

Singapore Faces Tougher Challenge Due To Worsening Regional Drug Situation - Deputy PM
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SINGAPORE, Dec 6 (Bernama) -- Singapore faces a tougher challenge in maintaining control over the local drug situation in view of the worsening regional drug situation, said Deputy Prime Minister Teo Chee Hean.

He said Singapore is in a vulnerable position because "we are close to drug producing countries".

"The spending power of Singaporeans is also high relative to others in the region. Hence, we are targeted by traffickers who see us as a lucrative market, said Teo, who is also coordinating minister for national security and minister for home affairs, at the 40th anniversary dinner of the Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) last night.

In the past 40 years, the drug landscape in Singapore has been changing, he said, adding that the republic now faces another threat -- synthetic drugs.

In the last four years, the number of persons arrested for methamphetamine drug abuse has been increasing, he said.

Teo said that as synthetic drugs are made from chemicals which have bona fide industrial uses, policing them is not easy.

"Moreover, drug syndicates have been moving their clandestine labs closer to Singapore, and neighbouring countries have also detected more kitchen labs in recent years," he said.

Teo said CNB has intensified its enforcement efforts over the past few years.

"On the supply side, we are seeing increasing seizures of heroin and methamphetamine, which are two of the most commonly abused drugs locally and in the region. Total heroin and methamphetamine seizures are expected to hit record levels this year.

"On the demand side, CNB has also arrested more abusers. While we will continue to rehabilitate existing drug abusers and help them to avoid relapsing, we are particularly concerned that the number of new abusers arrested has risen by 25 per cent over the past three years.

"Against this changing drug landscape, it is even more critical to preserve our zero-tolerance philosophy against drug abuse," he said.

Teo said that to tackle these challenges, he had asked Minister of State Masagos Zulkifli in September to chair a task force on drugs comprising representatives from the government and the community.

The task force will undertake a comprehensive review, covering preventive education, supply and demand suppression, treatment and rehabilitation, and aftercare, and make its recommendations in the first quarter of next year, he said.

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