



## **SINGAPORE CUSTOMS MEDIA RELEASE**

### **WEEKEND STING OPERATIONS – 2 ILLEGAL STORES CRUSHED, 17 PERSONS ARRESTED, 96,700 PACKETS OF DUTY-UNPAID CIGARETTES AND 4 VEHICLES SEIZED**

Singapore Customs smashed two cigarettes syndicates last weekend consecutively on Friday, 25 July and Sunday 27 July 2008. A total of 96,700 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes were seized in the operations, and 17 persons (12 Singaporeans and five Indonesians) were arrested. The cigarettes seized were worth over \$1 million and the amount of duty and GST evaded totaled \$741,200. Also seized were four vehicles – one lorry, one van and two cars during the operation.

#### **Case on 25 July 2008**

2 On 25 July 2008, Singapore Customs officers keeping watch on a warehouse at Joo Seng Road saw a van arriving at 3.45 pm. Boxes suspected to contain duty-unpaid cigarettes were quickly loaded onto the van. Subsequently, a team of officers trailed the van to a car park at Aljunied Road. Officers moved in and found 15,000 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes in van. The van driver and an attendant were arrested. The team of officers at Joo Seng Road also went into action and stormed the warehouse. A further 37,340 packets of cigarettes were seized and four men in the warehouse were arrested. The cigarettes were packed in boxes within layers of plaster-like compounds.

3 Meanwhile, another team of officers raided a warehouse along Henderson Road and arrested four men and a woman. In the warehouse were five jumbo bags of plastic resins. On checking, officers found a total of 12,390 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes hidden in the five bags. From preliminary investigations, the woman arrested is suspected to be a key member of the cigarette smuggling syndicate. A follow-up raid was conducted at her residence at Tiong Bahru where documents and a computer were seized.

## **Case on 27 July 2008**

4 Singapore Customs officers mounted surveillance on a warehouse at Pandan Loop Industrial Complex. A man was observed busy talking on his handphone at the loading bay. Not long after, a lorry arrived at the warehouse loading bay and immediately, boxes suspected to be containing duty-unpaid cigarettes were loaded onto the lorry. Before it could drive off, officers intercepted the lorry. A total of 31,970 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes were found onboard the lorry. The driver and the man who was first observed making phone calls were arrested. It is believed that the latter was coordinating the smuggling operation.

5 Immediately after the above arrest, officers moved into the warehouse and caught four men unawares as they were in the midst of stacking wooden pallets and planks. A closer inspection of the pallets and planks revealed that the smugglers had slotted the contrabands in the hollow parts of the pallets and covered them with fitted planks. In order to retrieve the cigarettes from the pallets, the plank coverings had to be removed using drills. The four persons in the store were also detained for questioning.

6 Out of the 17 persons arrested, two (the persons in the van) had already been charged in Court on Monday 28 July 2008. The remaining 15 persons are now in remand to assist in investigations.

7 Singapore Customs 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, offenders can be jailed as well as fined. The vehicles used in the commission of such offence are also liable to be forfeited. The public are strongly advised not to buy duty-unpaid cigarettes. For possessing a packet of duty-unpaid cigarettes, an offender may face a minimum fine of \$500 or prosecution in court.

**ISSUED BY: SINGAPORE CUSTOMS (新加坡关税局) (KASTAM SINGAPURA)**

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**Plaster-like compounds used to conceal duty-unpaid cigarettes.**



**More than meets the eye! The packages concealed duty-unpaid cigarettes buried within the plaster.**



**Just a stack of harmless wooden pallets? Syndicates use these to hide and smuggle cigarettes.**



**Syndicates use the hollow compartments to hide cartons of duty-unpaid cigarettes. However, their devious attempts were foiled by Singapore Customs.**





**A total of 96,700 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes were seized during Singapore Customs' weekend sting operations.**