become a habit for the people on the Malaysia-Thailand border. Malaysian waters have traditionally been fished by Thai fishermen. This led to the seizure of several hundred Thai boats by the Malaysian authorities and gun battles broke out between the boats, resulting in the deaths of fishermen. However, in 1979, the two countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to negotiate a settlement of the maritime dispute. Malaysia and Thailand also work together through the General Border Committee (GBC) which meets every year to discuss border issues. This Mal-Thai GBC was originally established to curb the communist threat, but it developed into a channel to deal with other issues. The 9th meeting in 1987 discussed issues of smuggling, drugs, and maritime disputes (Bath, 1988).

Many immigrants from the South of Thailand are hired to work in Malaysia, especially in illegal restaurants, due to the existence of their social networks that play an important role in providing information, especially related to jobs available in Malaysia, as well as help to get a job. The issue that drives this matter is also due to the social and cultural conditions of immigrants from the southern border region of Thailand and similar people in Malaysia, especially the practice of Islam and the Malay language and there is a marriage relationship with Malaysians (Klanarong, 2013). However, most Malay traders in the Malaysia-Thailand border are small traders who still deal with the competitive market and unsystematic business chain, causing them to be limited by smuggling activities in their business. The culture and norms of life make it difficult to change their actions to not be involved in this smuggling economy. Smuggling along the Malaysia-Thailand border is extremely difficult to avoid. Both governments bear huge revenue losses due to the outflow of subsidies and tariffs that fail to be collected, high enforcement operational costs and social security issues (Abdul Halim et al., 2019).

Cheaper prices and a variety of goods are the main factors that encourage shoppers to shop at the Malaysia-Thailand border. For example, most people visit Padang Besar because they are influenced by the variety of cheap goods and delicious Thai food. Activities around the border town have benefited both countries in terms of economic status and improved the socio-economic status of border communities, especially small-medium retailers. Nevertheless, border towns are still plagued with issues and problems that reflect the negative image of the destination and indirectly affect the number of tourist arrivals (Azmi et al.,

2015). Anuar and Harun (2018) also stated that cities along the Malaysia-Thailand border are always associated with backwardness and become low-income areas. This is mainly because the development of policies on the border of this region is based more on defence and security than economic considerations.

Challenges faced at the Malaysia-Thailand border are also congestion and delays due to insufficient infrastructure, equipment, lack of resources, strict immigration checks and delays in the declaration of documents. The main implication is the bureaucratic problem that has caused delays in processing documentation (Jeevan et al., 2021). Pengman et al. (2022) stated that Malaysia-Thailand cross-border operations are facing an unstable environment, fierce competition and complex operations that require logistics service providers (Logistics Service Providers - LSP) that have the necessary capabilities to improve cross-border logistics performance (Cross-Border Logistics Performance - CBLP) at Malaysia-Thailand and ensure effective operations. According to them, government resources should also be developed to facilitate movement and activities in the international trade process, such as ensuring the effectiveness of information and communication technology, reducing barriers to service delivery, and reducing public complaints.

## *2.2 Malaysia-Indonesia Border*

The conflict between Indonesia and Malaysia began in 1960, where a string of Indonesians refusing to recognize the emergence of the Federal State of Malaysia, which is considered a colony under British imperialism, caused the conflict continues in the border dispute between Indonesia and Malaysia and has resulted in high tension between the two governments, including their military forces (Irwansyah, 2017).

Later, there was a maritime dispute between Malaysia and Indonesia in the claim over Sipadan Island and Ligitan Island. In 1998, the governments of both countries brought this case to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for trial where on December 17, 2002, the ICJ ruled that sovereignty over the ownership of Sipadan and Ligitan Islands was given to Malaysia based on stronger evidence. Indonesia is more about evidence based on history (Maydhinaa & Hidayat, 2021).

The maritime dispute between Malaysia and Indonesia also occurred when Malaysia made a claim for an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the Malacca Strait with the release of the 1979 Malaysia Map. The claim was opposed by Indonesia who saw Malaysia as taking advantage of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to expand its territory in the Malacca Straits. In addition, there is also illegal fishing in the waters of the Strait of Malacca in Indonesia, allegedly carried out by Malaysian fishermen (Zulkifli et al., 2020).

