



SINGAPORE CUSTOMS MEDIA RELEASE

SINGAPORE CUSTOMS BUST CIGARETTE SYNDICATE – FOUR MEN ARRESTED, TWO ILLICIT STORES RAIDED AND 34,910 PACKETS OF DUTY-UNPAID CIGARETTES SEIZED

Singapore Customs' enforcement efforts smashed yet another contraband cigarettes syndicate. Four men were arrested and 34,910 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes worth about \$315,000 were seized from two illicit stores. The duty and GST on the seized cigarettes totalled \$268,000. Three of the men arrested pleaded guilty and were sentenced to imprisonment by the Court.

Background of the Case

2 On 17 June 2008, Singapore Customs mounted a surveillance operation at a warehouse unit at Boon Lay Way suspected to be used as a store for contraband cigarettes. At about 6.45 pm, a Malaysian registered pick-up moved in. The driver alighted and subsequently loaded boxes suspected to be contraband cigarettes from the store onto the pick-up. The officers trailed the vehicle to Bedok Reservoir Road where two men (Chinese nationals) awaited to take delivery of the goods. On the pick-up, officers found 7,990 packets of contraband cigarettes. All three men were arrested.

3 In the meantime, at Boon Lay Way, another Malaysian registered van arrived at the store. Immediately after loading cartons onto the vehicle, the driver sped off. Another team of officers trailed the van and intercepted it at a car park at Bukit Batok Central. Stashed in the cargo compartment were 13,990 packets of contraband cigarettes. The Malaysian driver of the van was immediately arrested.

4 Investigation revealed that the two drivers held the keys to the Boon Lay Way store. A follow-up raid of the store was conducted. All the windows of the store were

covered with cardboards to prevent people from looking in. Stacked inside were 11,500 packets of contraband cigarettes. Officers also discovered 125 wooden cabinets each constructed with a secret compartment at the back. It is believed that the syndicate had used these cabinets to smuggle the cigarettes into Singapore. The secret compartment in each cabinet could potentially hide 117 cartons of cigarettes.

5 On further questioning, the men led the officers to yet another store at Jalan Rajah. Here, officers found 1,430 packets of contraband cigarettes, and over a hundred buckets smeared with grease and cement. The officers believed that the greasy buckets were used to smuggle cigarettes.

Sentencing Outcomes

6 The four men were charged in Court on 19 June 2008. On 19 June 2008, the Malaysian driver of the pick-up pleaded guilty to the charges and was sentenced to 20 months' imprisonment. On 1 July 2008, the two Chinese national men also pleaded guilty and were sentenced to 15 months' imprisonment. One of them was further convicted for an immigration charge, and was given an additional four months' jail and six strokes of the cane. The case against the remaining van driver has been adjourned to 21 July 2008.

Stiff Penalties for Customs Offences

7 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, offenders can be jailed as well as fined. The vehicles used in the commission of such offence are also liable to be forfeited. The public are strongly advised not to buy duty-unpaid cigarettes. For possessing a packet of duty-unpaid cigarettes, an offender may face a minimum fine of \$500 or prosecution in court.

ISSUED BY: SINGAPORE CUSTOMS (新加坡关税局)

DATE: 2 JULY 2008