



## SINGAPORE CUSTOMS MEDIA RELEASE

### ENFORCEMENT IS A KEY PRIORITY, SAYS SINGAPORE CUSTOMS

1 In year 2006, Singapore Customs crushed more cigarette smuggling cases, and arrested more offenders. It will continue to step up efforts to contain cigarette smuggling, and encourage greater public involvement to fight smuggling collectively.

#### 2 Operations against Cigarette Smuggling

2.1 In year 2006, 5.3 million packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes with duty and GST value of \$37.6 million were seized. This is an increase of 141% over 2005.

<b>Table 1</b>	<b>Duty-unpaid Cigarettes Seized (in packets)</b>	
2005	2,200,000	<b>141%</b> 
2006	5,300,000	

<b>Table 2</b>	<b>Total Duty and GST Involved</b>	
2005	\$15,600,000	<b>141%</b> 
2006	\$37,600,000	

<b>Table 3</b>	<b>Total Number of Offenders</b>					
	<b>No. of Persons Arrested and Charged</b>		<b>No. of Persons with Offences Compounded</b>		<b>Total No. of Offenders</b>	
2005	807	<b>47%</b>	5,944	<b>36%</b>	6,751	<b>37%</b>
2006	1,186		8,081		9,267	

2.2 The overall number of persons caught for cigarette offences saw a 37% increase from 6,751 in 2005 to 9,267 in 2006. Of these, 1,186 were arrested and charged in Court while 8,081 had their offences compounded, an increase of 47% and 36% respectively over that of 2005. About 57% of the persons caught were foreigners, some of whom were also immigration offenders. Stiff penalties are imposed for such offences. The highest court

sentence for Customs offences meted out in 2006 was three and a half years jail term. Under the Customs Act, forfeiture of a vehicle is mandatory if the Court is satisfied that it was used in commission of an offence. In 2006, a total of 256 vehicles that were used in the commission of offences involving contraband cigarettes were forfeited by the Court.

2.3 Besides going after illegal suppliers, Singapore Customs also stepped up enforcement efforts against local peddlers and consumers who buy contrabands. In 2006, special enforcement teams were formed to focus on illegal street peddlers and end-consumers who buy contrabands. In 2006, a total of 763 illegal peddlers and 2,268 buyers were caught. For every packet of duty-unpaid cigarettes, buyers face a minimum composition sum of \$200 or prosecution in Court.

2.4 Since August 2006, Singapore Customs has launched a public education programme to complement enforcement efforts. In all, 85 talks and road shows were conducted. Some 30,000 posters printed in various foreign languages were distributed to explain the consequences of selling or consuming contraband cigarettes and to invite tip-offs from the public. The posters were displayed at workers' dormitories, factories and shipyards, HDB estates, bus stops, food and other retail outlets.

2.5 Thanks to public education efforts, the number of public tip-offs received has increased more than three times – over 100 a month in 2006, compared to 30 a month a year ago. The Singapore Customs hotline is 1800-2330000.

2.6 Singapore Customs will continue to adopt a multi-pronged approach to curb cigarette smuggling. This includes increasing manpower resources to strengthen enforcement against syndicates, peddlers and consumers, as well as engaging the community through public education, outreach and awareness programmes.

### **3 Enforcement Will Remain SC's Key Priority**

3.1 Mr Teo Eng Cheong, the Director-General of Singapore Customs, commented, "Maintaining a strong enforcement against cigarette smugglers will remain our key priority. Offenders should be warned about the severe consequences of selling, buying or smoking contraband cigarettes".

**End of Release**

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**For media queries, please contact the following**

Mrs Chew Lai Leng, Head Corporate Communications

DID: 6355 2129 Email: [woon\\_lai\\_leng@customs.gov.sg](mailto:woon_lai_leng@customs.gov.sg)

Victor Seah, Corporate Communications Officer

DID: 6335 2127 Email: [victor\\_seah@customs.gov.sg](mailto:victor_seah@customs.gov.sg)

## HIGHLIGHTS OF INTERESTING CASES

### **Two Syndicates Smashed – 17 Arrested, and Over 100,000 Packets Contraband Cigarettes, 15,000 Uncensored/Obscene VCDs and Five Vehicles Seized**

An island-wide raid on 20 April 2006 resulted in the dismantling of two syndicates dealing in contraband cigarettes and uncensored VCDs. When the operation ended at about 10 pm, 17 persons were arrested - seven male Singaporeans, four male Chinese nationals and six female Chinese nationals. All the Chinese nationals were over-stayers. Altogether 102,395 packets duty-unpaid cigarettes, over 15,000 uncensored and obscene optical discs and five vehicles were seized. The estimated market value of the contraband cigarettes is \$922,000 and the total duty and GST payable is \$766,938. Among those arrested were three taxi drivers. Information gathered from previous cases indicated that the taxi drivers were part of the illicit distribution network for cigarette smuggling rings. They had capitalised on the high mobility of the taxi drivers for their distribution network. The offenders pleaded guilty to the Customs offences and were given between eight months to three years jail sentence.

### **Singapore Customs Officers Arrested Six Men and Seized 48,000 Packets Duty-unpaid Cigarettes from Lorry Carrying Vegetables**

On 3 June 2006, Singapore Customs officers raided a unit at Bukit Batok industrial area and arrested four male Singaporeans and two male Malaysians. A total of 48,000 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes were seized from the unit. The cigarettes were hidden amongst the boxes and baskets of vegetables on a Malaysian registered lorry. The duty and GST on the seized cigarettes were \$359,520. The value of the contraband cigarettes was estimated at \$432,000. Investigation revealed that the lorry had stopped by the unit to discharge the contraband cigarettes before proceeding to the Pasir Panjang Wholesale Centre to deliver the vegetables. All six men pleaded guilty to the customs offences and served two years jail term each.

### **Smuggler Nabbed after Dramatic Car Chase**

On 24 January 2006, Singapore Customs officers arrested a 46-year-old Singaporean man after a car chase and a crash through the cash-card barrier at the Tampines Community Centre. In his lorry, the officers found 36,000 packets duty-unpaid cigarettes. Later in the afternoon, a related warehouse was raided, at which another 86,000 packets of contraband cigarettes were found. The cigarettes worth over \$1.1 million were smuggled in by air and falsely declared as air-conditioner parts. The man pleaded guilty to the customs and traffic offences, and he was sentenced to four years eight months jail by the Court.

### **Undeclared Cigars Lands Man to \$25,000 Court Fine**

On 13 October 2006, Singapore Customs officers arrested a man who had arranged with his friend overseas to send cigars to him via parcel post with intention of evading payment of duty and GST. He paid Court fines totaling \$25,000.

### **Contraband Cigarette Dealers Nabbed**

Following the arrest of a cigarette smuggler at Woodlands Checkpoint on 27 March 2006, Singapore Customs officers conducted a stakeout at a Sungei Kadut factory. Three men including the ring leader were subsequently arrested. One of the men spotted the officers

from afar and tried to escape on his motorbike. But he was soon intercepted and arrested. Another 364 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes were found in the factory. The men were sentenced to nine months' jail.