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My BACUDA Journey Advancing AI Applications in Customs

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Foreword

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the 90th edition of E-Newsletter of the ROCB A/P.

The key feature of this edition is data analytics. It is of interest to most Member Administration's and thus the WCO has set it as one of the three Focus Area's in its Strategic Plan 2025-28. In fact, the WCO has been interested in Data Analytics since 2019, when the BACUDA Project was launched, generously funded by Customs Cooperation Fund (CCF) of Korea. The BACUDA project aims at raising awareness and at building capacity in Data Analytics among WCO Members, by developing methodologies for Customs purposes to be deployed among Member Administrations in cooperation with expert groups from academia and research institutes.

The project's outputs are regional as well as national and include workshops to raise awareness and share Members' examples of good practices in Data Analytics. The outcomes are starting to prevail, and we are excited to introduce it in this edition and looking forward to seeing them more in the future.

I was invited by China Customs to attend the Regional Customs Laboratory Heads Meeting held in Qingdao, China, at the end of August. This was my third visit to mainland China and my first visit to Qingdao – a city well known among beer lovers.

The visit was full of impressive surprises. The first was the remarkable scale of the Qingdao Customs Laboratory, one of the Regional Customs Laboratories in the Asia-Pacific region. The laboratory conducts a wide range of analysis for Customs purposes and addresses quarantine-related matters. Later, our group had the opportunity to stroll through the city, and we were impressed by the grandeur of the Qingdao Customs building – only to discover that there was another one nearby!



We were also invited to visit Qingdao Port, an advanced facility that operates with minimal human intervention thanks to full automation, including gantry crane operations and container transport systems. En route, we passed massive dockyards for shipbuilding. China's shipbuilding industry accounts for approximately 55% of the global production, according to UNCTAD statistics¹, supporting essential aspects of our daily lives.

This e-Newsletter is being issued in October, a festive month for beer lovers. I am writing this foreword from Hong Kong, China, where I recently attended the Oktoberfest horseracing event with some local beer. Whether or not you share an interest in beer, I encourage everyone to take part in your country's seasonal celebrations while continuing our joint efforts toward the end of the year, for Customs efficiency, security and prosperity.

田島 雅司

Jun Tajima

Head of ROCB

¹ <https://unctadstat.unctad.org/datacentre/dataviewer/US.ShipBuilding>

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My BACUDA Journey Advancing AI Applications in Customs



Mohan Kumar Pudasaini

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Customs

Being nominated for the WCO BACUDA Scholarship Programme was an excellent opportunity; one that profoundly changed how I approach Customs work. The five-month course was both intensive and transformative, combining technical training with practical application. BACUDA (Band of Customs Data Analysts) is a World Customs Organization initiative designed to build data-analytics capacity across Customs administrations, share open-source methodologies, and promote the practical deployment of analytics tools in the field. The 2023 Programme, supported by the Customs Cooperation Fund of Korea, was the second cohort and brought together 12 participants from 12 countries for a rigorous, practice-oriented learning experience.

The curriculum covered a wide spectrum: from basic data analytics and visualization to advanced AI applications, including machine learning and large language models. Importantly, BACUDA does not only teach tools; it teaches how to frame Customs problems so they can be solved with data, how to select indicators, evaluate data quality, and design workflows that transform raw records into operational insights. The project also provides a library of open-source algorithms and methodological guidance that participants can adapt to their own data environments.

During the group project, the 12 participants were divided into four groups. The group that I led worked on the development of a revenue-predicting model, recognizing that one of the core responsibilities of Customs is to collect fair revenue, and accurate prediction is crucial

for government planning. Alongside this, on my personal initiative, I developed few AI models as proofs of concept, including an AI chatbot and an HS classification tool from images.

After returning from the programme, I applied these learnings directly within Nepal Customs. We implemented the AI revenue forecasting model, which reduced uncertainty in revenue prediction. We also deployed the HS classification model, conducted a series of workshops to enhance Customs officers' data analytics capabilities, and, most recently, piloted an online valuation database where we implemented an AI model to match brand, model, and size of declared goods.

