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## Drug mule walks into cops' hands

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### Collaboration with Taiwan tipped off authorities to syndicates' movements

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**SHAH ALAM:** A teenager walking with an awkward gait led to a startling find by police – he had nearly RM300,000 worth of drugs strapped to his legs.

His arrest stopped a synthetic drug smuggling syndicate in its tracks.

The arrest came as another major breakthrough in the Taiwan-Malaysia drug nexus.

A tip-off from the Taiwan Crime Investigation Department helped police narrow down their search for the drug smugglers who were supposed to board a flight to Taiwan on Dec 13.

Selangor deputy police chief Deputy Comm Datuk Ab Rashid Ab Wahab said officers on duty at the KL International Airport (KLIA) spotted the 16-year-old boy walking

suspiciously towards the check-in counter at 9.40am and decided to do a full body inspection.

"We checked him and a 39-year-old man who was with him. We found 16 packets of drugs believed to be syabu worth RM292,348 strapped to their shins.

"The two were supposed to board a flight to Taiwan. The following day, we caught another man in Petaling Jaya and seized 1.5kg of drugs at his hotel room as well as another 2.2kg in another room, all worth a total of RM273,660," he said at the Selangor police headquarters here yesterday.

The drugs were being sent to Taiwan as they could fetch prices six times their street value in Malaysia.

In follow-up operations at an apartment in Cheras, as well as a premises in Petaling Jaya, 14 more suspects, including a 14-year-old, were arrested, said DCP Ab Rashid.

Just three months earlier, Malaysian and Taiwanese authorities jointly cracked two illegal drug trafficking cases that led to the seizure of 30.5kg of heroin and 254kg of ketamine.

On Sept 27, Customs inspectors at Taoyuan International Airport found a total of 30.5kg of heroin wrapped in aluminium foil and concealed in 90 stainless steel vacuum bottles imported from Malaysia.

A special investigation team in Taiwan identified a Malaysian suspect but he had fled Taiwan by then.

Armed with intelligence from Taiwan, Malaysian authorities seized another 254kg of ketamine in 248 packets at KLIA on Oct 18 that was hidden in a shipment of clothes headed for Taiwan.

The market value of the 284.5kg in drugs seized was about NT\$440mil (about RM60mil).

Federal Narcotic Crime Investigation Department director Comm Datuk Seri Mohamad Salleh said that although many countries in Asia enforced capital punishment for drug traffickers, the payout was just too hard to resist.

"Based on our intelligence, drug mules are paid as much as RM15,000 per trip, excluding ticket costs and allowances. We see this as the key reason drug mules choose to risk their lives," he told *The Star*.

Comm Mohamad added that Singapore, Brunei, Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos, China, Taiwan, and Indonesia, among others, enforce the death penalty.

"In this case, collaboration with the Taiwanese Crime Investigation Department showed us where to look. We will continue to work with them to identify remnant syndicate members here as well as the syndi-

cate there," he said.

"Some of those arrested recently have prior records for drug-related crimes."

DCP Ab Rashid said the price of syabu in Taiwan was worth six times its street value here – RM120,000 per kg.

In an unrelated case, DCP Ab Rashid said police also seized about RM2.4mil worth of drugs and chemicals at a makeshift drug laboratory in Klang.

"We raided the house at about 4pm on Tuesday and arrested two men and seized 8.9kg of crystal substance believed to be syabu at a house at Bandar Puteri, Klang.

"We also raided a house in Kampung Jawa here and seized 54.382 litres of liquid, believed to be methamphetamine oil, and 1.05kg of crystal substance believed to be methamphetamine," he said.