

**NEWS**

Coming back from the brink of hell

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MALAYSIANSKINI | Ang Tan Loong is a success story. Founder of a thriving pest control company, the 62-year-old is soft-spoken, approachable and humble.

Meeting the friendly chap in Bangsar South recently, one would never guess that he was once a prisoner, a long-term drug addict and a hot-tempered and occasionally violent triad member.

The second son in a family of six boys and two girls, Ang (*above*) was born in April 1957, just months before independence. However, at the age of

four months, he was given away to his maternal grandparents after a medium told the family that he would bring ill-luck to them.

Ang's plunge into drug addiction began at 15 when he experimented with cigarettes and marijuana with his friends in his hometown of Ipoh, Perak. His drug problem worsened to the much more addictive and destructive heroin after he came down to Petaling Jaya to study in 1976.

Talking about his arduous journey battling drug addiction, Ang couldn't hold back his tears. The first person who came to mind was his mother.



"My mother struggled a lot. I told her to just give up on me but she refused. She said 'I am not giving up on you'," he told *Malaysiakini*.

The depths of despair

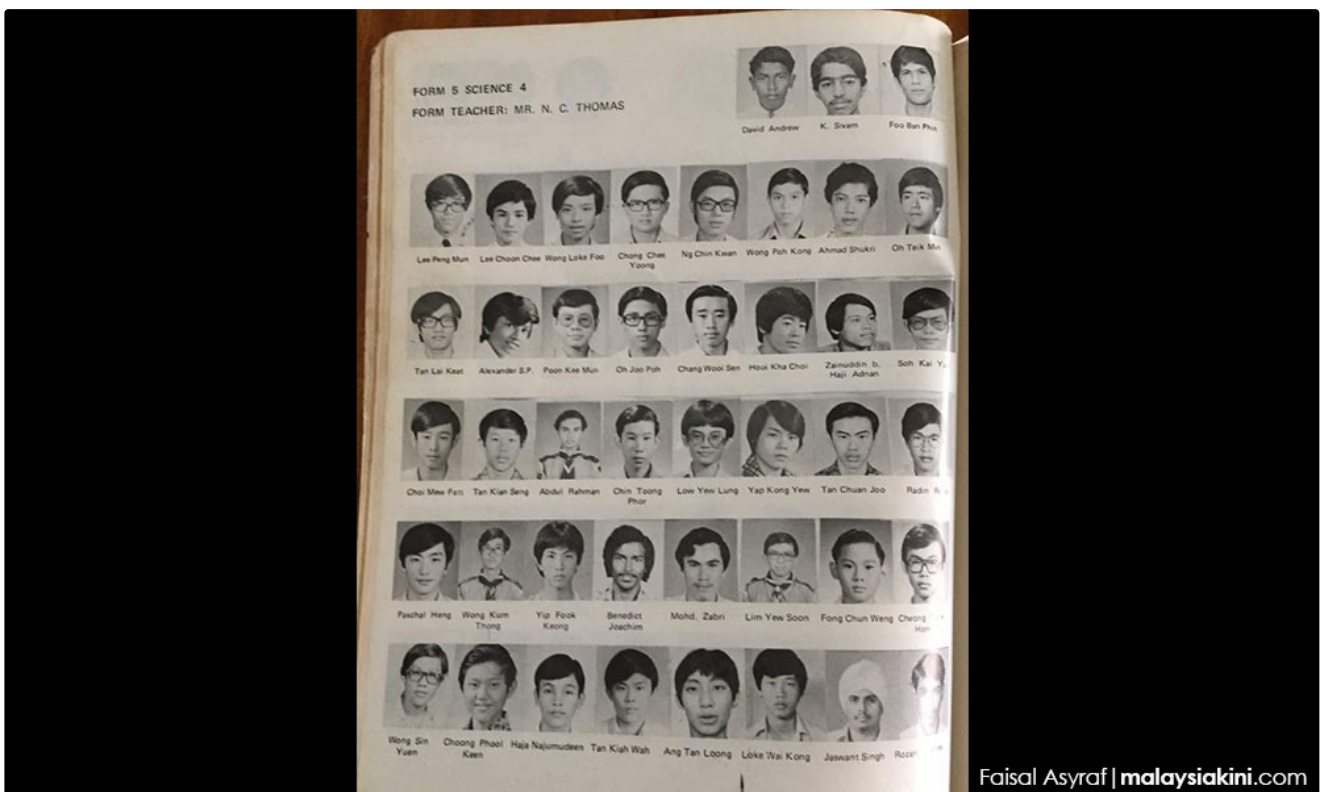
Ang (*pictured above, left*) recalled his early days falling into the drug habit at a time when heroin was available for just RM2 for a day's use.

