



OPERATION “MORNING WHEELER” - BUS DRIVER NABBED WITH CONTRABAND CIGARETTES HIDDEN IN SECRET COMPARTMENT

Singapore Customs and the Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA) jointly conducted an early morning operation on 31 August 2005 at Woodlands Checkpoint. The operation, code-named “Morning Wheeler”, was initiated by Singapore Customs based on information gathered that a factory bus, with contraband cigarettes hidden in specially-constructed compartments, would be arriving at Woodlands Checkpoint that morning.

At about 4.20 am on 31 August 2005, officers spotted the targeted Malaysian-registered factory bus arriving at the checkpoint. There were no passengers on board. Officers conducted a thorough check on the bus. However no unusual openings or compartments were detected on floorboard. ICA officers then drilled a hole on the floorboard and with the aid of the optical fibrescope, they detected a 15 cm secret compartment underneath the floorboard. The floorboard was subsequently pried open and a total of 570 cartons of assorted brands of cigarettes were found in the compartment.

The male Chinese Malaysian bus driver, aged 30, was arrested and the cigarettes seized. The driver admitted that he has been working for a Malaysian cigarette smuggling syndicate for about a month. He was paid \$200 for each delivery made.

The duty and GST payable on the contraband cigarettes totalled \$42,693. The estimated market value was \$62,700. The offender will be charged in court tomorrow. If found guilty, he can be fined up to a maximum of 20 times the amount of tax evaded and/or imprisonment.

As our country’s first line of defence against terrorist threats, ICA has a duty to ensure the security and safety of Singapore. We have tightened our security checks on passengers and vehicles at the checkpoints to prevent attempts to smuggle in undesirable persons, drugs, weapons, explosives and other contraband. We would like to advise the public against smuggling unlawful goods into Singapore.

Singapore Customs takes a serious view of any attempt to evade duty and tax and will not hesitate to prosecute offenders in court. Singapore Customs will continue work with other enforcement agencies and conduct joint operations to flush out such smuggling activities. Storing, possession, conveying or dealing with any duty-unpaid cigarettes are offences under the Customs Act. Upon conviction by the court, first time offenders can be fined up to a maximum of 20 times the amount of tax evaded. For second or subsequent convictions, offenders can be jailed for up to 2 years, as well as being fined. The offenders also face further fines based on the amount of GST evaded.

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

Joint release by -
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