

09 APRIL 2018

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THE STAR, MONDAY 9 APRIL 2018

Nation 17

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### Identity of syndicate boss gleaned from suspects arrested with 700kg of Ice

**BANGKOK:** A Malaysian man whom Thai police calls "AJ" is believed to be a drug lord and responsible for trying to smuggle 700kg "ice" (crystal methamphetamine) into Malaysia on March 28.

"He (AJ) is the man behind the 700kg of Ice," Narcotics Suppression Bureau (NSB) head Lt-Gen Sommai Kongvisaisuk said here recently.

The huge quantity of drugs seized, valued at over Bt500mil (RM64mil), had surprised the NSB.

AJ was identified through intelligence as well as "information" extracted from two Malaysian suspects arrested during the operation in Hatyai last month.

The men, aged 34 and 49, from two northern Malaysian states, were nabbed by undercover officers while unloading the drugs from a lorry into a rented house in the southern Thai border town.

A Thai man who drove the lorry was also detained, while an armed

member of the syndicate was arrested not far from the scene of the seizure after a brief gunfight with undercover officers.

The four suspects have been transferred to Bangkok to facilitate further investigations.

Three Bukit Aman anti-narcotics officers have travelled to Bangkok to question the Malaysians.

NSB deputy chief Maj-Gen Thanai Apichartsene, who oversaw the Hatyai's operation and was also

involved in the gunfight with the local accomplice, said AJ's identity and the role he played are not in doubt.

"AJ is the main man behind the syndicate," he said.

He said the two Malaysian suspects were not ordinary "drug couriers" but trusted henchmen and were in Hatyai to pick up the drugs and take it into Malaysia.

"We suspect they are very close to AJ and trusted by him," he said.

Thanai said the arrest of the two Malaysians presented an opportunity to Thai and Malaysian authorities to probe deeper into the inner workings of the syndicate and to identify its key players.

It is believed that the two Malaysians had planned to use pick-up trucks which had been modified to have secret compartments to smuggle the drugs into Malaysia.