



SINGAPORE CUSTOMS MEDIA RELEASE

WIPING OUT ILLEGAL “HOT DEALS” IN HOTSPOTS – DUTY-UNPAID CIGARETTE BUYERS AND SELLERS AT GEYLANG IN HOT SOUPS AS SINGAPORE CUSTOMS INTENSIFIES OPERATIONS TO BEEF UP ENFORCEMENT

Singapore Customs has intensified enforcement efforts against buyers and peddlers of duty-unpaid cigarettes. In a series of operations from 1 to 5 March 2008, enforcement officers were in action at Geylang Lorong 14 to arrest illegal sellers and to nab buyers. A total of six illegal peddlers (two Singaporeans and four foreigners) and 12 buyers (all Singaporeans) were caught. Altogether, 1,166 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes were seized. The duty and GST of the seized cigarettes totalled \$10,330. The illegal peddlers were arrested and charged in court while the buyers paid heavy composition fines of \$500 per packet on the spot.

2 The recent operations at Geylang on 1 to 5 March 2008 were part of the on-going raids that are conducted daily by the Suppression Teams of the Singapore Customs’ Special Investigations Branch to clamp down on buyers and illegal peddlers. Daily, these teams conduct island-wide patrols and inspections particularly at the hotspot areas like Yew Tee and Geylang. With the enhanced enforcement, there is a high chance of getting caught and the penalties are severe. Smokers are strongly advised not to be tempted the next time a cigarette peddler approaches. Singapore Customs will continue to clamp down on buyers - if we can curb the demand for contraband cigarettes, there will be less incentive for smuggling.

3 Commenting on Singapore Customs’ operation raids, Assistant Director-General of Customs (Investigations & Intelligence), Mr Lee Boon Chong said, “By conducting daily enforcement raids at Geylang, we want to send a strong message that offenders will find themselves easily in “hot soups” for getting involved in contraband cigarettes. We are warning them of the high chance of getting caught and the penalties are severe. As Singapore Customs steps up its enforcement efforts, we urge the public to cooperate with us by saying NO to duty-unpaid cigarettes”.

4 In the same operation on 1 March 2008, officers seized another loot – controlled drugs. While inspecting a coffee shop at Geylang Lorong 14 for illegal cigarettes, officers found a 41-year-old Singaporean man in the female toilet. Found in his pockets were five straws and a sachet suspected to contain heroin and seven tablets suspected to be Ermin 5. The case had been handed over to the Central Narcotics Bureau for further investigations. The officers also found 323 packets of illegal cigarettes left abandoned in a box at the corner of the coffee shop.

5 A member of the public, who was at Geylang during the operations, shared his views on the raids, “I would like to commend the enforcement officers for taking such prompt action. I strongly encourage them to continue with such raids. I believe the raids will be useful to apprehend more culprits, and their efforts will not be wasted”.

6 To raise public awareness on the issue and to warn potential buyers against buying duty-unpaid cigarettes, officers would be distributing warning flyers and Customs notice pamphlets to members of the public during their daily rounds of enforcement patrols at Geylang.

7 Singapore Customs warns that buying, selling, conveying, delivering, storing, keeping, having in possession or dealing with duty unpaid cigarettes are serious offences under the Customs and GST Acts. On conviction by the Court, offenders can be jailed or fined or both. The vehicles used in the commission of the offence are also liable to forfeiture. The public are also urged not to buy duty-unpaid cigarettes. Under the Customs Act, buyers stand to face hefty composition sums of up to \$5,000 for the offence or prosecution in court.

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.

End of Release

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