



Singapore Customs Media Release

“DIRTY” DEN OF ILLEGAL CIGGIES EXPOSED

Two illegal immigrants and Singaporean man jailed for hiding 400 cartons of duty-unpaid cigarettes and 14,160 sachets of chewing tobacco

On 8 September 2009, two illegal immigrants – J.P Ajith Pushpa Kumara (male, age 32) and G.G Samathi Renuka (female, age 26) – pleaded guilty for storing illegal cigarettes and chewing tobacco in a rental flat. Earlier on 7 August 2009, a 36 year-old Singaporean man, Shankar s/o Magalingam also pleaded guilty for keeping chewing tobacco in a rental car. The foreigners were sentenced by the Court to 18 months in jail each and Shankar was sentenced to 12 months in jail for committing offences under the Customs and GST Acts. The cigarettes were worth more than \$36,000 and the duty and GST evaded for both cigarettes and chewing tobacco totalled close to \$54,000.

Chewing Tobacco Uncovered in Car Boot

2 On 4 August 2009, while keeping watch in the vicinity of Blk 614, Choa Chu Kang Street 62, Singapore Customs (SC) officers noticed Shankar behaving suspiciously inside a car at the car park. The officers then identified themselves and searched Shankar’s vehicle in his presence. A total of 12,600 sachets of chewing tobacco of Han's Chhap Scented Khani brand were found concealed in the boot. The amount of duty evaded added up to \$20,525.40.

3 Investigations revealed that Shankar was using a rental car to deliver chewing tobacco to “customers” in various locations. Since April 2009, Shankar had made several successful deliveries of chewing tobacco. He was paid \$1.50 as commission for every 30 sachets successfully delivered. The officers also found out that prior to his arrest, Shankar was actually on his way to replenish his stocks of chewing tobacco from two foreigners staying in Block 614.

[For case photographs, please refer to Appendix 1.]

“Dirty” Den of Illegal Ciggies Exposed

4 At the same time, another team of SC officers stationed on one of the floors in Block 614 spotted two persons carrying four nylon bags and approaching a unit. At this juncture, the officers moved in, checked the bags and found 200 cartons x 200 sticks of illegal cigarettes. The officers wasted no time in entering the unit with the two foreigners and conducted a thorough search of their rented room.

5 As expected, more illegal cigarettes – another 200 cartons – were kept hidden from sight in a corner of the room, together with 1,560 sachets of chewing tobacco. The cigarettes of assorted brands were worth more than \$36,000 and the duty and GST evaded amounted to about \$31,000. The duty evaded for chewing tobacco of Han's Chhap Scented Khani brand totalled \$2,541.24.

6 On further investigations, the two foreigners were found to be illegal immigrants operating as a husband-and-wife team to store illegal cigarettes and chewing tobacco in their rental flat in Choa Chu Kang. Their “dirty” den served as a collection centre for distributors like Shankar. The couple was paid \$20 to \$40 daily for safe keeping every batch of fresh stocks of illegal cigarettes and chewing tobacco.

[For case photographs, please refer to Appendix 2.]

Illegal Ciggies Paid A High Price

7 In exchange for the commissions earned from dealing in illegal cigarettes, the three persons are now paying a high price for their wrongdoings. For Shankar, the Court sentenced him to 12 months’ imprisonment on 7 August 2009 for committing an offence under the Customs Act. The two foreigners, on the other hand, were sentenced by the Court on 8 September 2009 to 18 months’ imprisonment each for their offences committed under the Customs and GST Acts.

8 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. 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, buyers face a minimum fine of \$500 or prosecution in court.

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Appendix 1 – Photographs for Shankar s/o Magalingam’s case



Singapore Customs’ officers searched Shankar’s car and found 12,600 sachets of chewing tobacco of Han's Chhap Scented Khani brand in the boot.

Appendix 2 – Photographs for the Two Illegal Immigrants’ case



Singapore Customs’ officers checked the 4 big nylon bags of two suspicious foreigners outside their rental flat and uncovered 200 cartons of illegal cigarettes of assorted brands.

Appendix 2 – Photographs for the Two Illegal Immigrants’ case (cont’d)



In the rental flat of the two illegal immigrants, officers found more illegal goods stashed at one corner of a room.



Among the illegal goods stocked up in the illegal immigrants’ “dirty” den, officers found 1,560 sachets of chewing tobacco concealed in black plastic bags.

Appendix 2 – Photographs for the Two Illegal Immigrants’ case (cont’d)



Other than chewing tobacco, the flat unit was also a secret storage for illegal cigarettes. Officers seized another 200 cartons of illegal cigarettes of assorted brands wrapped in black plastic bags.