

'Rings distributing drug-laced coffee'

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> Another two treated for delirium, bringing total number of victims to seven: Subra

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GEORGE TOWN: The authorities have identified the "modus operandi" of what is believed to be a syndicate out to create mischief in Penang by inserting drugs into sachets filled with a durian white coffee mixture.

Health Minister Datuk Seri Dr S. Subramaniam, who described the culprits as operatives within a syndicate, said they were able to sow confusion by handing over free packets of the drug-laced sachets to unsuspecting consumers.

The latest incident involved two men, who were treated for delirium, similar to the symptoms

suffered by two Nepalese security guards, a local office worker and two local women over the past 10 days. The first case was detected on Saturday, involving two women. They had consumed the durian white coffee mixture drink filled with being given a free packet while on several sachets inside while on volunteer work at a temple in Pulau Tikus.

They felt nauseous and were treated at the Penang Hospital for symptoms of sympathomimetic toxidrome. Affected patients tend to display anxiety, diaphoresis, hyperreflexia, mudriasis, paranoia, piloerection and seizures.

Subramaniam urged consumers not to accept free sachets of coffee

given by strangers, especially if they are of the same mixture of durian white coffee.

He said authorities, including police, were trying to determine the motive behind the distribution of the tampered product.

The ministry is fairly confident that the tampering did not originate from within the main production hub of this type of coffee, so the product will not be taken off the shelves.

"We have tested the mixture from the original production line and the samples came back negative for drugs.

"It is a form of a psychoactive chemical. We have yet to determine the true compounds and effects pending a comprehensive test by the Chemistry Department."

The producer has a huge production house in Seberang Perai

with several boutique outlets selling the brand of coffee mixture and chocolates popular among foreign tourists.

A police spokesman said police are concerned as the new cases were detected outside the Pulau Tikus locality. We are hoping to secure CCTV footage and eyewitnesses account of the people who distributed the packets.

In another development, Subramaniam said rabies cases in Sarawak were expected to return in view of the inability to vaccinate stray dogs loitering around the border with Indonesia's Kalimantan province.

The public health authorities in Sarawak had treated and prevented the spread of rabies among humans initially. "However, when it comes to canines, they need more help from local authorities," he said.