

Malindo Air cabin crew arrested in Australian drug bust

SYDNEY, Jan 16 — An employee of a Malaysian airline was among eight people arrested in Australia on charges of trafficking more than 14kg of heroin, cocaine and methamphetamine, Australian authorities said today.

A police spokesman confirmed media reports that the suspect worked for Malaysia's Malindo Air, a subsidiary of Indonesia's Lion Air. Malindo Air did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The 38-year-old airline crew member was part of a group that brought drugs from Malaysia on aircraft for sale in Australian cities, police and customs officials said in a statement.

The gang, which police believe was run by a Vietnamese crime syndicate, was based in the city of Melbourne, Tess Walsh, Victoria State police crime command assistant commissioner, told reporters.

Police seized some 14kg of drugs when the suspects were rounded up but the gang was believed to have been smuggling drugs for a long time.

"Intelligence would tell us that this crew has been operating for some years, I would say five plus," Walsh said.

Australia is a lucrative market for suppliers of drugs from South-east Asia. It has one of the world's highest per-capita rates of methamphetamine use, government statistics show.

Police said they had made the eight arrests over the past 10 days, apprehending four women and four men aged between 26 and 55 in and around Melbourne.

They faced drug trafficking charges and appeared in court today. No pleas were entered and they will next appear on May 15.

Police said they seized 6kg of heroin, 8kg of methamphetamines, 500g of cocaine, along with a "significant quantity" of cash and a Porsche Macan SUV and Mini Cooper car. — Reuters

