



SINGAPORE CUSTOMS 新加坡关税局 KASTAM SINGAPURA சிங்கப்பூர் கங்கத்துறை

MEDIA RELEASE

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Singapore Customs is watching the emerging trend of online media being exploited by contraband cigarette peddlers

Over the years, Singapore Customs has intensified its enforcement efforts to tackle the contraband cigarette situation and to curb the buying and selling of contraband cigarettes.

In the face of stepped-up enforcement by the authorities, Singapore Customs has observed an emerging trend of some peddlers leveraging on the instant messaging platform “WeChat”¹ to sell contraband cigarettes. However, Singapore Customs officers kept a close watch and clamped down on such illegal activities.

In eight operations conducted throughout 2013, 11 men and two women were nabbed for selling contraband cigarettes via the instant messaging platform “WeChat”. A total of 1,740 cartons of assorted brands of duty-unpaid cigarettes worth more than S\$169,000 were seized in these operations. The total duty and Goods and Services Tax (GST) evaded exceeded S\$137,000.

Twelve of the 13 offenders were sentenced by the court for their involvement in contraband cigarettes to jail terms ranging from six weeks to 10 months, and fines ranging from S\$1,100 to S\$72,000. Investigations are ongoing for the remaining offender.

Offenders typically use this platform to communicate and source for buyers of contraband cigarettes. When a deal is made, the contraband cigarettes will be delivered to the buyer. Singapore Customs officers conducted operations at various locations island-wide. The enforcement officers nabbed the peddlers while they were delivering the contraband cigarettes.

¹ “WeChat” is a mobile text and voice-messaging communication service, providing multimedia communication such as text messaging, broadcast messaging, photo/video sharing and contact-information exchange. (Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WeChat>)

In one such operation, three male Chinese nationals – Wang Shuang Qun, 32; Wang Baoqun, 34; and Li Zhong Wei, 30 – were observed to be selling contraband cigarettes on WeChat. Wang Shuang Qun was caught by enforcement officers when he was on his delivery run. For his role, he was sentenced to 10 months' jail and fined S\$1,100. Wang Baoqun was sentenced to six weeks' jail, and Li was sentenced to nine months' jail and a court fine of S\$2,000. A total of 411 cartons and six packets of contraband cigarettes were seized in this operation.

Singapore Customs advisory

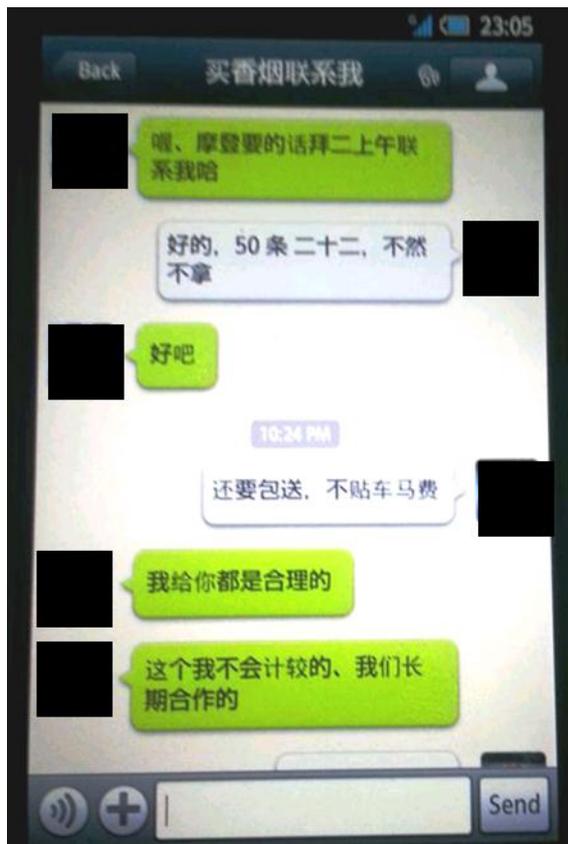
Buying, selling, conveying, delivering, storing, keeping, having in possession or dealing with duty-unpaid goods are serious offences under the Customs Act and the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Act. Offenders will be severely dealt with. They can be fined up to 40 times the amount of duty evaded, and/or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

The minimum court fine for first-time and repeat offenders of tobacco-related offences is \$2,000 and \$4,000 respectively. Repeat offenders who are caught with more than two kilogrammes of tobacco products will also face mandatory jail sentences. Vehicles used in the commission of such offences are also liable to be forfeited.

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

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ANNEX



A screenshot of a conversation between a peddler and buyer of contraband cigarettes on the WeChat instant messaging platform.



A screenshot of the instant messaging status of a peddler selling contraband cigarettes on “WeChat”.



Contraband cigarettes, stored in luggage, recovered in one of the operations.



Duty-unpaid cigarettes seized from two operations against peddlers who used the “WeChat” instant messaging platform.