|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| HMRC_327_AW |  |  |
|  |  |  |

***News Release***

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | For the attention of **News Desks** | | No of pages: 4 | |  |
|  | Date: | 26 July 2019 | Ref: | SE 05.19 |  |

**Gang that flooded Kent with illegal cigarettes jailed for more than 16 years**

A gang of nine men who flooded Kent with millions of illegal cigarettes and sold them for just £3 a pack in shops have been jailed for a total of 16 years and nine months.

The gang, led by Harem Kamishi, 33, of Tunbridge Wells, evaded £667,000 in duty and hid illicit cigarettes and tobacco in underground compartments that were opened with car key-style fobs. (Video available on request).

They were caught after an investigation by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), who worked with Kent Police, Medway Trading Standards and Kent Trading Standards to seize 2.9 million cigarettes and 481 kilograms of tobacco between 2009 and 2017.

The gang supplied and distributed illegal cigarettes and tobacco to a network of convenience shops in Margate, Gravesend, Chatham, Ramsgate, Dartford, Gillingham and Maidstone.

Ben Moore, Assistant Director, Fraud Investigation Service, HMRC, said:

“These men have undermined legitimate hard working shop owners who serve their communities and pay their taxes. They undercut their competitors, and have unashamedly contributed to the £1.8 billion annual tax gap caused by the illegal trade in cigarettes and tobacco.

“We worked in partnership with Kent Police, Kent Trading Standards and the Crown Prosecution Service to uncover the extent of this scam and we are pleased the courts have recognised the seriousness of this offending.

“Tax fraud steals money from our public services that we all rely on, day in day out. Anyone with information about suspected tax fraud can report it to HMRC [online](https://www.gov.uk/report-an-unregistered-trader-or-business) or call our Fraud Hotline on 0800 788 887.”

Clive Phillips, Complex Investigations Operations Manager, Kent County Council Trading Standards, said: “A large number of our officers have been involved in the inspection of premises, seizure of large quantities of illicit tobacco, interviews of suspects and provision of evidence at Crown Court hearings.

“The sale of illicit tobacco significantly undermines legitimate businesses and funds organised crime - this result sends a clear messages to criminal gangs that we will continue to work with all of our enforcement partners in stamping out this crime. We congratulate HMRC on this fantastic result for the community of Kent.”

Kim Holden of the Crown Prosecution Service said: “The network used increasingly elaborate methods to hide the smuggled cigarettes and tobacco, knowing what they were doing was completely outside the law. They treated their criminal activity like a game of hide and seek, but this was a game they were always destined to lose.

“The corrupt shopkeepers were driven by deception, creating increasingly complicated devices to conceal their haul of untaxed cigarettes and tobacco. Even when there was a wealth of evidence against them, the network still tried to deny their criminality, lies which we were able to disprove throughout the trials.”

The illicit tobacco was found in shops, vehicles, lock up garages and houses. It was even hidden in under-the-counter compartments which could only be opened by activating a car key-style fob.

Details of all the convictions can only now be revealed after the final two gang members were jailed after a second trial at Southwark Crown Court.

Shop workers Yassir Karim, 27, and Mohammed Rashid Mahmoud, 24, both of Gravesend, worked shifts at convenience stores in the town and sold illicit tobacco under-the-counter.

Karim was sentenced to do 90 hours unpaid work and pay court costs of £250, and Mahmoud was given a 24-week jail term, suspended for 12 months, and 200 hours unpaid work at Southwark Crown Court today (26 July 2019).

Confiscation proceedings are underway against Harem Kamishi, Dyar Jalal Hama, Mohamad Hassan Mohamad, Dani Adam and Shamal Mohammed Najib.

**Notes for Editors**

1. All nine defendants were charged with being knowingly concerned in the fraudulent evasion of duty on cigarettes and tobacco, contrary to s.170 (2) of the Customs & Excise Management Act (1979).
2. The trials and sentencings were all held at Southwark Crown Court in London between April 2019 and July 2019.
3. The first trial began on 23 April 2019 at and concluded on 20 June 2019. The jury returned guilty verdicts for five men. They were all sentenced on 26 June 2019:
   1. Harem Kamishi, (DOB 15/06/1986), of Sidney Close, Tunbridge Wells, was jailed for four years and three months.
   2. Mohamad Hassan Mohamad (DOB 07/05/1983), of Princes Road, Gravesend, was jailed for three years and six months.
   3. Shamal Mohammed Najib (DOB 01/01/1975), of St Patricks Gardens, Gravesend, was jailed for three years and nine months.
   4. Dani Adam (formerly known as Komar Ali Mohammed), (DOB 01/01/1990), of Colinton Place, Dundee, Scotland, was jailed for two years and three months.
   5. Dyar Jalal Hama (formerly known as Star Ali Fatah), (DOB 01/01/1986), of St Patricks Gardens, Gravesend, was jailed for three years.
4. The second trial began on 1 July 2019. Mohammed Rashid Mahmoud had pleaded guilty at an earlier hearing and on 4 July 2019, the other three defendants pleaded guilty and two were sentenced as follows:
5. Aryan Majid Karim, (DOB 01/01/1984), of Douglas Avenue, Maidstone, was fined £360 and ordered to pay £100 costs.
6. Karwan Tahseen Omar, (DOB 15/02/1991), of East Hill, Dartford, was ordered to complete 190 hours community service.
7. At Southwark Crown Court today (26 July 2019):
8. Yassir Karim, (DOB 14/05/1992), of Chantry Court, Gordon Place, Gravesend, was sentenced to do 90 hours of unpaid work and pay £250 in costs.
9. Mohammed Rashid Mahmoud (02/03/1995), of Raphael Road, Gravesend, was sentenced to 24 weeks imprisonment, suspended for 12 months, plus 200 hours of unpaid work.
10. Images are available of the men given jail terms and of the concealed cigarettes and tobacco on mynewsdesk here: <https://www.mynewsdesk.com/uk/hm-revenue-customs-hmrc/pressreleases/gang-that-flooded-kent-with-illegal-cigarettes-jailed-for-more-than-16-years-2901357>
11. A video clip of a remote controlled key fob being used to operate a hidden under-the-counter compartment which rises out of the floor is available on request.
12. Information on the tax gap can be found at HMRC’s Measuring Tax Gaps 2019 edition at: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/810818/Measuring_tax_gaps_2019_edition.pdf>
13. Follow HMRC’s Press Office on Twitter @HMRCpressoffice.

**Issued by HM Revenue & Customs Press Office**

**Press enquiries only please contact:**

Roger Kasper

Tel: 03000 525110 / 07388 955843

Email: [roger.kasper@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:roger.kasper@hmrc.gsi.gov.uk)

Out of hours

Tel: 07860 359 544

**Website** [www.hmrc.gov.uk](http://www.hmrc.gov.uk)