As for land border cooperation, Huang (2020) stated that the rate of smuggling and invasion in border areas is quite high. Among the reasons is due to the cooperation framework established between the two countries via the GBC that not focusing on security issues and dealing with border economic issues where it has been addressed through the Border Trade Agreement (BTA). The smuggling that takes place involves people and goods as well as the

invasion of illegal immigrants, who go through illegal roads (rat or elephant lanes). The smuggling factor is due to close family issues between the two countries (married) as well as a culture that has been instilled for a long time that the activity perspectives is illegal and as a daily routine to buy necessities and visit family. It is also due to the pressing poverty factor.

According to Kadarsih et al. (2020), there are still problems such as border areas that have not been finalized by the border agreement due to the difference in reference/allocation between Malaysia and Indonesia to determine the border. There are nine border points that have not been fully agreed upon by both sides, namely five points in the East Kalimantan area and four points in the West Kalimantan area (Muadi, 2021).

From Malaysia's perspective, there is growing concern about border security among the people of Sarawak, especially after Indonesian President Jokowi's announcement about moving the Indonesian capital to East Kalimantan. Some of the contemporary issues of concern are illegal routes, drug syndicates, kidnapping and vehicle theft. In addition, the existing problems near the Sarawak-Kalimantan border are believed to stem from weak border control by local authorities and weak border infrastructure, especially in places prone to illegal routes. Indonesia has become a 'black market' for illegal products such as drugs and stolen cars. The public has low confidence in the quality of border control by the Sarawak government, although the State of Sarawak has increased efforts in improving Sarawak security through the establishment of new security posts near the border. Among other initiatives implemented to improve structural components for control state border is through a diplomatic strategic approach with the implementation of the Sarawak Border Road Safety Program in October 2019 and the Sarawak-West Kalimantan Connection Project by Sarawak Energy (Jalli & Sualman, 2020).

From Indonesian perspective, the pattern of migration of Indonesian traders who trade in Pasar Serikin, Sarawak is practiced irregularly. However, cross-border trade by Indonesian traders has reduced unemployment, facilitated product marketing, and increased income. Even so, there are challenges faced including insufficient road infrastructure, poor quality of goods, lack of accommodation for Indonesian traders in the border area of Jagoi Babang bordering Serikin and relatively expensive shop rental prices (Abao, 2020). From a positive aspect, trade by Indonesian traders at the border of Sarawak will benefit Malaysia from an economic aspect despite the challenges faced. Other border challenges are in Sambas District, Mainland Kalimantan experiencing the problem of lack of assistance from the Government in terms of education, health, and infrastructure services. Although the Indonesian government has tried to solve this problem, the reality is that there is still a service gap in the border area. Indonesian local government needs to fix this problem to provide better services. One of them is to improve human resources in the bureaucracy (Atmojo1 & Fridayani, 2018). Malaysia can consider this matter through discussions with Indonesia on how to help the country for the better of the common border, which can benefit the country as well.

Trade activities carried out on the Malaysia-Indonesia border apart from being driven by economic factors, it is also due to socio-cultural factors (Awang, 2013), where according to Hsia (2019), the history of trade and family drives the occurrence of goods smuggling

activities among border communities as well as the relationship between border communities based on their past stories, kinship, beliefs, cultural symbols and dialects, recreated and strengthened, which evolve along with market dynamics (Sulehan et al., 2013). From economic factors, Amar et al. (2020) stated that the main purpose of visitors coming to Serikin (Sarawak) which borders Jagoi Babang (Indonesia) once a month is to shop where only five items are frequently purchased by visitors in Serikin such as clothes, vegetables, food, electrical appliances, and handicrafts.

Although cross-border trade can stabilize the market price of goods supplied with additional demand from the recipient country and provide employment opportunities, in terms of tax collection, it is affected by the probability of not paying taxes. Cross-border trade, which also involves informal activities such as human trafficking and migrant smuggling, has resulted in the spread of infectious diseases and increased criminal activity. Although there is no official cross-border route and the Immigration and Quarantine Checkpoint (CIQ) exists, Serikin as a small border town has been developed as a Weekend Market, which also focuses on informal trade (Awang, 2013). In addition, the lack of a formal structure to regulate economic and social interaction in the Serikin bazaar is also able to attract traders from West Kalimantan to take market transaction opportunities at this border. Private ownership of space at the border has also allowed houses and landowners to use their property as an economic resource to facilitate activities in Serikin (Sulehan et al., 2013).

