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Illegal cig ring smoked out after Customs seizes stash

The Star, Malaysia



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SEREMBAN: An illicit cigarette syndicate with a wide distribution network has been crippled following the seizure of almost 9,000 cartons of the contraband and 15 vehicles in an operation in Klang.

State Customs director Mohammad Hafiz Ishak said his officers had carried out an operation in an oil palm estate in Kampung Air Hitam on Feb 22 where they found a lorry and 14 vehicles of various models in a secluded area.

"Upon checking, we found 8,750 cartons or 1.75 million white cigarettes and another 240 cartons or 28,800 clove cigarettes in the vehicles.

"The contraband and the vehicles, some of which were brand new, were subsequently seized," he told reporters at the state Customs office here yesterday.

Mohammad Hafiz said the seized cigarettes were worth some RM144,000 with unpaid duties totalling RM1.19mil.

He said the syndicate's modus operandi was to transport the illicit cigarettes to a secluded area and then distribute them to buyers.

"The cigarettes are in high demand as they are available at a much cheaper price.

"Some of these brands cost only RM5 a packet while the average price in the market is about RM17," he added.

Mohammad Hafiz said the seized cars were privately owned and had valid registrations.

"We know who the owners are and will be making some arrests soon," he added.

He also said that Customs officers found gadgets later identified as jamming devices in each of the vehicles.

"Syndicates would use the gadget so that raiding teams would not be able to communicate with one another within a certain radius.

"This is another tactic used by these syndicates as the returns from this illegal business are very lucrative."

To another question, he said the illegal cigarettes were believed to have been smuggled in from a neighbouring country.

"We believe the contraband was then transported to Klang after being smuggled in from a point along the east coast," he added.

The case is being investigated under Section 135(1)(d) of the Customs Act and Section 74(1)(a) of the Excise Act.

Offenders can be fined between 10 and 20 times the value of the goods or between RM100,000 and RM500,000, whichever is higher, or jailed between six months and five years or both, upon conviction.



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SUMMARIES

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