SINGAPORE CUSTOMS MAGAZINE

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Virtual meetings with other Customs administrations on initiatives to facilitate trade



FEATURES

Singapore's Electronic Transactions Act amended to provide legal validity to electronic Bills of Lading and other Electronic Transferable Records



SPOTLIGHT

When buying duty-unpaid cigarettes comes with a hefty price tag... Think twice!



NEWS

Digital Trade Services on the Networked Trade Platform

CONTENTS

FEATURES

- 01 Virtual meetings with other Customs administrations on initiatives to facilitate trade
- 02 Singapore's Electronic Transactions Act amended to provide legal validity to electronic Bills of Lading and other Electronic Transferable Records
- 06 Case files: Enforcement Highlights

SPOTLIGHT

04 When buying duty-unpaid cigarettes comes with a hefty price tag... Think twice!

NEWS

- 07 Digital Trade Services on the Networked Trade Platform
- Safeguard against fraud with Trader 07 **Notification Service**
- 08 Industry outreach on trade facilitation initiatives

DO YOU KNOW?

09 GST extended to low-value goods from 1 January 2023

TRAINING CALENDAR

10 Training Calendar



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With the emergence of several clusters of COVID-19 infections in recent months, Singapore went into Phase 2 (Heightened Alert) in May 2021, and adopted a calibrated reopening to Phase 3 (Heightened Alert) a month later.

Amidst COVID-19, a key role of Customs administrations worldwide is to promote economic recovery through trade facilitation. Find out more about Singapore Customs' efforts in this area on the next page.

The pandemic has also hastened the push towards digitalisation.

In March 2021, Singapore's Electronic Transactions Act was amended to provide legal validity to electronic Bills of Lading and other Electronic Transferable Records. Read more on pages 2 and 3, in a guest article by the Infocomm Media Development Authority, and the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore.

With the Digital Trade Services on the Networked Trade Platform (NTP), traders can also explore another way of digitally connecting and exchanging data with service providers on the NTP. More details on page 7.

On the enforcement front, Singapore Customs continues to keep up its operations against illicit duty-unpaid cigarette activities. Our inSYNC reporter tagged along a few of such operations in April 2021, and reveals what happened behind the scenes (pages 4 and 5).

We hope you enjoy reading this issue of inSYNC, and stay safe.

TAN XIAN LIN AND ISABEL CHIA Editors

FEATURES

Virtual meetings with other Customs administrations on initiatives to facilitate trade

••• Amidst COVID-19, Customs administrations around the world play an important role in facilitating the international movement of goods, especially essential supplies. The Customs community also has a role to play in promoting economic recovery through trade facilitation. Through participation in meetings and discussions, Singapore Customs works closely with its regional counterparts to carry out its responsibilities in this regard.

22ND WCO RHCA

Singapore Customs' Director-General, Mr Ho Chee Pong, attended the World Customs Organisation (WCO) 22nd Virtual Regional Heads of Customs Administrations (RHCA) Conference held on 6 and 7 April 2021.

At the conference, Heads of Customs administrations of the Asia Pacific Region endorsed the Regional Strategic Plan for 2020 to 2022, and explored new initiatives to enhance dialogue between Customs administrations and the private sector.

WCO members also discussed measures to facilitate the movement of medical supplies and COVID-19 vaccines, and trade facilitation initiatives such as digitalisation of customs procedures, to help businesses recover from the pandemic by reducing business costs.

CUSTOMS COOPERATION UNDER THE 1ST INDONESIA-SINGAPORE FINANCE DIALOGUE

At the inaugural Finance Dialogue between Indonesia and Singapore on 8 April 2021, Singapore Customs and the Indonesia Directorate General of Customs and Excise jointly updated on the bilateral cooperation between the two Customs administrations and future areas for collaboration.



Attendees for the inaugural Finance Dialogue organised by Ministry of Finance, Singapore, and the Indonesian Ministry of Finance.

Singapore Customs' Deputy Director-General, Mr Lim Teck Leong, and Director of International Customs and Inter-institution, Mr R. Syarif Hidayat, exchanged views on promoting post-COVID-19 economic recovery through trade digitalisation and strengthening collaboration between the two agencies to combat illicit activities in the region.

