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**HUSBAND AND WIFE OWNERS OF QUEENS VIDEO STORE**  
**CHARGED IN CIGARETTE TAX SCHEME**

*Over 750 Cartons of Cigarettes Seized*

Queens County District Attorney Richard A. Brown today announced that a joint investigation involving his Special Proceedings Bureau, United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the Postal Inspection Service has resulted in the arrest of a Woodhaven couple for engaging in the sale of untaxed cigarettes at their video store and the seizure of more than 750 cartons of illegal, untaxed cigarettes.

District Attorney Brown said, "Cigarette bootlegging is a multi-million dollar business that rips off the public both by flooding the marketplace with inferior products – oftentimes containing dangerously high levels of tar and nicotine – while at the same time fueling an underground economy that does not pay much-needed state and local sales taxes."

CBP Director of Field Operations Robert E. Perez said, "The explosion of Internet commerce poses an ever-increasing safety threat when counterfeit, substandard and illegal goods infiltrate the legitimate U.S. commerce. Customs and Border Protection Officers have been working closely on this case with the U.S. Postal Inspectors and the Queens District Attorney's office to stem the flow of these dangerous products and bring the perpetrators who profit from these smuggling activities to justice."

U.S. Postal Inspector in Charge of the NY Division, Ronald J. Verrochio said, "Let these arrests serve as a warning to others who think they can use the U.S. Mail as a component of their illegal enterprises. Just like today's defendants, their ill-gotten gains will eventually go up in smoke. I commend the team of District Attorney Detectives, Customs Agents and Postal Inspectors who assisted in this investigation."

District Attorney Brown identified the defendants as Masoom Uddin, 57, and his wife, Khaleda Uddin, 36, of 86-19 103<sup>rd</sup> Avenue. The Uddins, who own The Video Shop, located at 101<sup>st</sup> Avenue and 76<sup>th</sup> Street in South Ozone Park, were arraigned on Saturday, August 23, 2008, before Queens Criminal Court Judge Dorothy Chin-Brandt on a complaint charging each of them with 3,760 counts of first-degree criminal possession of a forged instrument and three counts of violating the New York State tax law. Judge Chin-Brandt set bail for each defendant at \$20,000 (with a bail sufficiency hearing). The defendants, who face up to fifteen years in prison if convicted, were ordered to return to court on September 5, 2008.

District Attorney Brown said that the investigation began on August 12, 2008, when U.S. Customs and Border Protection officers at John F. Kennedy International Airport intercepted at least fifteen cartons of untaxed cigarettes from Karachi, Pakistan. Each carton was individually wrapped in cellophane and contained no tax stamps. The mail package allegedly listed the name and home address of Masoom Uddin as the recipient of the cigarettes.

According to the charges, a U.S. Postal Inspector, acting in an undercover capacity delivered the cigarette cartons to the Uddins' residence on the morning of Friday, August 22, 2008. It is alleged that Masoom Uddin answered the door, stated the package was for him and signed for the cartons. Shortly thereafter that day, court-authorized search warrants were executed at the Uddins' residence and their place of business. At the time the warrants were being executed it is alleged that Masoom Uddin was observed in the rear of his residence attempting to enter a 2007 Acura MDX that contained a plastic bag holding seven cartons of counterfeit stamped cigarettes. An additional 700 cartons of untaxed cigarettes – more than half of which contained forged tax stamps – were allegedly recovered from two upstairs bedrooms. Additional cartons and loose packs of untaxed cigarettes were recovered from the Uddins' video store.

District Attorney Brown said that all cigarette packages sold in New York City must bear a joint New York City/New York State tax stamp and only a licensed stamping agent can possess untaxed cigarettes and affix the tax stamp on the packages. Stamping agents use a stamping machine that affixes the tax stamp on the individual cigarette packs. The way the process works is that the agent places a full master case into the machine, the machine cuts the master case in half and the machine opens each individual carton and stamps each individual packs. Cigarette cartons wrapped in cellophane – such as those recovered at JFK Airport – would interfere with the machine's ability to lift a carton's flap. As a result, legal cigarette cartons that are being sent to a licensed stamping agent are not wrapped in cellophane.

At the time of his arrest, Masoom Uddin allegedly told investigators, "If somebody comes to me to sell me these cigarettes cheap, why shouldn't I sell them to make money."

The investigation was conducted by Detective David Gilbert, of the District Attorney's NYPD Squad under the supervision of Captain John F. Zanfardino; Detective Joseph Brancaccio, of the District Attorney's Detective Bureau, under the supervision of Lawrence J. Festa, Chief Investigator, and Albert D. Velardi, Deputy Chief Investigator; Customs Inspector Ralph Fasano; and United States Postal Inspector A.J. Lall, under the supervision of Richard Gutierrez, Team Leader of Prohibitive Mail.

Assistant District Attorneys Andrew H. Kaufman and Charles J. Balvin, of the District Attorney's Special Proceedings Bureau, is prosecuting the case under the supervision of Assistant District Attorneys Anthony M. Communiello, Bureau Chief, and Oscar W. Ruiz, Deputy Bureau Chief, and the overall supervision of Executive District Attorney for Investigations Peter A. Crusco and Deputy Executive Assistant District Attorney for Investigations Linda M. Cantoni.

It should be noted that criminal charges are merely an accusation and that defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty.

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**Note to Editors: Press release e-version posted at [www.queensda.org](http://www.queensda.org).**