



PRESS RELEASE

SINGAPORE CUSTOMS ISLAND-WIDE OPERATION - SIX MEN ARRESTED AND OVER 100,000 PACKETS DUTY-UNPAID CIGARETTES SEIZED

1 Officers of Singapore Customs Special Investigations Branch arrested six men and seized over 100,000 packets duty-unpaid cigarettes in a series of island-wide operations in the last two weeks. The cigarettes seized were worth close to \$1 million. The duty and GST payable totaled \$757,890.

2 Case 1 on 26 September 2006

Acting on a tip-off, Customs officers intercepted a container at Keppel Port Terminal. The container had earlier arrived from Malaysia and was consigned to a local importer. The shipping manifest indicated that it contained carton boxes. Upon opening the container, officers found empty carton boxes stacked two pallets deep at the front. 6,540 cartons (or 65,400 packets) of assorted brands of duty-unpaid cigarettes worth \$588,600 were found stashed behind the empty carton boxes. Total duty and GST payable amounted to \$489,850. Investigation into the case is still ongoing.

3 Case 2 on 29 September 2006

Arising from intelligence gathered, two men (Singaporeans aged 52 and 43) were arrested and 24,980 packets of contraband cigarettes worth \$224,820 were seized in at a warehouse at Kaki Bukit Road. The total duty and GST of the cigarettes totaled \$187,100. Three vans used by the offenders were also seized. The men were charged in court on 30 September 2006 for commission of Customs offences. The 52 year old man pleaded guilty to the charges and was sentenced by the court to 30 months' imprisonment. The case against the second man has been fixed for Pre-Trial Conference on 11 October 2006 at Court 3.

4 Case 3 on 4 October 2006

A team of Customs officers kept watch over one week at Sims Drive for a delivery van suspected to be supplying contraband cigarettes to peddlers in the Geylang area. On 4 October 2006, at about 2.55 pm, the suspect van arrived and stopped at the car park in front of Block 40, Sims Drive. Two men (Singaporean aged 36 and 40) alighted from the van. Officers moved in immediately and found a total of 9,270 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes packed in nylon bags in the rear cargo compartment of the van. In the follow-up raids, officers seized another 167 packets in the flat of the 36-year-old suspect in Geylang Baru. The estimated market value of the cigarettes

seized is \$89,700 and the duty and GST payable totaled \$78,140. The two men were arrested and charged in court on 5 October 2006.

5 Case 4 on 4 October 2006

At about 1.30 pm, a team of Customs officers kept observation at a coffee shop at Geylang Lorong 21 for two Singaporean men. Information gathered indicated that the men were peddling duty-unpaid cigarettes along the roadside outside the coffee shop. Customs officers spotted the men at about 4 pm. They were transferring items from a large nylon bag into a smaller bag. Upon checking, officers found 370 packets of assorted brands of duty-unpaid cigarettes. The estimated market value of the cigarettes seized is \$3,500 and the total duty and GST payable amounted to \$2,800. The men (both aged 53) were arrested and charged in court on 5 October 2006. One pleaded guilty to the charges and was sentenced to 8 months' jail. The case against the other man was fixed for further mention on 6 October 2006 at Court 26.

6 Since January 2006, Singapore Customs had conducted a number of operations at Geylang resulting in the arrest and prosecution of 78 illegal peddlers. Another 104 persons were caught and fined for buying contraband cigarettes from these sellers. So far this year, 33,000 packets of contraband cigarettes had been seized from the Geylang vicinity. Singapore Customs takes a serious view of the sale and distribution of smuggled cigarettes and will continue to monitor the situation closely. Members of the public are reminded that selling and buying of contraband cigarettes are serious offences under the Customs Act. Singapore Customs will not hesitate to charge offenders in court. For a packet of duty-unpaid cigarettes, buyers stand to face a minimum fine of \$200 or prosecution in court.

7 Buying, selling, conveying, delivering, storing, keeping, having in possession or dealing with contraband cigarettes are serious offences under the Customs. Stiff penalties are imposed for such offences. On conviction by the court, offenders can be jailed for up to 2 years, as well as being fined. The vehicles used in the commission of the offence are also liable to forfeiture.

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

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