

# Drugs still the No. 1 enemy

Star 15/5/2011 22.

Despite punitive anti-drug laws, the number of drug-related crimes has shot up in the country.

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**D**RUGS were declared the nation's number one enemy 28 years ago by then Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamed.

Today, that label remains unchanged if the recent spate of busts by anti-narcotics agencies is an indication of the trend in drugs use.

Two weeks ago, Selangor Customs crippled an international drug trafficking syndicate with the seizure of RM37.8mil worth of unprocessed heroin at Northport in Port Klang. The raiding party found 278 bags of heroin weighing 214.5kg shipped along with 560 cement bags from Karachi in Pakistan.

In March, police confiscated 81.4kg of syabu (methamphetamine) worth RM16.1mil from a container at Westport.

Last month, police seized Eramin-5 drugs and paraphernalia from a shoplot used as a production laboratory in an industrial area in Petaling Jaya. A local and a Taiwanese national believed to be a chemist were detained.

With all these developments, MCA Public Complaints Bureau chairman Datuk Michael Chong believes the incidence of drug abuse is increasing, cutting across race, gender, social background and even age.



**Big haul:** Police with the syabu they seized from a container at Westport in Port Klang in March. — TEH ENG HOCK/  
The Star

based on the latest police statistics despite punitive anti-drug laws,

Last year, 157,756 people were detained under various anti-narcotics laws compared with 125,620 people detained in 2009. A total of 42,133 people have been arrested up to March this year.

The National Anti-Narcotics Agency (AADK), meanwhile, identified 23,642 new drug addicts last year compared with 15,763

Iranians and West Africans, although smugglers of other nationalities were also involved.

Because of its strategic location, Malaysia is used as a transit point for drugs trafficking into places such Europe, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore and Australia.

This is in spite of Malaysia's strict anti-drugs trafficking laws which carry the mandatory death sentence.

Synthetic drugs which are growing in popularity include syabu or ice and Eramin-5 pills. These drugs are believed to originate from China, Taiwan and Japan.

Another designer drugs, ketamine, is increasingly brought in from India.

While a gram of syabu can cost anything from RM300 to RM500, Eramin-5 can fetch between RM100 and RM150 for a strip of 10 pills.

Ecstasy, a mood-altering drug which is us

ground and even age.  
He says that of late, parents have even pleaded with him to get their drug-abusing children arrested.

"These parents say their children steal money from them to support their drugs habit. With these kinds of cases, I don't see any improvement in the situation," he says.

An undercover narcotics officer with the police says more youngsters are turning to drugs these days.

"I have come across students as young as 14 being involved in drugs," says the officer.

Malaysia has ambitious plans to be free of drugs by 2015, but many are sceptical over whether this can be realised.

"This drugs issue did not crop up overnight. Maybe it can be reduced but it would be a miracle to be completely drug-free in another four years," Chong opines.

The statistics on drug abuse speaks for itself. Deputy Home Minister Datuk Abu Seman Yusop last month said the number of drugs-related crimes has shot up by 25.58%

new addicts in 2009.

Deputy Inspector-General of Police Datuk Khalid Abu Bakar says the drugs problem has always been a concern but adds that the recent spate of arrests and raids did not necessarily mean the problem was worsening.

"We have been stepping up action," he says, adding that the police are working closely with their counterparts and intelligence from other countries.

Whatever it is, the drugs scourge has caused many problems – health, social and economic, among others. Many crimes, especially petty thefts, are regularly linked with drug junkies desperately looking for money for a quick fix.

Malaysia itself is not a narcotics-producing country. Most of the drugs are smuggled into the country, believed to be mainly from the Golden Crescent (Iran-Pakistan-Afghanistan) and Golden Triangle (Laos-Thailand-Myanmar).

The narcotics officer says most of the drugs coming into the country are smuggled by

## Increasing threat of designer drugs

The commonly abused drugs in Malaysia can be classified into two – plant-based drugs and synthetic drugs.

Plant-based drugs include heroin, marijuana and opium, which still attract the highest number of users.

However, Dr B. Vicknasingam of the Centre for Drugs Research of Universiti Sains Malaysia believes the threat of amphetamine type stimulants (ATS) deserves more attention these days.

He says ATS is often the first introduction to drugs use among youths, often in fun party settings.

"The worrying trend with ATS is that we are seeing more mental health problems related to its use. This makes treatment more challenging.

"Since ATS is a stimulant drug, there may also be an increase in high risk sexual behavior vis-a-vis HIV/AIDS," he cautions.

Ecstasy, a mood-altering drug which is usually manufactured in Europe, has a market value of RM35 to RM70 per tablet.

Khalid says some of these designer drugs are manufactured here, although he believes it is on a much smaller scale. He explains that most of the imported raw materials come in legally and it is only when the different materials are mixed that they are potent.

"For example, ephedrine, an ingredient used to make syabu, is used in flu or cough medication," explains Khalid.

In 2004, the police in an operation involving Malaysian and Chinese authorities smashed a major regional supply line of amphetamine pills following raids on a processing factory in Semenyih.

Two years later, police busted a sophisticated syabu-producing laboratory in Lunas, Kedah. Syabu and Ecstasy pills worth RM14mil were seized from the factory.

It looks like they are doing more of the same now.