

JOINT PRESS RELEASE

10 ARRESTED AND 226,000 PACKETS CONTRABAND CIGARETTES SEIZED IN SINGAPORE CUSTOMS & ICA JOINT OPERATION – THE LARGEST HAUL IN 2007

A joint enforcement action by Singapore Customs and the Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA) resulted in the seizure of 226,000 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes on 7 April 2007. The haul worth over \$2 million is so far the largest in 2007. The duty and GST on the seized cigarettes amounted to \$1,693,000. Altogether, 10 men (nine Singaporeans and a Malaysian, aged between 26 and 48) believed to be members of a cigarette smuggling syndicate were arrested. Also seized were one bonded truck and a 20 footer container.

2 ICA officers at Tanjong Pagar Ports Command targeted a 20-foot container for clearance check. When the container was trucked out at PSA Gate 1 on 5 April 2007 at about 12 midnight, ICA officers immediately referred it to the Tanjong Pagar Scanning Station for radiographic scanning. Radiographic scanning revealed to ICA officers that the images were consistent with that of cigarettes. The container was immediately directed for more thorough checks. Opening up the container, ICA officers found contraband cigarettes hidden within. Singapore Customs officers were immediately alerted and the case was handed over to them.

3 Meanwhile, a team of Singapore Customs officers took up position at the industrial area in Mandai. The officers kept surveillance of the container, waiting for someone to take delivery of the goods. The wait lasted about 36 hours - on 7 April at about 7 in the morning, 10 men arrived in a bonded truck and a van. Immediately, the men jumped into action. Once the container doors were opened, six men quickly unloaded boxes from the container onto the bonded truck while two others kept watch - obviously on the look-out for any Customs officers. The remaining two were on board the bonded truck, all ready to drive off once the loading was completed. In one swift act, Singapore Customs officers moved in from various directions and netted all but two of the men. Some put up a struggle but were soon subdued. The two who ran off were also apprehended, thanks to alert members of the public who reported their hiding places to the officers. All the 10 men were arrested and charged in court on 9 April 2007 for Customs offences. The case has been adjourned for Pre-Trial Conference on 16 April 2007.

4 Singapore Customs warns that buying, selling, conveying, delivering, storing, keeping, having in possession or dealing with contraband cigarettes are serious offences under the Customs and GST Acts. Stiff penalties are imposed for such offences. On conviction by the court, offenders can be jailed as well as fined. The vehicles used in the commission of the offence are also liable to forfeiture. The public are also advised against buying duty-unpaid cigarettes. For every packet of duty-

unpaid cigarettes, buyers stand to face a minimum fine of \$200 or prosecution in court.

5 As Singapore's first line of defence against terrorist threats, ICA has a duty to ensure the security and safety of Singapore. ICA has tightened security checks on passengers and vehicles at the checkpoints to prevent attempts to smuggle in undesirable persons, drugs, weapons, explosives and other contraband. ICA would like to advise the public against smuggling unlawful goods into Singapore.

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

ISSUED BY: SINGAPORE CUSTOMS
IMMIGRATION & CHECKPOINTS AUTHORITY

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