Problems also arose at the Nunukan (Indonesia)-Tawau (Malaysia) border where they could not be dealt with optimally. Indonesia, which has not yet installed a Border Crossing Checkpoint, has encouraged various illegal cross-border activities such as smuggling of goods. In addition, the limited infrastructure also constructs the border areas lag in terms of social and economic development. Among the initiatives taken is to increase cooperation between existing law enforcement officers at the border in combating legal issues for violations at the Indonesia-Malaysia border. It includes collaboration between the National Border Area Management Agency and Regional Management Agencies including the Maritime Safety Agency. They also cooperate with other law enforcement such as the police, prosecutors, and the judiciary (Mursit, 2021). A development gap exists between Tawau and Nunukan. Therefore, investment in border areas through government and private initiatives is needed to generate cross-border economic activities, in addition to maintaining a defence and security approach (Anuar, 2015).

Malaysia-Indonesia border management is seen as less than optimal and integrated since there are still unfinished border areas (nine points), starting from Sebatik, Nunukan, Sanggau, and Entikong. Sebatik and Nunukan are on the Sabah border while Sanggau and Entikong are on the Sarawak border. Border conflicts also often occur and affect the political situation of both countries (Firdaus & Umar, 2022). For the case in Sebatik, drugs were smuggled through Sebatik and spread all the way to South Sulawesi. In addition, human trafficking activities are also quite active in Sebatik realizing that many people want to enter Sabah to work (Wan Hassan, 2020). Among the initiatives by the Indonesian Government to deal with the issues occurring in Sebatik is through the establishment of the National Defense Cadre (implemented by the Indonesian Ministry of Defense) and the Sebatik State Defense Forum



(Wahyudi, 2017).

However, state policy regarding Sebatik Island has been affected when what used to be an area of cross-border flow intensified border residents and goods to Sebatik Island, but the change in control places border residents is at the crossroads between openness and physical/socio-political border control. The physical barriers that restrict cross-border mobility also affect the identity at the border between both Sebatik and Tawau, which has rearranged social relations and changed the way border residents relate to the environment (Puryanti, 2018).

### *2.3 Malaysia-Brunei Border*

Maritime demarcation is often made an issue by local leaders and fishermen when there is still no clear demarcation that separates the waters of the two countries. There is the Malaysia-Brunei maritime border issue that has not yet been finalized, where in principle the leaders of the two countries have agreed to cooperate in creating Brunei Bay at the mouth of the Limbang River as the common use area for fishing activities for local and Bruneian fishermen, which allows local fishermen to use the waters of Brunei and Sarawak (especially the waters of Lawas) to catch fish at their discretion (Utusan Borneo Online, 2018).

There is cross-border smuggling of Malaysia-Brunei involving restricted and government-subsidized goods such as liquor, cigarettes, and meat of doubtful halal, where it is caused to escape from paying customs taxes and even to escape from obtaining permits and permission to bring in the controlled goods. Smuggling activities have many negative effects and result in losses for the country, among which it reduces the country's income through tax revenue collection, encourages the occurrence of criminal activities and has a negative impact on the domestic industry (Official Website of the Ministry of Religious Affairs Brunei Darussalam, 2022). There is also fuel smuggling activity, especially the supply of diesel across the Malaysia-Brunei border, but it has been successfully dealt by both countries (Daily News, 2019).

In 2021, Brunei is Malaysia's 30th largest trading partner and the 6th largest in ASEAN with a trade volume of RM8.03 billion (USD1.87 billion), which is a significant increase of 70.4 percent, compared to the value recorded in 2020 (MOFA Official Website, 2022). The importance of the Malaysia-Brunei border can be seen from an economic aspect through cross-border tourism activities when many tourists from Brunei come to shop in Malaysia. Subramaniam et al. (2013) stated that the low-income Bruneians come to Limbang, Sarawak to shop daily due to the low cost of transportation and they mostly come to buy food and drinks, where the researcher sees that this can bring profit to the country.

Other factors that encourage Brunei tourists to shop across the border to Malaysia are due to the perception of Malaysia as the best place to relax and unwind, as well as Malaysia has quality goods and services and Bruneians have family and friends living in Malaysia. It is estimated that Bruneians spend approximately B\$426 million per year on goods and services when visiting Malaysia, where this amount accounts for roughly 5.7 percent of Brunei's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2000 (Anaman & Ismail, 2002).

However, a study by Islam et al. (2019) revealed that this cross-border tourism activity has actually resulted in a loss to the national economy due to a decline in local business when the number of visits and total spending by Bruneians to Miri, Sarawak is related to the high outflow of money where as much as a one percent increase in the fall in value Malaysian Ringgit for every Brunei Dollar and also increased the number of Brunei buyers to Miri by 2.10 percent.