Equally valuable was the opportunity to exchange ideas with colleagues from 12 different countries, which inspired new perspectives for cross-border cooperation. This exchange of experience reinforced the idea that data-driven Customs is not only a national priority but also a regional necessity. The skills and experience I gained through BACUDA also supported my accreditation as a WCO Technical and Operational Advisor in Data Analytics, enabling me to contribute globally to advancing data-driven approaches in Customs.

For me, BACUDA was more than a technical course; it was a change in mindset. By connecting rigorous methods with operational needs, the programme helps Customs administrations move from intuition-based decisions to evidence-driven practices. I am deeply grateful to the WCO, SKKU, and CCF-Korea for this opportunity, and I look forward to continuing to share what I have learned with colleagues across the globe.



Workshops and Meetings

ROCB A/P participated in the APPU Executive Council Meeting 2025 in Ulaanbaatar

30th June – 5th July 2025, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia



Ms. Zhengqing YE, representing the WCO Asia/Pacific Regional Office for Capacity Building (ROCB A/P), was invited to participate in the 2025 Executive Council (EC) Meeting of the Asian-Pacific Postal Union (APPU) held from 30th June to 5th July in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. The meeting gathered key stakeholders from postal administrations and relevant international partners to discuss policy, regulatory, operational, and strategic matters shaping the postal sector in the region.

The high-level event began with an opening ceremony hosted by the Government of Mongolia, followed by a series of plenary meetings and technical working group discussions throughout the week. Sessions covered a broad spectrum of issues including postal finance, physical and digital services, e-commerce development, postal regulation, and universal service obligations.

ROCB A/P participated in sessions relating to Customs and postal collaboration where discussions focused on improving cross-border delivery efficiency, strengthening the role as operators in the e-commerce value chain, and ensuring regulatory compliance in the fast-evolving digital marketplace.

ROCB A/P also observed the APPU/UPU Reform Working Group and the Roundtable on Postal Regulations and Universal Service Obligation, where dialogue emphasized the importance of coordinated policy frameworks to adapt to evolving user needs and market demands.

The ROCB A/P continues to cooperate with the APPU, as e-commerce continues to reshape international trade, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region; closer coordination between postal and Customs remains essential to ensuring secure and efficient border management.

ROCB A/P participated in the 151st Anniversary Ceremony of the Thai Customs Department

4th July 2025, Bangkok, Thailand

At the invitation of the Thai Customs Department, Mr. Jun Tajima, Head of the ROCB A/P, along with his colleagues, attended the 151st Anniversary Ceremony held in Bangkok, Thailand.



The event featured a traditional Religious Ceremony commemorating the long-standing history and achievements of the Thai Customs Department.

All ROCB A/P staffs extend heartfelt congratulations on the 151st anniversary and express sincere wishes for the continued success and prosperity of the Thai Customs Department.

ROCB A/P reaffirms its strong commitment to maintaining close communication and further enhancing its long-standing partnership with the Thai Customs Department, and to work for the development of the Region together.

New JICA Long-Term Expert from Japan Customs visited ROCB A/P

7th July 2025, Bangkok, Thailand



On 7th July 2025, Mr. Daisuke Yoshikawa, the newly appointed JICA long-term expert, visited the ROCB A/P Office in Bangkok, accompanied by Mr. Kazushige Saito, the outgoing expert.

Mr. Jun Tajima, Head of ROCB A/P, warmly welcomed both Mr. Saito and Mr. Yoshikawa. Mr. Tajima expressed his sincere appreciation to Mr. Saito for his long-standing contribution to the development of Capacity Building in Mekong Region through the JICA project. He also extended his best wishes to Mr. Yoshikawa for a successful assignment and expressed the ROCB A/P's commitment to continued collaboration.

During their visit, Mr. Yoshikawa, who assumed his post on 3 July 2025, introduced himself and shared his enthusiasm for working closely with the Mekong Region and relevant stakeholders to further promote Customs modernization.

Customs Attache of Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands visited ROCB A/P

15th July 2025, Bangkok, Thailand



On July 15th, 2025, the WCO Asia Pacific Regional Office for Capacity Building (ROCB A/P) in Bangkok welcomed a significant visit from Ms. Guusta Visser, Customs Attaché of Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, and her successor, Mr. Mostafa Amini.

