

Hong Kong Customs tackles cross-boundary frozen meat smuggling and money laundering case involving \$190 million (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs mounted an operation codenamed "Seashine" in mid-August and successfully smashed a cross-boundary frozen meat smuggling and money laundering syndicate, with 13 persons arrested. The total value of the seized frozen meat as well as assets to be frozen and being considered for confiscation involved in the case was about \$190 million, which is the highest amount among similar frozen meat smuggling and money laundering cases solved by Customs in the past five years.

During the operation, about 160 tonnes of suspected smuggled frozen meat with an estimated market value of about \$25 million were seized. Customs officers also seized assets of the syndicate worth about \$18 million, including cash and valuables, and made arrangements to freeze the bank accounts held by the syndicate members with a total balance of deposits amounting to about \$27 million. Also, Customs is pursuing an investigation into the aspects of money laundering and criminal proceeds according to the Organized and Serious Crimes Ordinance. Upon conviction, Customs will consult the Department of Justice and apply to the court for confiscation of eight properties and three parking spaces under the syndicate members' names worth about \$120 million.

Customs earlier conducted an in-depth investigation targeting the frozen meat smuggling syndicate and deployed about 250 Customs officers to carry out enforcement action on August 13. First, a barge and a tugboat were intercepted for examination in the waters off Lung Kwu Chau and the batch of suspected smuggled frozen meat was seized on board the barge. Four men suspected to be connected with the case, aged between 55 and 65, were arrested.

After follow-up investigation, Customs officers raided 13 premises across Hong Kong, including residential premises, offices, a wharf and a container yard. A total of six men and three women, aged between 40 and 58, including the suspected mastermind and directors of the companies involved, were further arrested. Cash valued at about \$15 million and valuables worth about \$3 million including gold bars, gold ornaments, jewellery and watches, suspected to be part of the crime proceeds of the syndicate's smuggling and money laundering activities, were seized at their residential premises and the container yard.

In addition, financial investigation revealed that the syndicate members were suspected to have laundered the crime proceeds through fund transfers and purchases of various properties to conceal the real source of funds. In connection with this, Customs has arranged to freeze deposits with a total

value of about \$27 million in 76 bank accounts held by the syndicate members. Follow-up action in relation to the eight properties and three parking spaces under the syndicate members' names worth about \$120 million has been taken in accordance with the Organized and Serious Crimes Ordinance.

Investigation is ongoing and the arrested persons have been released on bail pending further investigation. The likelihood of further arrests is not excluded.

The operation has fully shown the determination of Customs in preventing smuggling and money laundering activities.

Under the Organized and Serious Crimes Ordinance, a person commits an offence if he deals with any property knowing or having reasonable grounds to believe that such property in whole or in part directly or indirectly represents any person's proceeds of an indictable offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$5 million and imprisonment for 14 years while the crime proceeds are also subject to confiscation.

Smuggling is also a serious offence. Under the Import and Export Ordinance, any person found guilty of importing or exporting unmanifested cargo is liable to a maximum fine of \$2 million and imprisonment for seven years.

Members of the public may report any suspected smuggling or money laundering activities to Customs' 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk).



[FEHD arranges one-off free COVID-19 testing service for staff of supermarkets and club catering](#)

premises and licensed hawkers

The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) today (August 20) launched a COVID-19 testing service for staff of supermarkets and catering business staff of clubhouses that hold a Certificate of Compliance and have submitted an application for registration with the Home Affairs Department (HAD), as well as licensed hawkers. The persons concerned do not need to register online. The testing agency (Prenetics Limited) will progressively deliver specimen bottles to all supermarkets and club catering premises as well as licensed hawkers for collecting deep throat saliva samples from today.

A spokesman for the FEHD said, "To strengthen anti-epidemic work, the Government earlier launched the voluntary one-off free testing service for high-risk groups, which include catering business staff (including those of licensed restaurants, licensed light refreshment restaurants, licensed marine restaurants, licensed factory canteens, school canteens, staff canteens, public market cooked food/light refreshment stalls and licensed cooked food hawker stalls) and staff of market stalls. The Government announced that the testing service will be extended to other groups including premises visited by the public frequently for purchasing daily necessities or dining."

The spokesman said that the testing agency will be responsible for the provision of one-stop service. It will deliver specimen bottles to staff of supermarkets and catering business staff of clubhouses that hold a Certificate of Compliance and have submitted an application for registration with the HAD, as well as licensed hawkers, for collecting deep throat saliva samples, and will then collect the samples in the subsequent one or two days for testing. Cases with positive results will be relayed to the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health for follow-up.

The FEHD will work closely with the testing agency to determine the priority of each premises with reference to a risk-based approach and manpower resources.

The FEHD strongly appeals to the people concerned to participate in the testing scheme, to continue to comply with the Government's regulation to wear a mask, and to maintain personal and environmental hygiene continuously.

For details of the testing scheme, please call the hotline of the testing agency (Prenetics Limited) at 3008 8319 or visit the FEHD website (www.fehd.gov.hk).