In recent years, the Karakoram Highway was upgraded to the Karakoram Rail Corridor, which falls under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project. The corridor provides a large extent of access and connectivity to the Indian Ocean and the energy-rich Persian Gulf. Modernising regional transportation infrastructure will facilitate improved connectivity between South Asia and the Central Asian Republics, exposing China's border to the region's growing security issues. China made some significant investments in constructing the Karakoram Highway, which runs across the disputed Indian-Pakistani border (Chansoria, 2015). The infrastructure project was built upon the existing Karakoram Highway passing through Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) and therefore invading Indian sovereignty and core interest.

#### *2.4 Malaysia-Singapore Border*

Beyond the borders defined by the 1995 agreement, there is still no formal agreement between the two countries to delimit their common borders and this has resulted in several overlapping claims, involving Pedra Branca, Middle Rocks and South Ledge. This dispute started when Malaysia presented a map of the country's territory that included these three islands in Malaysia's territory in December 1979. Malaysia and Singapore then on February 9, 2003, signed a Special Agreement and both parties brought this dispute to be referred to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) (Wan Dahalan, 2008). As a result of its decision, the ICJ has recognized Pedra Branca Island under the sovereignty of Singapore and sovereignty over Middle Rocks Island in favor of Malaysia (ICJ Reports, 2008).

Because there is no clear maritime boundary agreement on South Ledge Island, the ICJ left the question of the island's rights and sovereignty to Malaysia and Singapore (Ismail & Govindasamy, 2019). The next step is to determine the status of South Ledge Island and the re-demarcation of the maritime border between Malaysia and Singapore (Hamid, 2011).

In addition to disputes over maritime territorial claims, Malaysia and Singapore also face issues involving the illegal immigration and employment of Malaysians in Singapore, corporate transfers from Malaysia, and marriage migration, where it causes problems not only with immigration but domestic policy differences between Malaysia and Singapore. Malaysia and Singapore both believe in technology (smart card identification and biometrics) as a solution to secure territorial borders and control the flow of people. Anti-immigrant sentiment remains high in Singaporean society, and the debate over employment pass criteria continues to resurface. One might expect this to deter Malaysians from arriving in Singapore, but the mechanisms and pathways for migration remain essentially the same (Ho & Tyson, 2011). The Malaysia-Singapore border also faces congestion and misses the schedule to reach the destination on time. It is due to the large number of laborers and transport vehicles moving

across the Malaysia-Singapore border throughout the day. Furthermore, erroneous documentation has also caused delays and companies must bear the cost of losses (Jeevan et al., 2021).

Apart from issues, various perspectives on the growing number of Singaporean seniors and their families are beginning to consider Johor as a post-retirement alternative as Singapore is too expensive and overcrowded to meet their needs and desires for more affordable medical care and housing, larger homes, and greater freedom (Ormond, 2014). There is also cross-border shopping activity among Singaporeans to Tambak, Johor Malaysia due to marketing mix factors (price, quality, selection of goods/services, promotions and shopping atmosphere), accessibility (distance, time and travel cost) and economy (sales tax and exchange rate) where it does not affect the income level of Singaporeans due to the high standard of living and income in Singapore, which will not prevent its citizens from crossing the Johor Causeway to shop in Malaysia (Hui & Wan, 2008).

### *2.5 Malaysia-Philippines Border*

The border of Malaysia and the Philippines is experiencing a migration problem, which is the influx of irregular migrants from the Philippines to Malaysia for reasons of earning a living and improving life. However, the issue is most of them do not have valid documents and face difficulties in mobility, arrest, detention, and deportation. Even so, the influx of undocumented immigrants still occurs due to family factors (many Filipinos have relatives in Sabah, and they have shelter) as well as bright job opportunities compared to their country of origin (Taberdo, 2021). In addition, the Philippines has become an important source of labor supply to cover the labor shortage in Malaysia, especially in Sabah. The Philippine Government is very dependent on remittances from its abroad workers to increase income and deal with its economic problems (Karupiah & Tze-Ken, 2019).

Nevertheless, a solution to the problem of Filipino immigrants in Sabah is very difficult to deal with due to the unresolved claims on Sabah by the Philippine government, different political parties changing their views on immigrants and uncertainty among policy makers and state officials to decide who is responsible for these immigrants (Kassim, 2009).

