



PRESS RELEASE

SINGAPORE CUSTOMS SMASHED A 7- MEN SYNDICATE AND SEIZED 54,390 PACKETS OF CONTRABAND CIGARETTES

Singapore Customs officers uncovered a cigarette-smuggling ploy using wooden table-tops to conceal contraband cigarettes in a major anti-smuggling operation on 6 December 2007. Seven men (four Chinese nationals and three Singaporeans, aged between 34 and 57 years) were arrested. A total of 54,390 packets of cigarettes worth about \$500,000 were seized. The duty and GST on the seized cigarettes amounted to \$417,000.

2 On 6 December 2007 at about 4.00pm, Singapore Customs officers began staking out at a warehouse in Tuas. At about 10.50pm, the officers spotted a lorry leaving the compound. The lorry was trailed to a location near Gul Circle where it was joined by a van. When the two drivers started transferring boxes from the lorry to the van, the officers moved in. A total of 10,750 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes were seized from the vehicles. The two drivers were arrested.

3 Meanwhile, another team of officers raided the warehouse where stacks of table tops and cardboard boxes were strewn on the floor. Four men were in the midst of retrieving cartons of cigarettes from the hollow underside of the table tops and repacking them into the boxes. All four men (Chinese nationals) were arrested and a total of 43,640 packets (or 4,364 cartons) of duty-unpaid cigarettes were seized. Follow-up investigations led to the arrest of another Singaporean man suspected to have assisted in the loading of the cigarettes into the lorry earlier.

4 Singapore Customs warns that buying, selling, conveying, delivering, storing, keeping, having in possession or dealing with contraband cigarettes are serious offences under the Customs and GST Acts. Stiff penalties are imposed for such offences. On conviction by the Court, offenders can be jailed as well as fined. The vehicles used in the commission of the offence are also liable to forfeiture. The public are also advised against buying duty-unpaid cigarettes. For a packet of duty-unpaid cigarettes, buyers stand to face a minimum fine of \$500 or prosecution in Court.

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