

Hong Kong Customs and Marine Police detected six large-scale maritime smuggling cases involving cigarettes and drugs during joint anti-smuggling operations (with photo)

Hong Kong Customs and the Marine Police conducted joint operations from February 12 to 19 targeting large-scale maritime smuggling activities and six cases involving suspected illicit cigarettes and suspected dangerous drugs were detected. During the joint operations, a total of about 16.93 million sticks of suspected illicit cigarettes and 459 kilograms of suspected cannabis buds were seized.

Customs and police officers conducted anti-smuggling operations in Sai Kung and Lantau Island from February 13 to 16 and detected four suspected illicit cigarettes smuggling cases. A total of 4.1 million sticks of suspected illicit cigarettes, with an estimated market value of about \$19 million and a duty potential of about \$13.5 million, found in four goods vehicles and the waters nearby. The four goods vehicles involved in the cases were also detained.

At small hours on February 18, Customs found a suspicious unattended fishing vessel in Shau Kei Wan Typhoon Shelter. Upon inspection, Customs officers seized 12.83 million suspected illicit cigarettes, with an estimated market value of about \$57 million and a duty potential of about \$42 million, inside the compartments of the vessel.

Later on the same day, Customs intercepted a suspicious fishing vessel in the waters off Lamma Island, during which persons onboard the fishing vessel threw numerous nylon bags into the sea. Customs officers then took immediate action to board the vessel and retrieved the subject nylon bags from the water. Upon inspection, a total of about 459kg suspected cannabis buds, with an estimated market value of about \$118 million, were found inside the nylon bags. Three local men, aged between 44 and 60, suspected to be connected with the case were arrested in the operation.

Investigations on the above mentioned six cases are ongoing.

Being a government department primarily responsible for tackling smuggling activities, Customs has long been combating various smuggling activities at the forefront. Customs will keep up its enforcement action and continue to fiercely combat sea smuggling activities through proactive risk management and intelligence-based enforcement strategies. Customs will continue co-operating and exchanging intelligence with the Police, Mainland and international law enforcement agencies, with targeted anti-smuggling operations carried out at suitable times to disrupt these activities.

Smuggling is 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.

Under the Dangerous Drug Ordinance, trafficking in a dangerous drug is a serious offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$5 million and life imprisonment.

Under the Dutiable Commodities Ordinance, anyone involved in dealing with, possession of, selling or buying illicit cigarettes commits an offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$1 million and imprisonment for two years.

Members of the public may report any suspected drug trafficking or illicit cigarette activities to Customs' 24-hour report hotline 182 8080 or its dedicated crime reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk) or online form (eform.cefs.gov.hk/form/ced002/).