VIRTUAL COFFEE CHAT AMONG ASEAN CUSTOMS. **ABF AND WCO**

Singapore Customs organised an informal chat among ASEAN Customs, Australian Border Force (ABF), and WCO on 30 March 2021, to reaffirm the strong ties between leaders of the various Customs administrations, and to discuss evolving issues arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The leaders discussed ways to facilitate the movement of COVID-19 vaccines in the region, tackle enforcement challenges and speed up economic recovery through trade facilitation.



Singapore Customs' Director-General, Mr Ho Chee Pong (top left), with leaders of other Customs administrations at the virtual coffee chat session.

Singapore's Electronic Transactions Act amended to provide legal validity to electronic Bills of Lading and other Electronic Transferable Records

••• By Infocomm Media Development Authority, and Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore

In March 2021, Singapore's Electronic Transactions Act (ETA) was amended to adopt the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) Model Law on the Electronic Transferable Records (MLETR). The ETA facilitates the use of electronic transactions and e-commerce transactions by consumers and businesses. With the latest amendment, it enables the creation and use of transferable documents and instruments such as electronic bills of lading (eBLs) which are key documents for cross-border trade. This allows eBLs to be legally recognised as equivalent to paper Bills of Lading.

eBLs bring tangible benefits to supply chain players such as carriers, shippers, consignees, freight forwarders and trade financing banks. For example, faster transactions via digital transfer instead of physical delivery, cost savings from increased efficiency indocument processing, lower risk of demurrage and other cargo holding costs from delayed arrival of the bill of lading, and lowered fraud risks (through the use of digital authentication systems).

WHY DO WE NEED **eBLs?**



- No additional costs to hold cargo as goods are less likely to arrive at their port of destination before document processing is complete
- US\$4 billion estimated savings a year if 50% of the container shipping industry adopts eBLs, according to Digital Container Shipping Association
- Trade financing banks can obtain collateral security over the eBL, allowing them to obtain regulatory capital relief and pass on cost savings to clients

Figure 1: Infographics Source

eBL TRIALS USING TRADETRUST

However, the lack of standards and interoperability of eBLs across different industry players in the ecosystem was one key challenge preventing widespread adoption of eBLs since its introduction in the 1990s. With the amendment of Singapore's ETA to accelerate Singapore's trade digitalisation effort, the Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA), the Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore (MPA), Singapore Customs and other agencies have brought industry partners together through trials as a step towards maritime trade digitalisation.

Interoperability across digital ecosystems is a key element made possible via the TradeTrust digital utility, that facilitates trusted exchange of trade documents across supply chains. The following are examples of eBL trials conducted in 2021:

1) Singapore-Rotterdam eBL Collaboration

In January this year, Singapore and Rotterdam, the two major transshipment ports along the Europe-Far East trade lane, completed a shipment using an eBL to shadow a live shipment. This shipment was carried out by Ocean Network Express (ONE), a Singaporeheadquartered container carrier, in collaboration

THE ETA AMENDMENTS SUPPORT AND COMPLEMENT THE GOVERNMENT'S TRADE DIGITALISATION INITIATIVES



with Olam, a food and agri-business supplier, for a live shipment of processed cashew from Qui Nhon in Vietnam to Rotterdam in the Netherlands, via transshipment at Singapore.

In this trial, the shipper and the consignee used two different platforms, i.e. the Singapore-based #dltledgers' blockchain platform and the Netherlandsbased NaviPorta platform to perform the title transfer transaction and thereafter surrender of the eBL issued by ONE. The title transfer and surrender capability on both platforms were enabled by the TradeTrust digital utility.



2) Singapore-China (Shenzhen) Smart City Initiative

Currently, an ongoing pilot which aims to achieve mutual recognition of electronic trade documents for seamless cross-border trade between Singapore and China is being trialled. This pilot is part of the <u>Singapore-China (Shenzhen) Smart City Initiative</u>.

Participants in the trial will be able to use GUUD's <u>CamelONE Trade Finance (TFAP)</u> portal made available via the Networked Trade Platform for trade financing and to perform transfer of ownership digitally on eBLs. Through TFAP¹, companies can apply for trade financing with multiple banks through a single interface and will also provide templates and the repopulation of data to further simplify the trade financing process.