"When I first started (taking heroin) in the late 70s, a lot of people did not know what it was, even the police didn't know what we were doing.

"It was only when (prime minister) Dr Mahathir Mohamad declared war against drugs in the early 80s that the public came to know about heroin widely," he said.

By then, Ang was hopelessly addicted, having lived for the heroin high for many years. He had dropped out of his studies, lost his job and drifted into gangs, committing armed robbery along the way. He had been in and out of lock-ups several times before being sentenced to 18 months of imprisonment at the Taiping Prison in 1984.

"There was no toilet in the prison cell. Everyone had to share a common bucket and the stink sometimes disturbed our sleep. Early every morning, one of the cellmates would have to empty the bucket," recounts Ang in *From Pest to Pest Controller*, a recently published book in which he recounts his journey of recovery as told to writer Stephen Ng.



Ang in Form Four (bottom row, fourth from right)

Caught stealing in prison, Ang was even given the solitary confinement treatment. It was total darkness and food would be shoved through a small trap door. For one week, he could not even see sunlight and he developed a skin disease. It was rock bottom for the man who had drifted

into the Ngee Heng secret society and once had 40 people under his command.

Turning over a new leaf

Upon his release in 1985, Ang vowed to change his ways. It was the sort of promise he had made many times previously but only to relapse. But his years in prison (with six months shaved off for good behaviour) had given him the fresh motivation to make the most of what was left of his life. At 28, life slowly began again for Ang.

He entered a Christian drug rehabilitation centre where he built up his spiritual strength under the guidance of one Reverend John Khoo Boo Leong and managed to overcome his addiction to drugs. The physical dependence and psychological need had kept him a prisoner for many years but they bound him no longer.

In 1991, having experienced working with a pest control company, Ang decided to start up his own company called Stopest. Not forgetting how hard he had battled, he also co-founded a drug rehabilitation centre which is still operating today in Cheras.

Ang says that his centre was the first to admit patients with HIV as other centres were afraid of taking in such patients out of stigma.

Today, Stopest has grown into a household name locally and abroad. He was even appointed president of the Pest Control Association of Malaysia for eight years from 2003.

Drug addiction still a massive scourge

Ang noted that drug addiction was still a serious problem in the country, notably among youngsters who were not motivated or guided on taking on productive roles in society.



"Last year, I read we have 160,000 drug addicts. This number is based on registered addicts who were caught. For every one drug addict in the system, there are four other unregistered addicts," he said, adding that many of his friends died of drug abuse.

Sharing his determination to help others, Ang said it has been his purpose in life to help those in need.

"When I was in prison, I was very depressed. I knew the feeling of being under the control of drugs. When I finally recovered and since the rehab, I have made it my purpose and focus to help others. When you help somebody, you have a kind of satisfaction that money can't buy," he said.

In fact, the traits that he had cultivated over the years had helped him in his business too.

"When you tackle people's problems, and they are happy with your service, you also become happy. When you do well, clients will recommend you to others. Most of my clients are from word-of-mouth, not from advertising spaces," he said.

Asked about his thoughts on the proposed [decriminalisation](#) of drug addiction, Ang did not completely disagree but also voiced some scepticism.

"I don't really agree with decriminalisation. (It could work) for first-time offenders but first of all, drug addicts must admit their problem [...] otherwise you can't help them. They must understand that drug addiction is bondage. You need power, it's spiritual warfare and that's why you need to go through rehab," he said.



Commenting on the previous harsh death penalty terms for drug-related offences, Ang said the reason why they failed to deter the problem was because most of those arrested were mules and addicts, not the traffickers.

"The biggest culprits are the *tai kun* (but) most of those arrested were mules and addicts," he said.

The Malaysian mandatory death penalty is currently under a moratorium pending the findings of a special committee to explore alternative punishments.

Ang said he will continue to inspire and educate youngsters not only about the danger and consequences of taking illegal drugs but also how they can shape a personality to endure the challenges that they face in their daily lives.

"Many people emphasise education for their children. That's correct but personally I think education is secondary.

"You should educate them to be a person of principle, to be humble, to have humanity and steadfastness [...] a lot of people these days cannot handle a crisis.

"You must have perseverance. Definitely you will have trial and tribulations in life. How do you handle crises? Many people are educated but they don't know how to handle a crisis in life," observed Ang.

From Pest to Pest Controller is being sold at Canaanland bookshops in Petaling Jaya and Kota Kinabalu.

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