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Cops bust 'China White' heroin lab, nab eight



Mohmad Salleh (second from right) with the seized heroin and chemicals used in the production of the drug yesterday. — Picture by Ben Tan

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JOHOR BARU — Police believe they have cracked a regional syndicate specialising in the production and distribution of high-grade heroin after busting its lab here over the weekend.

Officers from Bukit Aman and the Johor Narcotics Criminal Investigations Department (NCID) arrested eight syndicate members and seized a total of RM1.5 million in illicit drugs, equipment, cars and cash on Saturday.

Bukit Aman NCID director Datuk Seri Mohamad Salleh said the ringleader was also arrested during a four-hour statewide operation.

"Seven of the eight men detained were locals, while a Bangladeshi national, suspected to be the chemist, was also nabbed," he said at the Johor police contingent headquarters here yesterday.

Also present were Johor police chief Datuk Mohd Khalil Kader Mohd and Bukit Aman NCID deputy director Datuk Kang Chez Chiang.

In the raids, police seized 31.7kg of heroin, 1.06kg of heroin base, 440g of ketamine, 110g of syabu and 84kg of caffeine.

"We also seized eight vehicles — three Mitsubishi Triton, a Mercedes-Benz GLC 250, a Honda Accord, a Toyota Altis, a Toyota Vios and a Nissan Teana.

"The seized drugs and raw material were estimated to be about RM800,000 in value," he said.

All the suspects, aged between 29 and 59, have been remanded for a week to assist with the investigation.

Checks by *Malay Mail* revealed the seized heroin base was high in purity as investigators found a box filled with high-quality heroin with the Lion Double UO Globe brand, commonly referred to as "China White".

The seizure was discovered during the raid on a single-storey house in Taman Bukit Indah, Iskandar Puteri, near here.

The heroin brand was popular worldwide for its high-purity content in the late 1970s to early 1990s, before the popularity of synthetic drugs overtook heroin.

Mohmad said heroin is making a comeback due to its lower cost over the

more expensive synthetic drugs called Amphetamine Type Stimulants.

"There is a resurgence in the popularity of heroin as it is easy to mix and affordable for the lower income groups," he said.

The high-grade heroin, processed by the syndicate for domestic consumption, was the main selling point for the syndicate, which is believed to have links to international drug dealers in Thailand and Myanmar.

"The powdered drugs are the main component for the illicit processing lab where profits from the finished product can easily be doubled.

"The Lion Double UO Globe brand, which is usually smuggled into Malaysia via Thailand, is highly sought-after by local drug lords as they can be easily mixed with caffeine and other chemicals through a process called 'cutting' to maintain its quality and also to maximise profits.

"This will then be made into lower-grade heroin, commonly known as heroin No 3, for the streets," the source told *Malay Mail*.

"Investigators believe that the suspects were hired to 'cook and cut' the drugs into inhaled-quality heroin or known as Heroin No 3 that is popular among addicts in

Malaysia and Singapore.

"The entire house was converted into a makeshift narcotics laboratory filled with cooking gas tanks, metal cooking utensils and also chemicals and electronic weighing scales used to process the drugs before being packed for distribution."

Checks by *Malay Mail* revealed the distinctive red Lion Double UO Globe brand of heroin originated from the Indo-China war in Laos.

It has since been sold by Myanmar-Chinese opium warlords in the Southeast Asian region.

At present, the source revealed that most heroin from the Golden Triangle have different brand names.

"Investigators have come across names such as Lucky Strike, Panda and Dragon. Each has its own reputation for quality, but the Double UO Globe with Chinese characters is considered the best," said one source, adding that its popularity was due to its accepted quality among foreign drug dealers and Asian gangs.

"Investigations are still ongoing on the total seizure pending another premises raided in Batu Pahat believed to be linked to the suspects," said the source.