In addition to migration issues, the dispute between Malaysia and the Philippines is caused by the Sulu Sultanate's claim to Sabah (North Borneo) (Soomro, 2013). Referring to the speech of YB Dato' Deputy Foreign Minister on August 27, 2020, in 1962, the people of the State of Sabah had clearly determined their self-determination, that Sabah would be in the Federation of Malaysia. The result of the Cobbold Commission referendum, as stated in its report dated August 1, 1962, confirmed the aspirations and decision of the Sabah people to join the Federation of Malaysia. Under the principles of international law, an individual can exercise the right to self-determination only once in the history of their country. The people of Sabah have exercised that right before the Cobbold Commission.

On September 14, 1963, the Secretary General of the United Nations (UN) reported to the UN General Assembly that the Sabah people chose to join Malaysia. Since that, the UN, and the international community recognized Sabah as, "an inseparable, unalienable and integral

part of Malaysia". On September 16, 1963, Sabah officially joined the Federation of Malaysia. Since 1963, the State of Sabah has been part of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Malaysia. Accordingly, any claim made by any foreign party on the State of Sabah based on previous history or for any other reason is no longer relevant and does not apply.

Then there was an incident of invasion in Sabah by the Royal Sulu Army in 2013 which prompted the government to establish a civil-military centre which is the Eastern Sabah Security Area (ESSCOM) including all enforcement agencies such as the police, army, immigration, marines, coast guard and others that coordinated under one command system (Dollah et al., 2016).

In the issue of the Spratly Islands dispute involving Malaysia and the Philippines, in addition to China, Vietnam, Taiwan and Brunei, the islands offer rich fishing grounds and potentially contain oil and natural gas reserves. China has frequently challenged Philippine claims and activities in disputed territories, resulting in more restraints on Malaysia, despite overlapping claims by Malaysia, unlike the Philippines, where Malaysia has extracted significant resources from territories disputed with China since the 1980s (Kreuzer, 2016). China, Taiwan, and Vietnam all claim the entire Spratly islands, the Philippines claims several islands included under Kalayaan, Malaysia claims several islands and Brunei claims one island based on UNCLOS. Then, more than 40 Spratly islands are occupied by claimant countries with Vietnam occupying 26, the Philippines 9, China 7, Malaysia 5, and Taiwan one. All the claimant countries have sought settlement of the dispute through bilateral agreements under UNCLOS, but all efforts have ended without a permanent settlement due to the complexity of the dispute on different bases. This requires efforts to identify unity procedures that can resolve disputes peacefully to pave the way for the use of disputed resources for common regional interests (Hasan, 2019).

The claim by the Philippines is based on the discovery of several Spratly islands by Thomas Cloma in 1947 who later declared it as a new state (Kalayaan). In 1974, Cloma officially transferred ownership of Kelayana to the Philippines. South Vietnam and China argued the Philippines' claim based on the Cloma discovery, which is considered the weakest claim made by any claimant to the Spratlys because it is purely reactive. However, the Philippines had occupied three Spratly islands as early as 1968 and five additional islands between 1980 and 1989. Malaysia's claim to only three islands in the Spratly chain in 1979 was based on the extension of the Malaysian continental shelf and claims to resources seabed based on Articles 76 and 77, 1982 United Nations Law of the Sea Convention (LOS). Malaysia established a military force on Layang-Layang Island (the largest of the three claimed islands) in 1983 and claimed two additional islets in 1986. The islands claimed by Malaysia have never been occupied by any other claimant states of the Spratlys and only Malaysia since 1983 (Murphy, 1994).

Later, there was also an incident of kidnapping by certain groups affiliated with Southern Philippine militants on tourists, citizens, and foreigners in Malaysia to obtain ransom money to finance these militant groups. Several series of kidnappings have resulted in the deaths of civilians and police officers. In addition, the main security threat in Malaysia is expected to

occur due to the influx of IDPs from the Philippines where an estimated 400,000 Filipino IDPs live in Sabah. Then, there was an invasion by Sulu (Mindanao Filipino) militants in Kampung Tandau, Lahad Datu, Sabah in 2013. To overcome this problem, Malaysia established close military cooperation with its neighbouring countries but there are still problems such as lack of manpower, equipment, and funds to deal with various security issues (Salleha & Kok Wey, 2018). It is also summarized that the conflict that occurred in the Philippines is one of the factors that caused the threat of piracy and kidnapping for ransom to continue occur in Sabah until today (Abdul Hamid & Dollah, 2021).

