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## End of road for 'southern godfathers of synthetic drugs'

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Top News

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JOHOR BARU — He lived on the fast lane, driving luxury German cars, dealing only in cash and carrying a semi-automatic pistol. He even had a hand grenade by his side.

The man, a 50-year-old Singapore drug syndicate mastermind, also had a love for finer things in life such as high-end Swiss watches and an impressive array of gold jewellery.

He carried with him a "symbolic oriental design" gold bar for good luck, knowing very well the risky illegal business he was in.

The man's life came to a sudden end when Federal police arrested him and his two local associates, in their 50's, recently for using Johor as a base for the lucrative synthetic drug market.

He and his associates were known as the "southern godfathers of synthetic drugs" as their vast illegal drug network was raking in millions within a short time.

Police raided their main drug lab in a house in the urban residential area of Bandar Dato' Onn that produced illicit synthetic drugs.

During the raid on Monday eight of syndicate members were arrested.

Police interrogation of the members led to the arrest of the trio at separate locations in the city centre here.

Investigators are now looking into the background of the mastermind, and his two associates who are related.

A source familiar with the investigations told *Malay Mail* that the three suspects were linked to a major underworld gang.

"They controlled the entire local synthetic drug market in the state and in Singapore. One of the associates had a previous drug-



The gated neighbourhood in Perjiranan 10, Bandar Dato' Onn in Johor Baru where the large synthetic drug lab was located in a double-storey house. — Picture by Roslan Khamis

related offence several years ago," the source said.

Initial investigations suggest they had been in business for close to a year based on the extent of their operations.

"Our probe will focus on several angles including the possibility that the syndicate is linked to a Singapore drug network."

The source said investigators are also trying to find whether the suspects are also responsible for a new blue ecstasy pill that has emerged in the market.

"We believe the mastermind can shed some light on the new ecstasy pill," said the source.

Yesterday, *Malay Mail* reported that narcotics police had identified a new ecstasy pill that was five times more powerful than

the regular ecstasy pill due to a higher concentration of MDMA (the main crystalline substance for most synthetic drugs).

The house, located in a gated middle-class residential area, was nondescript and drew no attention.

But after raiding the premises police described it as one of the biggest raids in the country, based on the drug lab set-up. It had a complete set up with advanced chemistry equipment and raw materials for drug processing.

"The whole kitchen was converted into a drug lab, with the rest of the house used for packing, storage and distribution," said the source.

The makeshift laboratory could produce millions of ringgit of synthetic drugs that

could supply Johor and surrounding states.

An array of synthetic drugs, jewellery, an undisclosed amount of cash said to be in thousands, a gold bar and several luxury cars were seized.

Among the syndicate member arrested were Chinese and Vietnamese nationals.

Police seized three semi-automatic pistols, a revolver, 128 rounds of ammunition and a hand grenade.

The shocking discovery followed several raids on smaller makeshift synthetic drug laboratories, located in luxury condominiums in Johor city centre, Larkin and Permas Jaya.

Based on intelligence and surveillance, they are all believed to be linked or associated with the same syndicate.