Banks will be able to authenticate the trade finance applications electronically via message exchanges. As a result, this will enable the banks to implement real-time straight-through processing for their trade finance transactions. By integrating with TradeTrust and facilitated by the ETA amendment, companies using TFAP are now able to also complete the document presentation online.

¹GUUD will be relaunching TFAP in July 2021 with a new name and additional functionalities.

The trial showed that there were significant time savings in the BL documentation process from an average of six to 10 days when using a hardcopy to less than 24 hours when using an eBL. It also demonstrated that cross-platform interoperability could be achieved as eBL issued by one platform could be verified and processed by another digital trade platform. This trial was facilitated by MPA, IMDA, with technology platforms provided by #dltedgers from Singapore and NaviPorta from BlockLab, a subsidiary of the Port of Rotterdam Authority.

ED CHANGE iic document & formulate legal acceptance	
ELECTRONIC Efficient and Easy	B/LFLOW
EXPORTER	IMPORTER
The B/L is issued for sea-freight shipment.	To claim the cargo the owner has to present the B/L document.
dit	TradeTrust
The total time needed for B/	L transfer of title via #dltledgers partnership 24 HOURS
	N. W. Star
Port of P A Caroct	

HOW TO GET STARTED

1) TradeTrust Digital Utility

The TradeTrust source code is distributed under an open source licence. Users may download and use it freely under the open source licensing terms. Join the TradeTrust network and incorporate the TradeTrust source code into your applications or systems.

- For more information: <u>https://www.tradetrust.io</u>
- Contact us: tradetrust@imda.gov.sg

2) Call for Proposal on eBL

To encourage further industry adoption, MPA issued a call-for-proposal in April 2021 to develop, enhance and adopt eBL solutions that are interoperable, meet industry standards like the Digital Container Shipping Association's standards on Bill of Lading preparation and issuance for container shipping, and/or leverage jurisdictions that have adopted the UNCITRAL MLETR framework. More information on the call for proposal can be found at: <u>https://www.mpa.gov.sg/web/portal/ home/maritime-companies/research-development/</u> <u>mint-fund-call-for-proposals/electronic-bills-of-lading</u>

WHEN BUYING DUTY-UNPAID CIGARETTES COMES WITH A HEFTY PRICE TAG... **THINK TWICE!**

Journalists from local media were invited to have a first-hand experience on Singapore Customs' enforcement operations against duty-unpaid cigarette buyers on 13 April 2021. While you may have read the media articles, we share with you what went on behind the scenes of the two operations observed by the media and a separate operation conducted on 14 April 2021.

Hope to save money by buying duty-unpaid cigarettes from online peddlers? Think you could escape from the arms of law when your sources get caught? These might be what the buyers of duty-unpaid cigarettes thought before Singapore Customs officers turned up at their workplaces and homes...

Based on the investigations on peddlers who were arrested earlier in April 2021, Singapore Customs officers tracked down offenders who bought duty-unpaid cigarettes from online peddlers via social media platforms.

One man arrested and three compounded at an industrial building in Second Chin Bee Road

It all started on 13 April 2021 when officers found two cartons of duty-unpaid cigarettes in the locker of a 33-year-old Chinese national who had purchased his stash from an online peddler. The buyer later revealed that he had collated orders and sold some of the cigarettes to his colleagues in his workplace.

Eagle-eyed officers observed another Chinese national, aged 51, meddling with a white plastic bag containing eight packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes when they moved in to verify the contents of the bag. Officers found 44 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes in the possession of a third Chinese national, also aged 51, who was stopped when he was walking out of the locker room with a white and red plastic bag. Officers also searched the locker of a 31-year-old Malaysian where they found 38 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes.

All three men admitted that they had bought the duty-unpaid cigarettes from the 33-year-old Chinese national. They were each issued with composition sums ranging from \$1,200 to \$4,800.

When interviewed, some of the offenders admitted that they were enticed by the low prices of duty-unpaid cigarettes. The third Chinese national lamented ruefully that his composition fine of \$4,800 amounted to nearly three months of his salary. One of the four men led out from their workplace by Singapore Customs officers into a van, where he was interviewed.



One of the offenders with the duty-unpaid cigarettes seized from the operation.



