



Singapore Customs Media Release

NO LET-UP ON CUSTOMS CRACKDOWN ON CONTRABAND CIGARETTES DURING FESTIVE CELEBRATIONS

Over 150,000 packets worth \$1.42 million and \$51,200 in cash seized

While celebrations for Christmas and countdown to the New Year were going on, Singapore Customs (SC) launched a series of anti-contraband cigarettes operations which crippled a syndicate and crushed two smuggling attempts. The island-wide operations saw 152,487 packets of contraband cigarettes and 18 kg of shag tobacco worth \$1.42 million in total being seized. The total duty and GST involved was \$1.22 million. Six locally-registered motor vehicles and cash amounting to \$51,200 were also seized. Eight men and one woman were arrested during the operations - four Singaporeans, one Malaysian and four Chinese nationals, aged between 27 and 54.

One week before Christmas – Launch of “Ops Double Decker I”

2 On 16 December 2009, officers from SC and the Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA) mounted a surveillance operation on a targeted double decker tour bus from the Woodlands Checkpoint. The bus was let in through the checkpoint and subsequently trailed by SC officers to a heavy vehicle park in Pasir Ris.

3 A Singapore-registered bonded truck was seen approaching and then parked beside the targeted tour bus. A middle-aged man got out of the truck and started transferring innocuous-looking cartons from the bus to the truck. Once done with the cartons, the man quickly climbed back into the truck and drove off. To gather further information of the smuggling activities, the tour bus was let out of the checkpoint.

4 However, the truck was intercepted by SC officers in a heavy vehicle park in Marine Crescent and the driver was arrested. Officers uncovered 34,220 packets of contraband cigarettes involving \$289,135 in duty and GST inside the cargo compartment of the truck. The driver, who was later established to be a 54-year-old Singaporean man, was charged on 17 December 2009 and sentenced to 42 months of imprisonment.

On eve of Christmas - “Ops Double Decker II”

5 Hot on the heels of Part 1 of “Ops Double Decker”, SC gleaned intelligence that the same tour bus would be making another attempt to smuggle in contraband cigarettes stashed in hidden compartments within the bus on the eve of Christmas. Similarly, SC officers worked with ICA officers to let the bus through the checkpoint at Woodlands. SC officers then trailed the bus to the same heavy vehicle park in Pasir Ris.

6 Again, a bonded truck appeared and parked next to the bus. The truck driver carried carton boxes out of the bus and placed them in his truck. Later, SC officers trailed the truck to another heavy vehicle park along Lower Delta Road and moved in quickly to arrest the driver. Hidden in the cargo compartment were 31,880 packets of contraband cigarettes, involving \$256,171 in duty and GST. The 52 year-old male Singaporean truck driver was charged on 28 December 2009. The court case is still ongoing.

7 On 31 December 2009, the tour bus used for conveying the contraband goods repeatedly was seized by ICA officers at the Woodlands Checkpoint after 33,250 packets of contraband cigarettes were found in modified compartments of the bus, with the duty and GST involved amounted to \$255,214. The 45-year-old Singaporean bus driver was arrested and subsequently charged on 2 January 2010. The court case is also ongoing.

[Please see pictures for “Ops Double Decker I & II” in [Annex 1](#).]

Countdown to 2010 – Customs smashed syndicate in “Ops Dragon Slayer”

8 On New Year's Eve, SC officers mounted another operation to target a contraband cigarette syndicate which was responsible for feeding peddlers with constant illegal supplies. The well-connected supply chain was able to distribute as many as 1,500 to 2,000 cartons of contraband cigarettes island-wide within three hours. During the operation conducted in Eunos, officers seized 44,277 packets of contraband cigarettes as well as two locally-registered rented vans and a taxi used for distributing the cigarettes.

9 Moving swiftly, officers arrested the syndicate’s mastermind in her flat unit at Eunos Crescent. She was a Chinese national, aged 46 who had previously been sentenced to 2 months’ jail for dealing in contraband cigarettes. Officers also arrested a Malaysian man in the flat. He was established to be the middleman between the source in Malaysia and the syndicate.

10 To flush out the remnants of the syndicate, SC officers raided the syndicate’s storage locations in various parts of the island and seized another 8,860 packets of contraband cigarettes and 18 kg of contraband shag tobacco.

11 Other than the mastermind and the middleman, three male Chinese nationals and one Singaporean man were also arrested in SC’s latest dragnet operation. The contraband goods seized involved a total duty and GST of \$420,861. Officers also found cash totalling \$51,200 which was believed to be sales proceeds from the contraband goods. The six persons were charged on 2 January 2010 and Court proceedings are still in progress.

[Please see pictures for “Ops Dragon Slayer” in [Annex 2](#).]

Advisory from Singapore Customs

12 Singapore Customs warns that buying, selling, conveying, delivering, storing, keeping, having in possession or dealing with duty-unpaid goods are serious offences under the Customs and GST Acts and will be severely dealt with. Offenders can be fined up to 40 times the amount of duty evaded and/or jailed for up to six years. 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 products. For possessing a packet of duty-unpaid cigarettes, buyers may face a minimum fine of \$500 or prosecution in Court.

**ISSUED BY: SINGAPORE CUSTOMS
KASTAM SINGAPURA**

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Pictures for “Ops Double Decker I and II”



Contraband cigarettes uncovered inside the bonded trucks



Double decker tour bus used for conveying the contraband cigarettes