Hosted by Mr. Jun Tajima, Head of ROCB A/P, the meeting began with Mr. Tajima delivering a short presentation to introduce ROCB A/P, highlighting the latest WCO initiatives and past workshops conducted in the region. The session provided an opportunity to honour Ms. Visser's legendary impact and brief Mr. Amini on ongoing initiatives. Mr. Amini emphasized the importance of information sharing among nations in the region to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes and expressed enthusiasm for future collaboration with ROCB A/P. His expertise is expected to further advance customs development in the region, building on Ms. Visser's legacy of strengthening regional networks and partnerships.

ROCB A/P Participates in the 2025 INCU Summer School

16th – 26th July 2025, Shanghai, China



From 16th - 26th July 2025, the International Network of Customs Universities (INCU) hosted its inaugural INCU Summer School at the Dishui Lake Campus of Shanghai Customs University, bringing together Customs professionals, scholars, and students from across the globe. As the Programme Manager of the WCO Asia/Pacific Regional Office for Capacity Building (ROCB A/P), Ms. YE Zhengqing had the honour to participate in this milestone event.

Organized by the INCU Shanghai Regional Office, the Summer School marked the formal operational launch of the Office, which aims to deepen Customs academic cooperation in Asia and beyond. The event featured a dynamic programme of lectures, cultural activities, and site visits, promoting both academic learning and intercultural understanding.

During the meeting, Ms. YE, as the representative of the ROCB A/P, had a chance to engage in the dialogues with academia introducing ROCB A/P's Customs capacity-building efforts in this region.

The Summer School gathered leading Customs academics such as: Prof. David Widdowson (INCU President & Editor-in-Chief of the World Customs Journal), Prof. Wieslaw

Czyzowicz (Poland), Prof. Frank Altemöller (Germany), Prof. Samuel Bautista (Philippines), Assoc. Prof. Galina Fedotova (Russia) and Assoc. Prof. Xie Jing (China).

Their lectures addressed a wide array of topics including Customs policy and law, WTO-related issues, risk management, digital Customs, and the Harmonized System. The students and future Customs professionals, actively engaged in discussions, workshops, and field visits to logistics companies and cultural sites in Shanghai.

The 2025 INCU Summer School successfully exemplified the potential of academic-practitioner partnerships in strengthening global Customs capacity. The event also provided an excellent opportunity to reconnect with long-standing partners from academia and foster new links for future collaboration in research and training.

ROCB A/P Welcomes New interns from Shanghai Customs University

29th July 2025, Bangkok Thailand

On July 29th, ROCB A/P warmly welcomed two new interns, Ms. Cao Jiani and Mr. He Houliang, students from Shanghai Customs University (SCU). This marks the first time the office has hosted interns since the COVID-19



pandemic. Their arrival brings not only fresh energy to the office but also valuable insights into the latest developments within Chinese Customs.

This internship was proposed upon the visit of the delegates of the University to the ROCB A/P on 18th October 2024. It is a one-month internship under the 2025 Summer Internship Program of the SCU. During their stay, the interns are tasked to study and make an informal presentation of China Customs to the staffs of the ROCB A/P and other interested officials; to study Member Customs Administrations of the Asia Pacific Region of the WCO; and to study the WCO Tools.

To formally welcome the interns, Mr. Jun TAJIMA, Head of ROCB A/P, and his team conducted an orientation session. The session introduced the core functions of ROCB A/P in

supporting WCO Capacity Building activities, outlined the interns' roles and responsibilities during their stay, and extended a warm welcome on behalf of the entire team.

Ms. Cao and Mr. He expressed their sincere gratitude for the opportunity and the support provided by the ROCB A/P. They shared their enthusiasm for contributing meaningfully to the office and their commitment to learning and growing throughout the internship.

Throughout the internship, the office provides comprehensive guidance and support. This engagement aligns with ROCB A/P's broader mission of nurturing future talent and advancing customs capacity building in the region.