Deadline of current first registration tax concession arrangement for electric vehicles extended for three years

The Financial Secretary announced today (August 20) the extension of the deadline of the current first registration tax (FRT) concession arrangement for electric vehicles (EVs) for three years to March 31, 2024.

A Government spokesman said, "The current FRT concession arrangement for EVs is scheduled to end on March 31, 2021. Taking into account factors including the market situation and development of EVs, we consider that the early announcement of the three-year extension before the end of the existing concession arrangement could help the relevant trades to plan for the amounts and models of EVs to be imported in a timely manner. As a result, the public could have suitable environmentally friendly choices and together support a green recovery."

Apart from providing FRT concessions for EVs, the Budget this year has allocated funds to support various measures to actively promote the use of EVs. They included injecting \$800 million into the New Energy Transport Fund to subsidise trials and applications for electric commercial vehicles, allocating \$80 million and \$350 million for trials of electric public light buses and electric ferries respectively, and setting aside \$2 billion to subsidise car park owners of existing private residential buildings to install EV charging infrastructure. In addition, starting from last financial year, the Government is spending a total amount of \$120 million over three years to install more than 1 000 additional public chargers in government car parks.

Furthermore, the Government has set out in this year's Budget the formulation of Hong Kong's first road map on the popularisation of EVs. The relevant work is in progress and is expected to be completed in the first quarter of 2021.

Public hospitals daily update on COVID-19 cases

The following is issued on behalf of the Hospital Authority:

As at 9am today (August 20), 48 COVID-19 confirmed patients were discharged from hospital in the last 24 hours. So far, a total of 3 827 patients with confirmed or probable infections have been discharged.

At present, there are 690 negative pressure rooms in public hospitals with 1 251 negative pressure beds activated. A total of 660 confirmed patients are currently hospitalised in 19 public hospitals, a community isolation facility and a community treatment facility, among which 31 patients are in critical condition, 35 are in serious condition and the remaining 594 patients are in stable condition.

The Hospital Authority will maintain close contact with the Centre for Health Protection to monitor the latest developments and to inform the public and healthcare workers on the latest information in a timely manner.

Details of the above-mentioned patients are as follows:

Patient condition	Case numbers
Discharged	2302, 2391, 2533, 2811, 3357, 3432, 3443, 3501, 3525, 3624, 3641, 3798, 3849, 3851, 3853, 3854, 3855, 3867, 3901, 3902, 3918, 3976, 3988, 3998, 4006, 4023, 4047, 4056, 4175, 4209, 4215, 4219, 4276, 4320, 4345, 4360, 4379, 4391, 4394, 4403, 4426, 4441, 4467, 4500, 4509, 4520, 4522, 4542
Critical	1401, 1470, 1650, 1718, 1779, 1835, 1989, 2007, 2282, 2396, 2792, 2890, 2912, 2968, 3308, 3434, 3626, 3635, 3744, 3764, 3904, 3949, 3960, 3968, 4101, 4187, 4213, 4222, 4235, 4306, 4429
Serious	1316, 1956, 1968, 2078, 2079, 2334, 2362, 2576, 2577, 2702, 2746, 2748, 2940, 2941, 2962, 2966, 2988, 2989, 3005, 3274, 3366, 3377, 3408, 3461, 3496, 3497, 3539, 3617, 3621, 3761, 3994, 4059, 4148, 4526, 4583

Employment Support Scheme publishes eighth batch of employers receiving wage subsidies and prepares to disburse another batch of subsidies

The Employment Support Scheme (ESS) Secretariat published on the ESS website (www.ess.gov.hk) today (August 20) the name list of the eighth batch

of employers that have received wage subsidies under the first tranche, the amount of subsidies received and the employers' committed headcount of paid employees.

A Government spokesman said, "The name list of the eighth batch of employers published today covers about 7 600 employers. These employers have received wage subsidies totalling about \$2.8 billion (for June to August 2020), and committed to maintaining a total paid headcount of about 125 000. Together with the name list of the eighth batch of employers, the Secretariat has published from June 22 up to today the name lists of about 145 000 employers that have received wage subsidies and the relevant information."

In addition, the ESS Secretariat has notified a further batch of about 2 000 successful employer applicants, and will commence disbursement of wage subsidies totalling about \$500 million within this week, covering a total committed paid headcount of about 23 000 employees. To date, the wage subsidies disbursed amount to about \$43.9 billion, covering around 148 500 employers with a total committed paid headcount of about 1.9 million.

Excluding the 18 300 ineligible applicants that have not been approved for wage subsidies, the ESS Secretariat has completed processing for around 99 per cent of the eligible employers and will continue to process the remaining 1 800 applications with a view to completing the first tranche as early as possible.

The spokesman said, "Should an employer be found to have abused or violated the conditions of the ESS, the employees concerned or members of the public can make a report to the ESS Secretariat. The Secretariat and the processing agent will follow up on all reports and complaints."

The Government has announced on August 18 details of the second tranche of the ESS. Applications for wage subsidies covering September to November 2020 under the second tranche will be accepted from 7am on August 31 to 11.59pm on September 13. Details can be found on the ESS website (www.ess.gov.hk) or through the hotline 1836 122.