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## Two arrested over B40m abortion pill racket

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The Department of Special Investigation (DSI) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have caught two men thought to have made 40 million baht selling illegal abortion pills online.

Somchai Sunancharoen, 48, and Viroj Ungkurawanich, 30, were arrested at a house in Muang district in Nakhon Pathom

province on Wednesday with 2,008 Cytolog and Cytotec pills in their possession. The pair also had 120 parcels ready to post to customers containing pills with an estimated value of one million baht.

Authorities found empty boxes for 50,000 tablets that had already been sent to customers, worth 30 million baht.

The case was revealed by the two agencies on Thursday.

The medicines were seized at Mr Somchai's house, which was also being used as a distribution centre for the pills, DSI chief Tarit Pengdith said.

Mr Viroj was responsible for selling the drugs on nine websites, he added. The sites used by the men were rongbhayabalkhlongtan.com, sukhumvit12.com, yatamtank.com, tamtanksure.com, clinicsuporn.com, clinicsomsak.com, clinicbancha.com, tanksabai.com and clinicnarin.com.

The websites operated for more than a year and lured more than 20,000 buyers across the country who ordered the pills online, Mr Tarit said. Many customers had addresses near university campuses, he added.

According to information still live on the clinicbancha.com website on Thursday, Cytotec and Cytolog retail at 500 baht per pill. The website provides a phone number for making orders and promises to deliver the medicines in two days by express mail.

The DSI is working with the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology to close the websites.

The DSI and FDA carried out surveillance of the websites for seven months as part of the operation to arrest the two men.

The two netted around four million baht a month from the illicit business, Mr Tarit added.

They were charged on two counts - violating the Computer Crime Act and selling drugs without authorisation. The pair could face further charges on import-tax evasion and money laundering.

Pharmacist Prapon Antrakul said the drugs were only approved for sale by the FDA to prevent gastric ulcers. Using the tablets to induce abortion required special approval from doctors since patients risk death from heavy bleeding, he warned.

Abortion is illegal in Thailand. A public health survey of 101 hospitals in 2011 found one-third of miscarriages were caused by botched abortions.

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