



JOINT NEWS RELEASE

21 August 2019

Peddler of duty-unpaid cigarettes and chewing tobacco prosecuted and sentenced to 19 months and 11 weeks' jail

The Health Sciences Authority (HSA) and Singapore Customs have jointly prosecuted Veerappan Vimalraj, 33, an Indian national for storing and dealing with a total of 14,130 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes, and for possessing for sale a total of 12,180 sachets of khaini tobacco, a type of chewing tobacco that is prohibited in Singapore. The street value of the chewing tobacco is estimated to be more than \$24,000, while the duty, and Goods and Services Tax (GST) evaded on the cigarettes amounted to about \$120,670 and \$8,900 respectively.

On 21 May 2019, Singapore Customs officers conducted an operation and sighted Veerappan entering a storage facility in Neythal Road. A total of 10,680 sachets of prohibited chewing tobacco and 13,130 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes were found in the storage facility.

Investigations revealed that Veerappan was paid \$600 per month to sell chewing tobacco and duty-unpaid cigarettes. Besides the sachets that were found in the storage facility, another 1,500 sachets of the chewing tobacco and 1,000 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes were found in a car parked near the storage facility. Veerappan would use the car to deliver the chewing tobacco and cigarettes to his customers. In order to avoid attention, he would hide the chewing tobacco and cigarettes in bushes after reaching the delivery locations. After collecting the chewing tobacco and cigarettes, his customers would either place the payment at the same spot or hand over the cash to him. The car and cash of \$5,927 from sales proceeds of duty-unpaid cigarettes were also seized.

On 21 August 2019, Veerappan was found guilty and convicted on a total of three counts for offences under the the Tobacco (Control of Advertisements and Sale) Act and the Customs Act. He was sentenced by the State Courts to 19 months and 11 weeks' imprisonment and the seized cash was forfeited.

Chewing tobacco is strictly prohibited in Singapore

Khaini tobacco is a form of chewing tobacco that is intended to be used by placement in the mouth. It has a distinctive smell and consists of moist, dark brown tobacco leaves, mixed with slaked lime or spices.

HSA would like to remind the public that the Tobacco (Control of Advertisements and Sale) Act prohibits the import, distribution, possession for sale, sale or offer for sale of emerging tobacco products. These include shisha tobacco, smokeless tobacco, chewing tobacco such as Gutkha, Khaini, Zarda, vaporisers and their constituents.

Any person convicted of an offence is liable to a fine not exceeding \$10,000, or to imprisonment for up to six months or to both, for the first offence and a fine not exceeding \$20,000, or to imprisonment for up to 12 months or to both, for the second or subsequent offence for each count of the offence. Information pertaining to prohibited tobacco products in Singapore is available on the HSA website.

Besides sale, the possession, purchase and use of emerging tobacco products are also prohibited in Singapore. Any person convicted is liable to a fine not exceeding \$2,000, for each count of the offence.

The public is reminded not to purchase or bring harmful tobacco products into Singapore.

HSA encourages members of the public who have information on the prohibited sale of harmful tobacco products to call its Tobacco Regulation Branch at Tel: 66842036 or 66842037 during office hours (9:00am to 5:30pm, Monday to Friday).

Importing/Peddling of Duty Unpaid Cigarettes

Buying, selling, conveying, delivering, storing, keeping, having in possession or dealing with duty-unpaid goods are serious offences under the Customs Act and the GST Act. Offenders can be fined up to 40 times the amount of duty and GST evaded and/or jailed for up to six years. Vehicles used in the commission of such offences are also liable to be forfeited.

Members of public with information on smuggling activities or evasion of Customs duty or GST can call the Singapore Customs hotline on 1800-233-000, email customs_intelligence@customs.gov.sg or use Customs@SG mobile app (which can be downloaded from the Apple Store or Google Play) to report these illegal activities.

###

ANNEX





Singapore Customs officers conducted an operation at a storage facility in Neythal Road on 21 May 2019. A total of 12,180 sachets of chewing tobacco and 14,130 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes were seized from the operation.

###