

Hong Kong Customs detects largest smuggling case on record involving goods worth about \$1.5 billion (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs on June 13 detected a suspected case of an ocean-going vessel being used to smuggle goods to the Mainland via Singapore at the Kwai Tsing Container Terminals. A large batch of suspected smuggled goods, including electronic goods, expensive food ingredients, table wines, music records and scheduled endangered species, with a total estimated market value of about \$1.5 billion was seized. This is the largest smuggling case detected by Customs on record in terms of the seizure value.

Through risk assessment, Customs discovered that criminals may use ocean-going vessels to smuggle goods to the Mainland via Southeast Asian countries, and therefore formulated strategic plans. Fifteen containers, declared as carrying wood pulp, prepared to be shipped to the Mainland via Singapore by an ocean-going vessel, were identified at the Kwai Tsing Container Terminals.

Upon inspection, Customs officers found that the 15 containers were fully packed with wooden boxes. Some of the wooden boxes were used to carry raw paper while most of the wooden boxes were used to conceal suspected smuggled goods. The majority of them were electronic goods, including integrated circuits, printed circuit boards and capacitors, totalling about 1.1 billion pieces. Other goods included about 25 tonnes of expensive food ingredients, about 20 000 bottles of table wines, about 27 000 pieces of classical music CDs and vinyl records, and scheduled endangered species.

After a follow-up investigation, Customs arrested a 45-year-old man suspected to be connected with the case, and detained 15 containers suspected to be involved.

An investigation is ongoing. The arrested man has been released on bail pending further investigation and the likelihood of further arrests is not ruled out.

Customs is the primary agency responsible for the suppression of smuggling activities and has all along been combating various smuggling activities proactively 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, along with mounting targeted anti-smuggling operations at suitable times to land a solid blow against relevant 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. Moreover, any person who imports or exports pharmaceutical products and medicines without a valid licence commits an offence. The maximum penalty upon conviction is a fine of \$500,000 and imprisonment for two years.

Under the Protection of Endangered Species of Animals and Plants Ordinance, any person found guilty of importing or exporting an endangered species without a licence is liable to a maximum fine of \$10 million and imprisonment for 10 years.

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



