



JOINT PRESS RELEASE

TOYS USED AS COVERLOAD TO CONCEAL 3,000,000 STICKS OF DUTY-UNPAID CIGARETTES

On 14 November 2006, in a joint operation by Singapore Customs and Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA), six male Singaporeans were arrested in a raid at a unit at Noble Building, 49 Tannery Lane. A total of 3,000,000 sticks of duty-unpaid cigarettes and 2,145 boxes of toys were seized from a container. The duty and GST on the seized cigarettes are \$1,056,000 and \$67,500 respectively. The street value of the seized cigarettes is estimated at \$1.5 million.

2 On 14 November 2006, at about 2 a.m., a 20-footer container was diverted to Tanjong Pagar Scanning Station for radiographic scanning by VACIS (Vehicle And Cargo Inspection System). Upon analysis of the image taken of the container, ICA officers were suspicious of the goods inside the container and decided to conduct physical inspections on them. ICA officers opened some of the packages and found contraband cigarettes hidden inside. Immediately, ICA alerted Singapore Customs for follow-up operation. Officers of Singapore Customs took up surveillance at the vicinity of the loading/unloading bay of Noble Building, 49 Tannery Lane where the container was parked.

3 Officers of Singapore Customs continued to keep watch and at about 11.10 a.m., six men arrived and began to unload boxes from the container. The boxes were carried into a store in front of the loading/unloading bay. In the midst of unloading, the Customs officers moved in. The officers found boxes of cigarettes and toys. The six men were arrested. Investigation revealed that the boxes of toys were stacked in front of the container to mask the boxes of duty-unpaid cigarettes. A total of 15,000 cartons (or 3 million sticks) of duty-unpaid cigarettes worth \$1.5 million were stashed away behind 2,145 boxes of toys. All the six admitted they were involved in unloading of the cigarettes. The six arrested persons would be charged in Court on 16 November 2006 for customs offences.

4 Being the guardian of Singapore's checkpoints, ICA is acutely aware that our borders are the first line of defence in safeguarding Singapore's security against possible terrorist attacks. The increased security checks at all our checkpoints are critical to our nation's security, especially since terrorism remains a clear and present threat to Singapore. ICA now conducts 100 per cent checks on persons, cargo and conveyances that pass through our checkpoints.

5 Singapore Customs warns that 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 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 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