

HK returns armed vehicles to Singapore

Hong Kong customs officials announced on Tuesday that nine Singaporean armed vehicles seized two months ago will be returned after the completion of an investigation.

The Singaporean vehicles were impounded by customs on Nov 23 "because there was a suspected breach of Hong Kong law", said Roy Tang, commissioner of customs and excise of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

The armed vehicles were inside a cargo ship from Taiwan that was passing through Hong Kong. They were on their way back to Singapore following a military drill in Taiwan.

Tang said that customs has finished its investigation. The case may lead to criminal prosecution, according to a news release from the Hong Kong government.

"Import, export and transshipment/transit of strategic commodities in breach of licensing requirements are criminal offenses punishable under the Hong Kong law," he said, adding that the military vehicles and the associated equipment will be returned to Singapore.

In a statement released on Tuesday, Singapore's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong had thanked Hong Kong Chief Executive Leung Chun-ying for resolving the matter.

"This is a positive outcome," the Singaporean ministry said.

On Jan 17 in Beijing, Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying urged the Singaporean government to stick to the one-China principle when she was asked about the seizure of the vehicles.

China attaches great importance to its relationship with Singapore, and at the same time, China's stance on the one-China principle is firm and unchanged, she said.

Jia Duqiang, a senior researcher in Southeast Asia studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said that by seizing the vehicles, China sent a signal to Singapore that the city-state should stick to the one-China principle, especially as Taiwan authorities led by Tsai Ing-wen are challenging Beijing on sovereignty.

Returning the vehicles is a positive sign for the China-Singapore relationship, he said, adding that bilateral ties have been frustrated in recent months as a result of what he called Singapore's "improper remarks" on China's stance on the South China Sea issue.

In July, Singapore asked "all parties to fully respect" the ruling of an arbitration case on South China Sea territorial disputes. China insisted that the ruling is "null and void", and has no binding force.

Mother and daughter jailed over vaccines

A mother and daughter have been jailed for selling vaccines without a license in east China's Shandong Province.

Pang Hongwei was sentenced to 15 years in prison for illegally purchasing vaccines which she stored in warehouses in Jinan and Liaocheng, and then sold to clients between June 2013 and April 2015, according to Jinan Intermediate People's Court.

The court said the vaccines had been improperly stored and that Pang had earned nearly 75 million yuan (US\$11 million).

In 2009, Pang was sentenced to three years in prison with a five-year probationary period for illegally trading vaccines in Heze, another city in Shandong. In April last year the case was retried, as required by the provincial higher people's court, and her sentence was extended to six years without probation.

The intermediate court ruled that Pang will serve 19 years in prison in total for the two cases. In addition, all her property will be confiscated.

Sun Qi, Pang's daughter, was sentenced to six years in prison for assisting her mother and being involved in the sale of vaccines worth over 42 million yuan between September 2014 and April 2015. She will have more than 7.4 million yuan of her property confiscated, the court ruled.

Other public services should not be expected to cover for this Tory Government's cuts to the border agency – Diane Abbott

Diane

Abbott MP, Labour's Shadow Home Secretary, speaking after revelations that confidential NHS patient data is being gathered by the Home Office to trace suspected illegal immigrants, said:

"This

is unacceptable. We have already seen this government using schools to gather immigration data on children. Now we find they are using the NHS in the same way.

“Other public services should not be expected to cover for this Tory Government’s cuts to the border agency. People could be deterred from seeking medical care because they are worried their confidential information might be passed on. This could do irreparable damage to the people concerned and it may have public health implications. It should stop now.”

This is not a Charter for Budget Responsibility, it’s a ‘Charter for Alternative Facts’ – John McDonnell

John

McDonnell MP, Labour’s Shadow Chancellor, speaking after the vote tonight on the revised Charter for Budget Responsibility, said:

“This is not a Charter for Budget Responsibility, it’s a ‘Charter for Alternative Facts’, as the Chancellor has tonight abolished the OBR’s ability to determine when a negative shock occurs. This represents a lack of confidence by the Chancellor in his ability to reach his own targets, as well as a rowing back of the welcome principles the OBR was created for – impartiality and credibility of fiscal policy.

“Instead of less scrutiny by the OBR, Labour would like to see more, such as our call for the Chancellor to give power to the OBR to assess short-medium term policy decisions on health spending. Given the last six years of Tory underfunding in our NHS alongside the Government’s denials of the resulting crisis, we need to restore not diminish the public’s faith in the Government’s spending plans.

“Under this new charter the OBR will assume the role of bystander rather than arbiter of whether or not the economy is facing a negative shock. This is a huge power

grab by the Chancellor, as it means he can decide when and what such a “shock” will be, and therefore he can suspend his rules when he likes, and make up his targets as he goes along.

“This Charter also continues with the practice of lumping infrastructure spending in with day-to-day spending, meaning that there will be insufficient scope for investment in our economy, which could hinder growth and therefore our ability to reduce the national debt.

“Despite all the rhetoric of “pressing the reset button”, the Autumn Statement has shown that there would be a continuation of austerity cuts to public services. There is still no more money for the NHS and social care crisis, or for ESA and Universal Credit recipients facing cuts.

“Labour’s Fiscal Credibility Rule would provide the adequate level of investment our economy needs, underpinned by independent oversight coming from both the MPC and a beefed up OBR, which would report to parliament and not the Treasury.”

Schools are struggling to plug the massive budget deficits created by Tory Government – Angela Rayner

Angela

Rayner MP, Labour’s Shadow Education Secretary, ahead of the party’s Opposition Day Debate on schools funding, said:

“Schools are struggling to plug the massive budget deficits created by a Tory Government incapable of running a schools system.

“On Monday we heard from headteachers who are increasingly faced with difficult choices of whether they can afford to have classrooms cleaned, sport pitches mowed or to keep hold of vital support staff who are essential to school communities.

“With three quarters of school budgets taken up by staffing costs, the fear across the sector is that classroom teachers could be cut next.

“At the election the Tories offered warm words to parents about better schools and promised to protect school funding. It is clear that their legacy will now be one of cutting school budgets, super-sized class sizes, and no progress made in the international league tables.

“Our children deserve better.”