



**SINGAPORE CUSTOMS SMASHED 2 SMUGGLING RINGS
- 17 PERSONS ARRESTED AND OVER 100,000 PACKETS OF
CONTRABAND CIGARETTES, 15,000 UNCENSORED/OBSCENE
VCDs AND 5 VEHICLES SEIZED**

Acting on intelligence and investigation from previous cases, Singapore Customs mounted an island-wide raid on 20 Apr 06 and smashed 2 smuggling rings involved in duty-unpaid cigarettes and uncensored VCDs. When the operation ended at about 10 pm, 17 persons were arrested - 7 male Singaporeans, 4 male Chinese nationals and 6 female Chinese nationals. All the Chinese nationals were over-stayers. A total of 102,395 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes, over 15,000 uncensored and obscene optical discs and 5 vehicles were seized. The estimated market value of the contraband cigarettes is \$922,000 and the total duty and GST payable is \$766,938.

Of the 7 Singaporeans arrested, 1 was a former taxi-driver, and 2 were current taxi drivers. Information gathered from previous cases indicated that the taxi drivers were part of the illicit distribution network for cigarette smuggling rings. They had capitalized on the high mobility of the taxi drivers for their distribution network.

Case 1

On 20 Apr at about 12 pm, a suspect Malaysian-registered lorry was traced and located at a side road of Bukit Batok Industrial Park. The lorry was fully loaded with sofas. While under observation by Customs officers, 2 men were seen retrieving from underneath the sofas, boxes of contraband cigarettes to await buyers to pick them. Within 2 hours, a bonded truck, a taxi, and a car arrived at the scene to pick up the boxes of cigarettes. All the persons involved scattered when Customs officers moved in to effect arrest. The taxi drove off by running over a side curb. It punctured a tyre, but continued along the main road for a distance before it was finally intercepted. All suspects (6 male Singaporeans aged 22 – 49) were arrested. Altogether, there were 137 boxes packed with a total of 68,500 (6850 cartons) packets of assorted brands of contraband cigarettes.

Case 2

After intense investigations and ground intelligence gathering, Customs officers identified a 3-storey terrace house at Chempaka Avenue used by a syndicate ring to store and distribute contraband cigarettes and obscene VCDs. The house was kept watch by Customs officers on 20 Apr 06. At about 4 pm, when a taxi was seen driving up to the house to receive some 1000 packets of contraband cigarettes, Customs officers moved into the house and arrested the taxi driver and 6 Chinese nationals (3 male and 3 female) found in the house. The

Chinese nationals were over-stayers. Customs officers also found over 30,000 packets of contraband cigarettes and tens of thousands of obscene VCDs in the house. Cash of about \$87,000, believed to be proceeds from the illicit cigarettes and VCD transactions, were also seized from the house. Investigation into the case is ongoing.

Case 3

On the same day, at about 7pm, following leads gathered from the house at Chempaka Ave, Customs officers conducted a follow-up raid at a nearby house at Macpherson Rd. This raid resulted in the arrest of another 4 Chinese nationals, all over-stayers, (1 male and 3 female) and the seizure of 3000 packets contraband cigarettes and over 200 pieces uncensored VCDs. Two of the women and the man climbed onto to the roof from the balcony when officers entered the house. With the help of a resident from the neighbouring house, officers climbed onto the balcony and arrested the suspects.

All the persons arrested will be charged in Court for offences under the Customs and GST Act.

Singapore Customs warns that the storing, possession, conveying or dealing with any contraband cigarettes are serious 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. Upon conviction by the court, first time offenders can be fined up to a maximum of 20 times the amount duty evaded. For the second or 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. The public are advised against buying duty-unpaid cigarettes. Those caught buying or having in their possession duty-unpaid cigarettes stand to face severe penalties.

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.

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