



SINGAPORE CUSTOMS MEDIA RELEASE

LEOPARDS NEVER CHANGE THEIR SPOTS ...

But they can't escape Customs' eagle eye!

6 men arrested and 35,000 packets of contraband cigarettes seized

A leopard never changes its spots! Syndicates are up to mischief again. Singapore Customs (SC) caught six men in the alleged illicit act of unpacking over 35,000 packets of contraband cigarettes concealed drums of rubber sheets in one of its latest raids. Such elaborate and meticulous modus operandi of hiding contrabands has been the trend among syndicates observed by SC officers since 2009. The syndicate members – two Singaporeans and four Bangladeshis, aged between 21 and 54 – were arrested. With the estimated total worth exceeding \$320,000, the cigarettes seized would have attracted duty and GST amounting to \$280,000!

Lorry Under Customs' Eagle Eye

2 Working on intelligence gathered, SC officers began its surveillance activities on 5 August 2010. Their target was a lorry and the officers were careful not to be detected by the lorry driver when trailing him to a factory-cum-warehouse compound along Defu Lane 1. The driver stopped the lorry at the back of the factory, deposited six pallets of rolled-up rubber sheets and left the compound hastily. Customs officers then saw two men appeared and started taking stock of the consignment of rubber. The men were later established to be Singaporeans.

Gathering Assistants In Geylang Red-Light District

3 On the following day, the two Singaporean men were tailed by officers to the red-light district in Geylang. They approached four Bangladeshi men loitering by the roadside

and started talking to them. Throughout the conversation, the Singaporean men seemed to be explaining to the Bangladeshis on some matter while the latter nodded their heads. Shortly after, the six men flagged down two taxis and left Geylang. Still keeping watch on the group, Customs officers soon realised that the taxis were heading to the factory at Defu Lane 1!

4 It was late afternoon when the group of six arrived at Defu Lane. The men alighted at the loading/unloading bay of the warehouse located on the factory compound. Without a word, one of the Singaporean men walked away briskly to the back of the factory. The rest of the group entered the warehouse discreetly and waited quietly in the darkness.

Caught By Surprise In Illicit Act

5 An hour later, a forklift drove from behind the factory and broke the silence of the compound. The machine was stacked to the top with pallets of rubber sheets. The heavy load was placed at the entrance of warehouse. The other five men emerged from the warehouse and action began. The men were seen removing cartons and cartons of contraband cigarettes out from rolled-up rubber sheets. The illegal loot was to be re-packed into large white boxes. With their suspicion confirmed, officers moved in swiftly. The men looked surprised and confused to see the officers. With no escape routes in sight, they felt utterly dejected and allowed themselves to be arrested by the officers without much resistance.

6 Further investigations revealed that the Singaporean men had realised that they would need more helping hands in packing the contraband cigarettes. They had allegedly hired the Bangladeshis to assist them in the illicit act. All were charged in court on 13 August 2010 and one of the Singaporean men was sentenced to 30 months' imprisonment. Court proceedings for the rest of the men are still ongoing.

[Please see photographs of the crime scene and contraband cigarettes in [Appendix 1.](#)]

7 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. Cigarettes without 'SDPC' marking are illegal and 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.

8 Members of the public with information on smuggling activities or evasion of Customs duty or GST should contact the Singapore Customs Hotline at 1800-2330000 or email to customs_intelligence@customs.gov.sg

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DATE: 18 AUGUST 2010



Lorry driver deposited six pallets of rubber drums at the back of the factory



Inside each drum, the coverload of rubber sheets made up the first layer.

On removing the top layer, contraband cigarettes were uncovered!





Every roll of rubber contained 37 cartons of contraband cigarettes





Contraband cigarettes removed from roll-up rubber sheets and re-packed into white boxes



**Total quantity of contraband cigarettes seized
OVER 35,000 PACKETS of ASSORTED BRANDS**