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**'It's an Uphill battle'**

**PENANG DRUG PROBLEM**

# 'IT'S AN UPHILL BATTLE'

State narcotics chief says police are stepping up efforts to nab drug users

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**T**HE expanding multi-million ringgit drug trade in Penang is a growing concern for the state police.

Penang narcotics chief Superintendent Maidu Abu Bakar said the problem was compounded by Penang's proximity to the Thai border.

He said while the state's drug problem had not hit the "critical level", police had their guard up to prevent the influx of drugs and drug-making equipment into Penang.

"The number of arrests last year and the number of drugs seized, which is worth millions... shows that the police have not been sitting idle.

"The war against drugs is an uphill battle that will take time.

"It requires the support of various agencies and the public in providing us with information," he told the *New Straits Times*.

Maidu said one issue that must be looked into was that many cited for abusing drugs would skip bail.

"That is why when we arrest a repeat drug offender, we will im-



Deputy Home Minister Datuk Nur Jazlan Mohamed (standing, fourth from left) and enforcement personnel standing guard over those who were nabbed from Op Bersepadu in George Town yesterday. PIC BY SHAHNAZ FAZLIE SHAHRIZAL

mediately charge him under the Dangerous Drugs (Special Preventive Measures) Act 1985.

"Last year, we charged 127 people who abused drugs and this year (to date), we have charged 66 people under the act."

A state National Anti-drug Agency spokesman said the agency had been directed by the Home Ministry to come down hard on illicit drug users.

He said this group would usually start out as recreational users before becoming full-fledged drug users, adding that the agency had no official figures on those abusing drugs.

The agency, he said, was stepping up its raids to nab illicit drug users.

Yesterday, 324 people, including government servants and teenagers, were picked up from several entertainment outlets and nightclubs here in the biggest raid mounted this year.

The raid under Op Bersepadu was jointly carried out by the state National Drug Agency, the Immigration Department, the People's Volunteer Corps (Rela) and the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission.

Deputy Home Minister Datuk Nur Jazlan Mohamed said 250 men and 74 women were tested

for drugs in the operation, which started at lam.

"Forty three of them tested positive for drugs such as methamphetamine (29), opiates (three) and tetrahydrocannabinol (11).

"We also found about 50 Erimin 5 pills in the premises.

"Among those detained are government servants and security officers. More than half of those detained are underage youths.

"This shows that drug abuse at entertainment centres is committed by people from all levels of society and should be curbed," he said here at 3am yesterday.