ROCB A/P participated in Workshop for ASEAN Member Countries in Enhancing Knowledge on HS

18th – 22nd August 2025, Bangkok, Thailand



Thai Customs Department, collaboratively hosted by WCO, with financial support from CCF-Japan and Thai Customs organized the Workshop for ASEAN Member Countries in Enhancing Knowledge on HS to Utilize Advance Rulings from 18–22 August 2025 at the WCO

Regional Training Centre in Bangkok, Thailand. This significant event brings together 17 Customs professionals from 7 Members across the ASEAN to strengthen their expertise in the Harmonized System (HS) and advance rulings, fostering trade facilitation and compliance.

Ms. Lamia Frigui, the WCO Head of Unit of Nomenclature and Revenue Implementation, emphasised the importance of “share, share and share” on this important topic. The Deputy Director General, Mr. Niti Wityatem warmly welcomed the participants and encouraged discussions among experts and participants to take most of the precious opportunity.

Mark Ho, Program Manager of ROCB A/P, delivered a presentation introducing ROCB A/P, highlighting its mission, achievements, and role in supporting customs administrations in the Asia Pacific region.

ROCB A/P's continued commitment during the transition at the 4th RCL Heads Meeting

25th - 27th August 2025, Qingdao, China



The 4th Meeting of Heads of WCO Asia/Pacific Regional Customs Laboratories (RCLs) took place in Qingdao, China, from 25th to 27th August 2025, hosted by RCL China. The meeting also marked the official establishment of two new RCLs and one RTC in the Asia/Pacific region RCL China (Qingdao), RCL China (Haikou), and RTC China (Qinhuangdao).

Having served as the organizer of the previous three RCL Heads Meetings, the ROCB A/P is proud to have contributed to building a strong foundation for regional collaboration. Following the decision of the 26th RHCA Meeting, new arrangements under which future RCL Heads Meetings will be organized by the host administration and coordinated by the APVC were adopted. During this transitional period, our office served as facilitators, ensuring continuity and supporting the smooth handover of responsibilities.

Throughout the meeting, each RCL shared its latest updates, including achievements in analytical expertise, laboratory management and capacity building activities. These updates reflected the evolving roles and functions of the RCLs: moving beyond their traditional area of HS classification to a stronger focus on enforcement-related work, while also expanding into new areas such as environmental protection. This shift underscores the growing importance of scientific support to address emerging global challenges.

Another highlight was the WCO RCL Professionals Programme, which showed the valuable contributions of RCLs in strengthening technical knowledge and in nurturing a new generation of customs laboratory professionals.

The meeting also reaffirmed the eagerness of RCLs to deepen cooperation and enhance information exchange, particularly in developing new analytical methodologies and sharing best practices. This collaborative spirit is essential for ensuring that customs laboratories remain effective in responding to complex and evolving enforcement challenges.

The ROCB A/P reiterated its continued commitment to supporting the RCLs through capacity building, knowledge sharing, and fostering stronger linkages with other WCO regional entities. While our role has shifted from organizer to observer, our dedication to promoting the growth and sustainability of the regional laboratory network remains unchanged.

New Customs Attaché of the Australian Border Force Visits ROCB A/P

1st September 2025, Bangkok, Thailand



Mr. James Ryan and Mr. Paul Schembri, the newly appointed Customs Attachés from the Australian Border Force (ABF), along with Mr. Banpot Denmetharat from the Australian Embassy in Thailand, paid a visit to the ROCB A/P on 1 September 2025. Mr. Jun Tajima, Head of the ROCB A/P, and his team warmly welcomed them. The visit

served to introduce both attachés to the work of the ROCB A/P and to further strengthen collaboration between the two important organisations around capacity-building.

Mr. Tajima expressed his appreciation for the ABF's continued support and provided a brief overview of the ROCB A/P, highlighting its role in supporting WCO's capacity-building activities. He emphasized the importance of working closely with partner administrations like ABF in leveraging regional expertise and showed his interest in exchanging information on capacity-building initiatives, particularly in ABF's priority areas including tobacco and drug smuggling.

The meeting concluded with a shared commitment to deepen cooperation between the ABF and the ROCB A/P. Both sides showed their willingness to look for future collaborations to improve Customs capacity across the Asia-Pacific region.

