



SINGAPORE CUSTOMS 新加坡关税局 **KASTAM SINGAPURA** சிங்கப்பூர் சுங்கத்துறை

MEDIA RELEASE

22 February 2013

Vietnamese contraband cigarette distribution ring leader jailed for 16 months and fined S\$14,000

A Vietnamese man who coordinated the distribution of contraband cigarettes by a Vietnamese ring was sentenced by the court on Tuesday to 16 months' jail and a fine of S\$14,000 or in default another three weeks' jail.

Tran Dinh Hieu, 33, was nabbed along with 17 other Vietnamese nationals in a joint operation by Singapore Customs, Singapore Police Force (SPF), and the Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA) last year.

This was the largest number of Vietnamese arrested in a single operation by Singapore Customs last year, and the fourth Vietnamese distribution ring smashed since 2010.

A total of 2,090 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes worth more than \$22,000 were seized in the operation. The total duty and Goods and Services Tax (GST) evaded exceeded S\$18,000.

In the early hours of the morning on 27 June 2012, enforcement officers from Singapore Customs, the SPF and ICA mounted an operation along East Coast Road.

Seven men carrying bags suspected to contain contraband cigarettes were spotted leaving an apartment at intervals.

Another two men were observed alighting from a taxi and carrying a big cardboard box to the apartment.

The officers intercepted the nine men. After a search, 1,373 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes were found on them. They were arrested on the spot.

The officers then raided the apartment. Hieu attempted to escape from the apartment but was subsequently caught and arrested. Another four men and four women in the apartment were also arrested. A total of 717 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes were found hidden in several bags and luggage in the rooms of the apartment.

For their involvement in the contraband cigarette distribution ring, 10 of the Vietnamese have been sentenced to jail terms ranging from 12 to 22 weeks and fines of between S\$5,100 and S\$25,000 each.

Investigations established that Hieu was an illegal immigrant. Hieu and seven other Vietnamese were referred to the ICA for further investigations.

Singapore Customs takes a serious view of foreigners who get involved in illegal cigarette activities.

Said Mr Goh Hoon Lip, Deputy Head of Special Investigation Branch (缉私处副处长吴坤立): "Singapore Customs collaborates closely with the SPF and ICA. We keep a close watch on foreigners who flout Singapore's laws by getting involved in illegal activities such as distributing and peddling contraband cigarettes."

"We know where they are operating and we will spare no effort to bring them to justice," said Mr Goh.

Buying, selling, conveying, delivering, storing, keeping, possessing or dealing with duty-unpaid goods are serious offences under the Customs Act and the GST Act. Offenders will be severely dealt with. They can be fined up to 40 times the amount of duty evaded and/or jailed for up to six years.

The minimum court fines for first-time and repeat offenders of tobacco-related offences are \$2,000 and \$4,000 respectively. Repeat offenders who are caught with more than two kilogrammes of tobacco products will also face mandatory imprisonment.

Members of the public with information on smuggling activities or evasion of customs duty or GST can contact the Singapore Customs hotline on 1800-2330000 or email customs_intelligence@customs.gov.sg.

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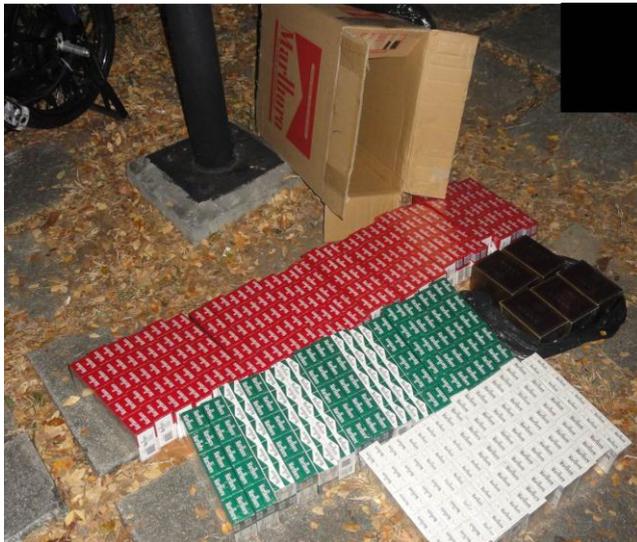
ANNEX

Photos of contraband cigarettes seized in the joint operation against the Vietnamese distribution ring





The six photos (above) show duty-unpaid cigarettes hidden in the bags of the seven Vietnamese men who left the apartment at intervals.



Duty-unpaid cigarettes found in the cardboard box that was carried to the apartment by the two Vietnamese men who alighted from a taxi.





The four photos (above) show duty-unpaid cigarettes hidden in boxes and luggage in the rooms of the apartment.

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