



IMMIGRATION & CHECKPOINTS AUTHORITY SINGAPORE CUSTOMS

JOINT NEWS RELEASE

EVEN THE TYRES ARE NOT SPARED!

Two seemingly innocuous vehicles – a blue bus and a white van – were parked at a secluded junction in the vicinity of Tampines Industrial Avenue 4. Two men and a woman seemed to be preoccupied with the vehicles. Two spare tyres and a few tools were also spotted lying on the road pavement. Did the trio need help to change the tyres? If they did, they should be relieved when others came to “render assistance”; or should they be thankful at all?

2. On Tuesday, 26 July 2011 at about 8pm, officers from the Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA) and Singapore Customs (SC) came face-to-face with the trio and their “innocent” tools of the trade. When questioned by the officers, they appeared apprehensive and started to perspire profusely. Suspecting that there could be some illicit activities going on, the alert and experienced officers conducted a thorough search on the Singapore-registered van. Their meticulous efforts paid off when a total of 602 packets of contraband cigarettes and 906 sachets of chewing tobacco were detected in the innocent-looking tyres. All three persons were immediately placed under arrest.



The two innocuous-looking vehicles

3. During the preliminary interview, the Malaysian bus driver, Murugan Ramasamy claimed that he was approached by a Malaysian Indian in Pontian, Johor Bahru who offered him RM200 if he agreed to transport a large spare tyre concealed with duty-unpaid cigarettes into Singapore using his Malaysian-registered bus. The 39-year-old man, who plies between Malaysia and Singapore conveying factory workers located around Tampines Avenue 5, accepted the offer as he was in financial difficulties. He also admitted that he pried open one of the spare tyres and retrieved the cigarettes with the help of the “receiver”.

4. The “receiver” was a 37-year-old Singaporean, S M Jahabardeen s/o Mohamed Ameendeen, who confessed to “owning” the contraband cigarettes found inside his van during the preliminary interview. He claimed that he had ordered the illicit cigarettes through a syndicate member in Johor Bahru, who told him that the contraband cigarettes would be placed in a large spare tyre and delivered to him by a driver. The driver would retrieve the items and transfer them into his van. When interviewed, the 38-year-old Fijian woman disclosed that the Singaporean was her boyfriend, and that he was responsible for the loot found in the van.



The tools used to pry open the spare tyre that was concealed with contraband cigarettes

5. The estimated duty and GST payable for the duty-unpaid cigarettes amounted to about S\$5,860 and S\$380 respectively. Murugan Ramasamy and S M Jahabardeen s/o Mohamed Ameendeen were charged in court on 28 July 2011.



Total exhibits seized (from left: contraband cigarettes; chewing tobacco)

6. The Singapore Customs takes a serious view on contraband cigarette activities and is monitoring the situation closely. 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 will be severely dealt with. Upon conviction by the court, first-time offenders can be fined up to 20 times the amount of duty evaded and liable for a jail term not

exceeding three years. Repeat offenders can be fined up to 40 times the amount of duty and GST evaded and/or jailed for up to six years. For every packet of illegal cigarettes, buyers may face a composition sum of at least \$500. The vehicles used in transporting the contraband will also be liable for forfeiture. Members of the public are encouraged to stay vigilant and report any information on evasion of duty or GST to the Singapore Customs Hotline at 1800-233 0000 or email to: customs_intelligence@customs.gov.sg.

7. Our borders are our first line of defence in safeguarding Singapore's security. 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 contrabands. The same methods of concealment used by contraband smugglers may be used by terrorists to smuggle arms and explosives to carry out attacks in Singapore. The enhanced security checks are critical to our nation's security.

**IMMIGRATION & CHECKPOINTS AUTHORITY
SINGAPORE CUSTOMS**

28 July 2011