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THE CONTRABAND CIGARETTES THAT DID NOT REST IN PEACE

The cigarettes smugglers probably thought that the cigarettes could **Rest In Peace** (RIP) by hiding them in the coffins. Little did they realise that RIP could also mean **Recovery Is Possible**. And true enough, the secrets (cigarettes) kept inside the coffins were uncovered by the enforcement officers during a raid on 9 August 2007.

2 On 9 August 2007, Singapore Customs smashed a cigarette smuggling syndicate using coffins to smuggle contraband cigarettes. Three male Singaporeans aged, 32, 37 and 55 years, were arrested. 37,199 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes worth about \$335,000 were seized from the false-bottom compartment of 33 coffins. The duty and GST on the seized cigarettes totalled \$285,317.

3 Acting on a tip-off received and in joint operation with enforcement officers from the Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA), a surveillance operation was mounted on a male Singaporean who was suspected to be involved in cigarette smuggling activities. On 8 August, the suspect was trailed by Customs officers to a warehouse unit at Toh Guan Road East. On the same night, a Singapore-registered lorry, loaded with coffins arrived at the warehouse. The coffins were unloaded into the warehouse unit. The suspect left after locking the unit.

4 On the following day at about 6 am, the suspect was seen entering the warehouse with two other men. Customs officers stormed the warehouse and found the three men busily retrieving cigarettes from the coffins and repacking them into carton boxes. All three persons were immediately arrested. There were a total of 33 coffins in the warehouse. All the coffins were constructed with false floor boards under which were packed with contraband cigarettes. Altogether, 37,199 packets of contraband cigarettes were seized. The coffins were also seized. The three men will be charged in court on 11 August 2007.

5 This is the first time coffins were used for smuggling cigarettes. Other devious methods include concealing the contraband cigarettes inside laminated table tops, under false floor board of a container trailer, inside sacks of chemical compounds and amongst legitimate cargo. But, no matter how innovative the smugglers were, our enforcement efforts continued to yield positive results.

6 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 \$200 or prosecution in court.

7 As Singapore's first line of defence against terrorist threats, ICA has a duty to ensure the security and safety of Singapore. ICA has tightened our security checks on passengers and vehicles at the checkpoints to prevent attempts to smuggle in undesirable persons, drugs, weapons, explosives and other contraband. The same methods of concealment used by contraband smugglers may be used by terrorists to smuggle arms and explosives to carry out attacks in Singapore. ICA would like to advise the public against smuggling unlawful goods into Singapore.

8 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.

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