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**BANGKOK:** A Thai court sentenced a notorious 76-year-old drug trafficker to life in prison after he was allegedly caught trying to sell 20kg of crystal meth in the Golden Triangle drug-producing region.

Laota Seanlee – a former anti-Communist guerilla turned drug runner who famously opened an eponymous coffee store in Thailand's far north – was nabbed with several of his relatives by undercover officers in a sting operation last year.

The rugged Golden Triangle zone – which also includes parts of Myanmar, Laos and southern China – is home to some of the world's most prolific drug producers, with cartels moving heroin and methamphetamine across Asia.

Yet high-profile arrests are rare.

Laota, who hails from the Lisu ethnic minority, had been detained multiple times over the decades but authorities never managed to make major drug charges stick – until now.

Yesterday, Bangkok's criminal court sentenced him to life in prison for selling "ice" to undercover police and possessing 20kg of the high-purity narcotic in his compound – charges he confessed to.

Laota's wife was also sentenced to 25 years in prison while his two sons, who denied helping facilitate the drug sales, were handed the death penalty, a sentence that is rarely carried out in Thailand.

The sons will appeal. — AFP