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HIGH-SPEED CHASE CUTS OFF DELIVERY OF CONTRABAND CIGARETTES

Case 1

Since early January 2008, a group of foreigners have been acting as runners for a syndicate selling duty-unpaid cigarettes in Singapore. Unknown to them, the days of their illegal activities were numbered as the Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA) had been monitoring them.

2. On 18 January 2008, ICA officers and their partners in Singapore Customs (SC) decided to launch an operation to nab them. At around 6.30pm, two female suspects were spotted loitering at a multi-storey car park at Woodlands Circle. They were approaching two men who were arriving in a taxi. At this juncture, the officers moved in to intercept all four of them. The two men decided to run, but one of them was stopped. The other man tried to jump down from the second level of the multi-storey car park, but was ambushed by the SC officers waiting for him at the ground level.

3. The first three persons are China nationals, while the fourth is a Bangladeshi. The two women were found to be overstayers, while the men were work permit holders. Two boxes, containing 149 cartons of contraband cigarettes were recovered. The total market value of the cigarettes is estimated to be S\$13,410. The duty and Goods and Services Tax involved are estimated to be S\$11,429.

4. SC is currently investigating the case.

Case 2

5. The vigilant ICA officers uncovered yet another attempt to smuggle duty-unpaid cigarettes into Singapore.

6. On 18 January 2008 at around 7.10pm, a secret compartment under the rear passenger seat of a Malaysia-registered car was detected in the course of routine checks at the Woodlands Checkpoint. The car was driven by a lone Malaysian, aged 19. A total of 40 cartons and 270 packets of cigarettes were retrieved from the secret compartment. The total market value of the cigarettes is estimated to be S\$6,120. The duty and Goods and Services Tax involved are estimated to be \$5,215.

7. The case has been handed over to SC for investigations.

Penalties

Storing, possession, conveying or dealing in contraband cigarettes

8. SC warns that buying, selling, conveying, delivering, storing, keeping, having in possession or dealing with contraband cigarettes are serious offences under the Customs and GST Acts. Stiff penalties are imposed for such offences. On conviction by the Court, offenders can be jailed as well as fined. The vehicles used in the commission of the offence are also liable to forfeiture. The public are also advised against buying duty-unpaid cigarettes. For a packet of duty-unpaid cigarettes, buyers stand to face a minimum fine of up to \$500 or prosecution in Court.

Immigration offences

9. ICA takes a serious view of attempts by foreigners to overstay or enter Singapore illegally. Under the Immigration Act, the penalties for overstaying or illegal entry are a jail term of up to six months plus a minimum of three strokes of the cane.

Hotline for illegal activities involving contraband cigarettes

10. Members of the public with information on any illegal activities involving duty-unpaid cigarettes are encouraged to contact the Customs toll-free hotline on 1800-2330000.

**ISSUED BY: SINGAPORE CUSTOMS
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