



PRESS RELEASE

SINGAPORE CUSTOMS ARRESTED 7 MEN AND SEIZED \$1.3 MILLION WORTH OF DUTY-UNPAID CIGARETTES FROM A WAREHOUSE IN CLEMENTI

On 8 October 2006, Singapore Customs officers seized 121,000 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes worth over \$1.3 million in a covert operation at a warehouse in Clementi Loop. The duty and GST on the seized cigarettes are \$851,840 and \$54,450 respectively. Seven men (Singaporeans, aged between 29 and 54) were arrested.

2 From a tip-off about illegal activities involving contraband cigarettes, Singapore Customs officers narrowed its target to a self-storage warehouse facility along Clementi Loop. Immediately, officers took up surveillance at the vicinity. On 7 October 2006, a suspect container entered the cargo bay of the warehouse vicinity.

3 On 8 October 2006, at about 7.45 am, two men were seen opening the doors of the suspect container. They started unloading boxes from the container and stacking them on the cargo platform. The officers continued to keep watch and their patience finally paid off. At about 10 am, five vehicles (three trucks, a van and a car) were seen simultaneously entering the loading bay. Six men alighted from the vehicles and began assisting to load the boxes onto one of the trucks. When fully loaded, the truck began to move out. At this point, the officers moved in. One of the suspects quickly ran into his car and drove off towards the exit gate. At the exit gate, the driver was ordered to stop but instead, he accelerated towards the Customs blockade nearly running down an officer who was swift enough to jump aside. It then crashed onto the left-rear corner of a Customs car, and escaped. Investigations are underway to track down the suspect.

4 Meanwhile, other Customs officers subdued and arrested the remaining seven men. Besides cigarettes, officers also found cartons of rattan baskets. Preliminary investigation revealed that the rattan baskets were stacked in the front of the container to mask the boxes of duty-unpaid cigarettes. A total of 12,100 cartons (or 121,000 packets) of duty-unpaid cigarettes worth more than \$1.3 million were found stashed away behind cartons of rattan baskets. The total duty and GST payable amounted to \$906,290. The men will be charged in court on 10 October 2006.

5 Buying, selling, conveying, delivering, storing, keeping, having in possession or dealing with contraband cigarettes are serious offences under the Customs. Stiff penalties are imposed for such offences. On conviction by the court, offenders can be jailed for up to 2 years, as well as being fined. The vehicles used in the commission of the offence are also liable to forfeiture. Members of the public are reminded that selling and buying of contraband cigarettes are serious offences under the Customs Act. Singapore Customs will not hesitate

to charge offenders in court. For a packet of duty-unpaid cigarettes, buyers stand to face a minimum fine of \$200 or prosecution in court.

6 Members of the public with information on smuggling activities or evasion of customs duty or GST can contact the Singapore Customs Intelligence Hotline on 1800-2330000 or email to customs_intelligence@customs.gov.sg