However, Malaysia has shown its commitment as a neighbouring country to the Philippines in providing support to the country through providing moral support, military training centres and being a financial channel centre from the Middle East to the Bangsamoro fighters in the south of Philippines in their fight for independence on the brotherhood basis, where Malaysia has successfully brought these fighters to the negotiating table with the Central Government of the Philippines (Manila). However, this support began to change when the conflict that occurred in South of the Philippines had a direct impact on prosperity and harmony from an economic and social aspects in Malaysia, especially in Sabah (Dollah & Joko, 2015). In addition, the demands of the Bangsamoro have not yet been met by the central government of the Philippines and eroded the Bangsamoro's trust in the peace process and the ability of negotiations to be held. Peace negotiations are also facing a deadlock due to the reluctance to compromise on each other's positions (Harun, 2016).

### **3. Analysis of the Border Crisis Impact in Countries Bordering Malaysia on the National Economy**

For the Malaysia-Thailand border, the smuggling of goods such as firearms, controlled and subsidized goods, daily groceries, *ketum*/drugs, and counterfeit branded goods has caused a loss of national revenue involving millions of ringgits due to the outflow of subsidies and tariffs that failed to be collected. Besides, it is led to households and individuals feeling insecure which affects their well-being, small traders are limited by smuggling activities in their business, portraying a negative image as destination and affecting the number of tourist arrivals. However, the cheaper prices and variety of goods at the Malaysia-Thailand border have encouraged shoppers to spend which benefited both countries in terms of economic status and improved the socio-economic status of border communities, especially small-medium retailers.

For the Malaysia-Indonesia border, the smuggling of goods that occurs has cost the country but helped the survival of the poverty-stricken border residents. In addition, cross-border trade by Indonesian traders has provided employment opportunities that reduce unemployment, facilitate product marketing, increase income, and stabilize market prices of goods supplied with additional demand from recipient countries. Despite that, it also faces challenges such as insufficient road infrastructure, poor quality of goods and relatively expensive shop rental prices and non-payment of taxes. Border controls have also resulted in areas of what used to be an intensified cross-border flow of border residents become crossroads between openness and control.

For the Malaysia-Brunei border, cross-border smuggling that escapes from paying customs taxes and permission permits to bring in controlled goods has brought many bad effects and resulted in losses to the country. Among them, it reduces national income through tax revenue collection, encourages criminal activity and has a negative impact on domestic industry. However, cross-border tourism activities with the influx of many tourists from Brunei who come to spend in Malaysia have brought benefits to the country. Anyhow, it has resulted in a loss to the national economy due to a decline in local business when the number of visits and total spending by Bruneians to Malaysia is related to the high outflow of money where as much as a one percent increase in the depreciation of the Malaysian ringgit for every Brunei dollar.

As for the Malaysia-Singapore border, the large number of laborers crossing the border throughout the day has caused delays and companies must bear the cost of losses. However, cross-border shopping activities among Singaporeans to Malaysia has benefited the country. In the aspect of border dispute, consistent sovereign action within the limits of Malaysia's responsibility has caused sovereignty over Middle Rocks Island to side Malaysia.

As for the Malaysia-Philippines border, the migration of irregular migrants from the Philippines to Malaysia has covered the labour shortage in Malaysia. In the Spratly Islands dispute issue which a rich fishing area and potentially contains oil and natural gas reserves, Malaysia's claim due to the country has extracted large amounts of resources from the disputed territory with China since the 1980s and has occupied five islands that have never been occupied by any other state, but no permanent settlement was obtained. Kidnapping by certain groups affiliated with Southern Philippine militants on tourists, citizens, and foreigners in Malaysia to obtain ransom money for finance this militant group has caused losses to the country which has to pay for the ransom and requires the country to increase personnel, equipment, and funds. Besides, the conflict that occurred in the South of the Philippines has had a direct impact on the prosperity and harmony of the economy in Malaysia.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Overall, the analysis in this article shows that the border security crisis occurring at the border of Malaysia has negative and positive effects on the country, which come from the countries bordering Malaysia. It is negative when the country suffers a loss of million ringgits, but the positive aspect it is also benefits the country in term of solving the labour shortage problem and increased sales of goods, as well as facilitate border communities. Therefore, the researchers sees that the profit obtained has been able to balance the losses faced by the country. It is concluded that the economic impact due to this border security crisis is still under control but requires continuing and stable initiatives from the country to ensure that it remains equal and does not lead to more losses for the country.

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### **Authors contributions**

Mohd Ikbal Mohd Huda was responsible for study design. Shahrizal Sa'ad was responsible for data collection, Siti Sabrina Imji Rahim drafted the manuscript and Ravichandran Moorthy revised it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript, as well as contributed equally to the study.

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The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data is not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

### **Data sharing statement**

No additional data is available.

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