The duty-unpaid cigarettes were found in the silver luggage inside the top cabinet, cabinet drawer and bedside table.



A 53-year-old Singaporean arrested at vicinity of Marsiling Drive

On the evening of 14 April 2021, officers mounted another operation in a residential unit in Marsiling and seized over 45 cartons of duty-unpaid cigarettes. The large quantity of cigarettes found in the unit was a giveaway that they were not solely for personal consumption. Upon further questioning, the female offender disclosed that she had been purchasing dutyunpaid cigarettes from an online peddler to be resold. She was sentenced by the State Courts on 30 April 2021 to ten weeks' imprisonment for dealing with dutyunpaid cigarettes.

Officers were meticulous in their search for duty-unpaid cigarettes, and they found the remaining dutyunpaid cigarettes in the cupboard.



We strongly urge smokers to think twice before buying or selling duty-unpaid cigarettes. The composition sum for a first-time offender who has up to one packet of duty-unpaid cigarettes in his possession is \$500. Heavier penalties will apply if he is found with more than one packet of duty-unpaid cigarettes and/or if he is a repeat offender.

A 36-year-old Chinese national arrested at vicinity of Yuan Ching Road

In a separate operation that took place in Tuas Avenue 1 on 13 April 2021, officers searched the offender's workshop unit and work lorry, where they found three packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes. At a follow-up search at his residence located along Yuan Ching Road, five cartons and eight packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes were uncovered, and the offender was arrested. The offender had purchased the cigarettes from an online peddler for his friend and for his personal consumption. He would then arrange for the cigarettes to be delivered to his residence. The offender was sentenced by the State Courts on 28 June 2021 to a fine of \$5,750, in default 23 days' imprisonment for storing dutyunpaid cigarettes.



Case files: **Enforcement Highlights**

CASE 1: MORE THAN 781 CARTONS OF DUTY-UNPAID **CIGARETTES SEIZED IN A JOINT CUSTOMS-COAST** GUARD OPERATION

On the evening of 29 April 2021, Singapore Customs and Police Coast Guard (PCG) officers mounted an operation in the vicinity of No. 9 Gul Road. The following morning, officers sighted five men pushing trolleys containing gunny sacks suspected to contain duty-unpaid cigarettes from the seafront towards Gul Road. Officers moved in to conduct a check and found 776 cartons and 221 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes.

Three male Indonesians were arrested, while two other males fled the scene. Further checks on a vessel berthed at Gul Basin where one of the men supposedly disembarked from led to the detection of five cartons and eight packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes onboard. The two men who had earlier fled the scene, both Indonesians, were subsequently arrested by PCG officers during a follow-up operation on 4 May 2021

Investigations revealed that all five men were employed as ship crew and deployed on different vessels. One of the men had purportedly coordinated the smuggling of the duty-unpaid cigarettes from a vessel into Singapore. He had allegedly engaged the other four men to assist in the transfer of the duty-unpaid cigarettes from the vessel to shore.

A total of 781 cartons and 229 packets of duty-unpaid cigarettes were seized. The duty and Goods and Services Tax (GST) evaded amounted to more than \$103,000 and more than \$7,000 respectively.

Court proceedings against the five men are ongoing.

CASE 2: MAN JAILED FIVE WEEKS AND FINED \$275.860 FOR EVASION OF GST AND RELATED **OFFENCES UNDER THE CUSTOMS ACT**

A male Singapore permanent resident was sentenced by the State Courts on 22 March 2021 to five weeks' imprisonment and a fine of \$275,860, in default eight months' and one week's imprisonment, for offences under the Customs Act.

Investigations revealed that the accused, the director of a private limited company and sole proprietor of another business, had under-declared the value of goods imported by the company and the business between 2016 and 2018. The total amount of GST evaded was about \$64,200.

In addition, the accused was found to have provided falsified documents and false information to Singapore Customs officers on multiple occasions to conceal and diminish his responsibility.

Duty-unpaid cigarettes concealed in gunny sacks.

The accused had falsified documents and provided them to another man, the then co-director of the company, upon knowing that the company would be audited by officers in December 2016. The man submitted the documents to Singapore Customs despite having reasons to believe that the details in the documents were falsified. He was dealt with separately.

