

Hong Kong Customs detects two smuggling cases by ocean-going vessels involving goods worth about \$200 million (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs on December 11 and 12 mounted a special enforcement operation codenamed "Convoy" and detected two suspected cases of using ocean-going vessels to smuggle goods to the Mainland at Tsing Yi Container Terminal. A large batch of suspected smuggled goods, including expensive food ingredients, electronic goods, vinyl records, table wines, medicine and scheduled endangered species, with a total estimated market value of about \$200 million was seized.

Through intelligence analysis and risk assessment, Customs early this month discovered that criminals may use ocean-going vessels to smuggle goods to the Mainland and then formulated strategic enforcement operations. Two ocean-going vessels prepared to depart from Hong Kong to Shanghai were successfully identified.

Customs officers identified for inspection eight containers declared as carrying plastic materials and four containers declared as carrying household products on board the two vessels, and found inside nine containers a large batch of suspected smuggled goods, including about 22 tonnes of expensive food ingredients such as dried shark fins, dried fish maws and dried sea cucumbers, over 140 000 electronic goods, about 70 000 pieces of vinyl records, about 9 000 bottles of table wines, about 4 000 boxes of medicine and scheduled endangered species.

After follow-up investigations, Customs officers arrested five men aged between 38 and 54 suspected to be connected with the cases.

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

Being a government department specifically responsible for tackling smuggling, Customs 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).



