



SINGAPORE CUSTOMS ARRESTED 7 AND SEIZED 84,000 PACKETS CONTRABAND CIGARETTES – A SMUGGLING SYNDICATE SMASHED

Singapore Customs officers smashed a smuggling syndicate – six male Singaporeans (aged between 24 and 37) were arrested and 8,000 cartons (or 80,000 packets) duty-unpaid cigarettes seized – in a covert operation on 2 Mar 2006. The estimated market value of the contraband cigarettes is \$720,000 and the total duty and GST payable is \$599,200.

2 On 2 Mar 2006 at about 8 am, Customs officers acting on a tip-off, raided a warehouse at Senoko Drive for suspect illegal activities involving duty-unpaid cigarettes. On arrival, officers heard hacking noises behind the closed metal roller shutters. On entering the warehouse, officers found a covered truck, partially loaded with boxes of cigarettes and six men in the act of retrieving smuggled cigarettes from 16 units of 4 feet by 4 feet hollowed-out drums and packing them in brown paper boxes. To retrieve the cigarettes from a drum, one had to strip away the outer layers of kraft paper and then hack through a wooden covering. Stashed in the space under the wooden covering of each drum were 500 cartons of cigarettes.

3 Preliminary investigations revealed that the goods were imported from Malaysia. Altogether, there were 20 drums – 4 were genuine reams of kraft paper while the other 16 were hollowed on the inside and stuffed with contraband cigarettes. The cigarettes were meant for distribution to factories, construction sites and dormitories of foreign workers. The six men will be charged in court on 3 Mar 2006 for offences committed under the Customs Act.

4 On the same day at about 3 pm, another party of Customs officers arrested a taxi driver (Singaporean, 42 years) with 4,000 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes at Tampines Industrial Street 61. The man admitted collecting the cigarettes for distribution to the construction workers. He will also be charged in court on 3 Mar 06. The estimated market value of the contraband cigarettes is \$36,000 and total duty and GST payable is \$29,960.

5 Singapore Customs warns that the storing, possession, conveying or dealing with any contraband cigarettes are serious offences under the Customs Act. First time offenders can be fined up to a maximum of 20 times the amount of duty evaded. For the second and subsequent convictions, offenders can be jailed for up to 2 years, as well as being fined. The offenders also face further fines based on the amount of GST evaded.

6 We would like to urge anyone with information on any illegal activities involving duty-unpaid cigarettes to contact the Singapore Customs Intelligence Hotline on 1800-2330000 or email to customs_intelligence@customs.gov.sg. Also call us if you know of any person dealing in duty-unpaid cigarettes, either as distributors or sellers or if you have been approached by people who claim that they have cheaper cigarettes for sale.