ROCB A/P and ADB Discuss Closer Collaboration to Support the South Asia Region

5th September 2025, Online Meeting

ROCB A/P participated in an online meeting with the South Asia Department of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) on 5th September 2025 to explore more ways to work together in supporting the South Asia Members.



The ADB team included Ms. Kanya Satyani Sasradipoera, Principal Regional Cooperation Specialist; Mr. Satish Reddy, Trade Facilitation Expert; and Ms. Pia Reyes, Principal Regional Cooperation Officer.

From ROCB A/P, Mr. Jun Tajima, Head of ROCB A/P, and Ms. Asuka Nagamatsu, Program Manager for South Asia, took part in the meeting.

At the beginning of the meeting, Mr. Tajima highlighted the importance of closer communication between ROCB A/P and ADB to make capacity-building efforts more effective in the region, especially with growing needs and limited resources. Ms. Nagamatsu gave an overview of ROCB A/P's policies and recent activities and shared the overall needs of those Members.

From ADB's side, Ms. Kanya, Mr. Satish, and Ms. Pia explained their current and future programs and showed their interest in working together with WCO and ROCB A/P to ensure better alignment between their needs and Capacity Building activities. Both sides also recognized opportunities to improve synergy in their efforts.

The meeting concluded with a shared understanding to continue open communication and to seek practical ways to work more closely together.

ROCB A/P Participates in Operation DEMETER XI

9th – 11th September 2025, Xiamen, China



The Briefing Meeting of Operation DEMETER XI, funded by the Customs Cooperation Fund of China (CCF-China), was held in Xiamen from 9th to 11th September 2025. At the invitation of the WCO Secretariat, Ms. Zhengqing YE represented the ROCB A/P at this important event.

First launched in 2009 with 64 Customs administrations, Operation DEMETER has grown into one of the WCO's flagship enforcement initiatives. Operation DEMETER XI targets illegal cross-border shipments of hazardous and other waste, as well as ozone-depleting substances (ODS) and hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) controlled under the Montreal Protocol. With 115 participating Members, this year's operation is the largest in the series to date, reflecting the international Customs community's strong and united commitment to combat environmental crime through cooperation and collective enforcement action.

During the meeting, the ROCB A/P was invited to present its efforts in promoting the Green Customs Initiative (GCI) in the Asia/Pacific region. Ms. YE highlighted ROCB A/P's active engagement, including organizing regional workshops on Multilateral Environmental

Agreements (MEAs) and CEN applications, and contributing to UNEP workshop and 4th RCL Heads Meeting. She also underlined the increasingly vital role of Customs laboratories, particularly in identifying solid waste shipments.

On this occasion, the ROCB A/P expressed its sincere appreciation to the WCO Secretariat, RILO A/P, and all partners and Members for their continued collaboration. Together, we share the goal of preventing and deterring illegal trade in environmentally sensitive commodities and substances, thereby safeguarding sustainable trade and protecting the environment. The ROCB A/P remains committed to supporting future operations and advancing the WCO's Green Customs agenda.

Staff Update

Farewell Message from Ms. Aksara Mackhawiman, Assistant Program Manager

Time flies faster than we realize, and now my tenure has come to an end. I want to take this opportunity to express my sincere appreciation for this remarkable experience.

First and foremost, my sincere gratitude extends to my colleagues at ROCB A/P. Working with this exceptional team and contributing to meaningful projects has been truly rewarding. Throughout my time here, I was continually inspired by their dedication and expertise. Beyond their outstanding expertise, their encouragement to pursue my interests and goals, and the friendship they offered, made my journey here special.

My appreciation also extends to all the amazing people I've had the pleasure of working with across the project and workshops. I am very grateful for your kind coordination and ongoing support you offered along the way.

Working here has provided invaluable opportunities to learn from diverse perspectives, which has deepened my understanding and broadened my perspective on the Asia-Pacific region and WCO mission. The knowledge and insights I gained have been enriched and will serve as valuable assets in my professional journey.

Though my time here is concluding, I will always cherish what I've learned here. Most importantly, the memories and friendships from this journey will stay with me always. Thank you for making this journey memorable.





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