The accused pleaded guilty to five charges of fraudulent evasion of GST, falsifying documents, and furnishing of false information to Singapore Customs. Another four charges were taken into consideration in the sentencing.



igital Trade Services (DTS) on the Networked Trade Platform (NTP) offers a listing of digital, trade-related services provided by the private

••• sector. With DTS, traders can explore another way of digitally connecting and exchanging data with service providers on the NTP.

> Just like any other NTP user, each service provider listed as a DTS provider on NTP will



Browse trade-related, digital services and reach out to service providers

Engage our partners on the Digital Trade Services to start enhancing your business today!

For prospective service providers, DTS provides an avenue to list digital, trade-related services without the need for any technical integration with the NTP. If you have a digital, trade-related service and would like to list on DTS, please email NTP_Operations@customs.gov.sg.

Safeguard against fraud with Trader Notification Service

raders are encouraged to sign up for Singapore Customs' Trader Notification Service, as a safeguard against fraud from

••• falsified permits.

Singapore Customs has recently detected a number of cases where the freight forwarders or declaring agents had, without the knowledge of the importers, declared lower values and paid a lower Goods & Services Tax (GST) amount for the goods imported by the importers.

Subsequently, these freight forwarders or declaring agents falsified the import permits by amending the goods' values and the corresponding GST payable amount to the higher correct figures, before providing these falsified permits to the importers for billing



NEWS

Digital Trade Services on the Networked Trade Platform

have its own NTP account and data repository. Users can easily connect with DTS providers by first reaching out to them directly or vice versa, forming business partnerships on NTP and begin exchanging trade documents and data using the NTP data repository's data-sharing functions.

Explore services listed on the DTS and start enjoying the benefits of the DTS today.



purposes. The difference in the GST amount would be pocketed by the declaring agents or freight forwarders.

By signing up for the Trader Notification Service, traders will receive notifications on the permit number, name of declaring agent and permit approval date relating to permit declarations made under their Unique Entity Number, including approval, cancellation and amendment.

For payment permits, the notification would also include the total amount of duty and/or GST payable. Traders can use this information to verify against the amount of duty and/or GST that they have actually paid or are asked to pay to their freight forwarders or declaring agents.

For more information, refer to **Circular 03/2021** on the Customs website.

Industry outreach on trade facilitation initiatives

ngapore Customs regularly takes part in trade-related seminars and conducts outreach sessions with traders from

••• different industries, to keep the trading community updated on the latest regulatory requirements and the various trade facilitation initiatives. Here are three such recent outreach events:

EUSFTA webinar for business operators

Singapore Customs participated in a webinar on customs, trade facilitation and rules of origin in the EU-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (EUSFTA) on 19 May 2021, and shared about the provisions in the EUSFTA aimed at promoting trade facilitation and providing preferential market access for goods originating in the EU and Singapore.

Organised by the European Union Delegation to Singapore, the webinar hoped to raise awareness of the benefits business operators could enjoy under the EUSFTA, and promote greater utilisation of the free trade agreement which came into force on 21 November 2019. A recording of the webinar is available online here: https://go.gov.sg/ webinar-eusfta.

FTA webinar series for the logistics and transportation sector

At another webinar jointly organised by the Singapore Logistics Association and Singapore Business Federation (SBF) on 7 May 2021, speakers from Singapore Customs shared about customs procedures and topics concerning rules of origin (ASEAN-Wide Self-Certification and back-to-back provisions).

The webinar covered current ASEAN initiatives relevant to the logistics and transportation sector that would enable the logistics and transportation companies to utilise these established initiatives to elevate their competitiveness and service offerings.

More than 130 participants from various logistics and transportation companies attended the webinar, which also involved speakers from other government agencies such as the Land Transport Authority and Enterprise Singapore.



Speakers for the EUSFTA webinar on 19 May 2021.

FTA level 2 training course for the food manufacturing sector

On 1 April 2021, representatives from Singapore Customs spoke about customs procedures and rules of origin at a seminar organised by SBF for the food manufacturing sector.

