



SINGAPORE CUSTOMS CRIPPLED TWO SYNDICATES OPERATING IN GEYLANG

On 5 October 2006, Singapore Customs arrested four men, including a taxi driver, and seized 3,156 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes worth about \$28,500. The duty and GST payable totalled \$24,749.

Singapore Customs officers kept watch at a commercial building in Geylang for a syndicate supplying duty-unpaid cigarettes at Geylang. At about 6.00 pm, a taxi arrived in the compound of the said commercial building. The driver alighted, entered the building and emerged with several bags. He loaded the bags into the boot and drove off. The officers trailed him to a car park at Bedok Reservoir Road where he stopped briefly to hand over three bags to a man. Officers continued to trail the taxi.

A separate team of Customs officers trailed the second man from the Bedok Reservoir Road car park to his flat. Upon checking the bags, officers found 500 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes. Another 280 packets of assorted cigarettes were found inside a cabinet in his bedroom. The man (Singaporean aged 40) was immediately arrested.

Meanwhile, the first team of officers trailed the taxi to a car park at Tampines Street 41 and saw the driver alighting from the taxi to hand over a few bags to two men. The officers moved in. 500 packets of duty unpaid cigarettes were found in the bags and another 880 packets in the boot of the taxi. All three were arrested. Investigation revealed that the taxi driver had rented a store in the building at Geylang for the storage of duty-unpaid cigarettes. In the follow-up raid, officers seized another 996 packets of assorted brands of duty-unpaid cigarettes from the store. Inside the store, Customs officers arrested two illegal immigrants from India and they were handed over to the Police. Investigation revealed that the syndicate had obtained the contraband cigarettes from barges arriving from Indonesia.

Earlier on 4 October 2006 at about 2.55 pm, Customs officers arrested two men (Singaporean aged 36 and 40) at Sims Drive. Investigations revealed that they were supplying contraband cigarettes to peddlers in the Geylang area. A total of 9,437 packets of duty-unpaid cigarette were seized from them. On the same day, another two Singaporean men were arrested at Geylang Lorong 21. Information gathered indicated that the men were peddling duty-unpaid cigarettes along the roadside outside the coffee shop. Customs officers spotted the men (both aged 53) at about 4 pm transferring items

from a large nylon bag into a smaller bag. Upon checking, officers found 370 packets of assorted brands of duty-unpaid cigarettes.

Since January 2006, Singapore Customs had conducted a number of operations at Geylang resulting in the arrest and prosecution of 78 illegal peddlers. Another 104 persons were caught and fined for buying contraband cigarettes from these sellers. So far this year, 33,000 packets of contraband cigarettes had been seized from the Geylang vicinity. Singapore Customs takes a serious view of the sale and distribution of smuggled cigarettes and will continue to monitor the situation closely.

Buying, selling, conveying, delivering, storing, keeping, having in possession or dealing with contraband cigarettes are serious offences under the Customs. Stiff penalties are imposed for such offences. On conviction by the court, offenders can be jailed for up to 2 years, as well as being fined. The vehicles used in the commission of the offence are also liable to forfeiture. Members of the public are reminded that selling and buying of contraband cigarettes are serious offences under the Customs Act. Singapore Customs will not hesitate to charge offenders in court. For a packet of duty-unpaid cigarettes, buyers stand to face a minimum fine of \$200 or prosecution in court.

Members of the public with information on smuggling activities or evasion of customs duty or GST can contact the Singapore Customs Intelligence Hotline on 1800-2330000 or email to customs_intelligence@customs.gov.sg