



JOINT NEWS RELEASE

JOINT OPERATION FLUSHED OUT CONTRABAND CIGARETTES DEALINGS AND IMMIGRATION OFFENDERS AT YEW TEE

On 30 June 2005, Singapore Customs, together with Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA) and Singapore Police Force, conducted a joint operation to flush out suspected contraband cigarettes dealings and immigration offenders at the vicinity of a POSBank ATM at Yew Tee Industrial Estate. Recent investigations into cigarette smuggling activities conducted by Singapore Customs indicated that contraband cigarettes were being sold to approaching passer-bys at the vicinity by suspect illegal immigrants. These cigarettes were sold at \$5 per packet, which is less than half the price of duty-paid cigarettes from the retail shops. To stop the illegal cigarette peddling from growing rampant, and attracting more illegal immigrants and other vices, Customs, ICA and Police officers decided to launch operation, "Bush Fire" to rid the area of the illegal activities.

2 At about 1700 hours, enforcement officers from the three departments raided the area, catching the suspects by surprise. In the two-hour operation involving about 70 plainclothes officers, a total of 15 males (13 foreigners and two Singaporeans) were arrested, and 142 cartons and 389 loose packets of assorted brands of duty-unpaid cigarettes were seized. Some of the cigarettes were hidden in the forested area nearby and under drain covers. Of the 13 foreigners arrested, 11 were immigration offenders. Of the two Singaporeans arrested, one was wanted by the Police.

3 The customs duty and GST on the contraband cigarettes were \$14,741.76 and \$901.29 respectively, with an estimated market value of \$18,025.80. The offenders are expected to be charged in court over the next few days. If found guilty, they could be fined up to a maximum of 20 times the amount of tax evaded and/or imprisonment. For immigration offenders, the penalties for overstaying or illegal entry are a jail term of up to six months plus a minimum of three strokes of the cane under the Immigration Act.

4 Storing, possession, conveying or dealing with any duty-unpaid cigarettes are offences under the Customs Act. Singapore Customs takes a serious view of any attempt to evade duty and tax and will not hesitate to prosecute offenders in court. When necessary, more operations similar to Operation Bush Fire will be mounted. Members of the public with information on smuggling activities or

evasion of customs duty or GST can contact Singapore Customs Intelligence Hotline at 1800-2330000 or email to customs_intelligence@customs.gov.sg. They can also call ICA at Tel:1800-3916150 or contact the Police if they have information regarding immigration offenders.

SINGAPORE CUSTOMS
1 July 2005

END OF NEWS RELEASE