More than 35 attendees from the food manufacturing sector attended the seminar. The seminar enabled the companies to understand the key requirements for the eligibility of various benefits under different FTAs, as well as learn how to enhance the companies' price competitiveness through the FTAs' provisions. Besides government agencies, private sector representatives also shared insights on utilising the FTAs at the seminar.



the SBF seminar on 1 April 2021

DO YOU **KNOW?**

GST EXTENDED TO LOW-VALUE GOODS FROM 1 JANUARY 2023

As announced in Budget 2021, Goods and Services Tax (GST) will be extended to imported low-value goods from 1 January 2023. Overseas suppliers of goods and services will be subject to the same GST treatment as local suppliers. This is to ensure a level playing field for our local businesses vis-à-vis their overseas counterparts, with the rise of e-commerce.



OWHAT THIS MEANS FOR CONSUMERS IN SINGAPORE

There is no change to the GST treatment for goods imported via sea or land as well as goods valued above S\$400 which are imported via air or post. Consumers will need to pay GST at the point of importation of such goods.

OKEY POINTS FROM BUDGET 2021

• One aspect of a fair and resilient tax system is ensuring a level playing field for our local businesses vis-à-vis their overseas counterparts. This is especially relevant as e-commerce – for sales of goods and services - is growing.

• To facilitate clearance at the border, low-value goods imported via air or post are currently not subject to GST. In contrast, GST is paid on such goods purchased in Singapore.

• From 1 January 2023, GST will be extended to imported low-value goods. The new GST treatment will affect both overseas and local suppliers of imported low-value goods.

Currently, low-value goods (goods valued at \$\$400 or below) which are procured locally are subject to GST, while the same goods which are procured from overseas and imported via air or post are not.

From 1 January 2023, consumers in Singapore will need to pay GST on low-value goods, which are imported into Singapore via air or post, and purchased from GSTregistered suppliers.





With the appointment of Nanyang Polytechnic (NYP) and Republic Polytechnic (RP) to conduct the existing suite of business courses from January 2020, the business courses conducted by Singapore Customs Academy has ceased from January 2020.

To sign up for the business courses conducted by NYP or RP, please visit the respective polytechnic's website. All courses will be conducted virtually, except for SC111.

RP:

SC101

12 TO 13 JUL 2021.

16 TO 17 AUG 2021.

13 TO 14 SEP 2021

15 SFP 2021

14 JUL 2021, 18 AUG 2021,

Same dates for SC102 & SC103

SC100

NYP: **5 TO 6 JUL 2021, 2 TO 3 AUG 2021, 6 TO 7 SEP 2021** SC101

7 JUL 2021, 4 AUG 2021, 8 SEP 2021

Same dates for SC102 & SC103

BASICS OF EVERY DECLARANT

This course provides an overview of customs procedures pertaining to the import and export of goods, the basic requirements for preparing TradeNet declarations, classification of goods, and the rules of origin:

- SC101 Customs Procedures (2 days)
- SC102 Classification and the Harmonised System (half-day)
- SC103 Rules of Origin/Free Trade Agreements (half-day)

Participants may register for individual modules.

[WEBINAR] OUTREACH PROGRAMME FOR NEWLY-REGISTERED Manufacturers [28 Jul 2021]

This programme is designed to equip newly-registered manufacturers with a better understanding of the rules of origin under Singapore's Free Trade Agreements, the application procedure for certificates of origin, and the compliance requirements.

For enquiries, please email customs_roo@customs.gov.sg.

NYP: 6 AUG 2021

SC111



RP: 15 JUL 2021, 19 AUG 2021, 16 SEP 2021

HANDS-ON TRADENET DECLARATION

This one-day workshop provides new declarants with basic information on TradeNet and its various message and declaration types.

The guided practical session uses simulated scenarios to prepare and submit a declaration using the Government Frontend Solution.

SC200 /

NYP:

8 JUL 2021, 5 AUG 2021, 9 SEP 2021

Same dates for SC201 & SC202

RP:

16 JUL 2021, 17 SEP 2021 Same dates for SC201 & SC202

STRATEGIC GOODS Control programme

This one-day course provides an overview of Singapore's strategic goods control system and its regulations, registration procedures and permit requirements for strategic goods transactions, as well as the essentials of an internal (export control) compliance programme.

The course comprises two modules:

- SC201 Basics of Strategic Goods Control (half-day)
- SC202 Essentials of Internal (Export Control) Compliance Programme (half-day)

Participants may register for individual modules.