

Hong Kong Customs seizes suspected smuggled goods worth about \$20 million (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs detected a suspected speedboat-related smuggling case in Lau Fau Shan on March 16. A batch of suspected smuggled goods, including electronic products, high-value food and cosmetics, with an estimated market value of about \$20 million was seized.

Customs officers conducted an anti-smuggling operation in Lau Fau Shan on that day and spotted several suspicious men on the shore moving cartons from a lorry to a speedboat using a ladder with metal rollers. The officers then took action and those men immediately jumped onto the speedboat and fled.

Customs officers later intercepted the lorry suspected to be connected with the case in the vicinity. A batch of suspected smuggled goods, including electronic parts, camera lenses of smartphones, dried abalones, bird nests, dried sea cucumbers and cosmetics was seized on board the lorry.

During the operation, a 32-year-old man suspected to be connected with the case was arrested and the lorry suspected to be involved was detained.

An investigation is ongoing and the arrested man has been released on bail pending further investigation.

Customs stresses that it will keep up its enforcement actions and will continue to fiercely combat sea smuggling activities by actively pursuing risk-management and intelligence-based enforcement strategies, along with mounting targeted anti-smuggling operations at suitable times and maintaining close co-operation in its intelligence exchanges with local and overseas law enforcement agencies 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.

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).



Seventeen building plans approved in January

The Buildings Department approved 17 building plans in January, with five on Hong Kong Island, six in Kowloon and six in the New Territories.

Of the approved plans, 10 were for apartment and apartment/commercial developments, five were for commercial developments, and two were for community services developments.

In the same month, consent was given for works to start on 11 building projects which, when completed, will provide 11 333 square metres of gross floor area for domestic use involving 46 units, and 79 762 sq m of gross floor area for non-domestic use. The department has received notification of commencement of superstructure works for eight building projects.

The department also issued 15 occupation permits, with two on Hong Kong Island, eight in Kowloon and five in the New Territories.

Of the buildings certified for occupation, the gross floor area for domestic use was 24 112 sq m involving 468 units, and 28 086 sq m was for non-domestic use.

The declared cost of new buildings completed in January totalled about \$2.1 billion.

In addition, six demolition consents involving six building structures were issued.

The department received 1 718 reports about unauthorised building works (UBWs) in January and issued 257 removal orders on UBWs.

The full version of the Monthly Digest for January can be viewed on the Buildings Department's homepage (www.bd.gov.hk).

Speech by FS at Hong Kong Science Park Virtual Career Expo 2021 (English only)

Following is the speech by the Financial Secretary, Mr Paul Chan, at Hong Kong Science Park Virtual Career Expo 2021 today (March 18):

Sunny (Chairman of Hong Kong Science and Technology Parks Corporation, Dr Sunny Chai) ladies and gentlemen, online friends,

Greetings from Hong Kong, where the future – your future – is waiting.

Being held virtually for the second year, this year's Hong Kong Science Park Career Expo connects you with more than 240 Science Park companies. And they're your ticket to over 2 000 promising job opportunities in the innovation and technology (I&T) sector. Right here in Hong Kong. Where I&T is not only your future but ours too.

Let me tell you why. Innovation and technology is a policy priority of the Hong Kong SAR Government. Its development is critical to every sector, every industry, of our economy.

To date, this Government has allocated over US\$14 billion for the development of I&T. That certainly includes Science Park, home to some 1 000 tech companies. And so much more to come. That's because two major research clusters at Science Park are now opening for business. One is laser-focused on artificial intelligence and robotics, the other on healthcare technology. And in these pandemic times, we all know how essential healthcare technology is to all of our futures.

The clusters are attracting high-profile research organisations and institutions from all over the world. And they're looking for people like you.

Hong Kong is also a magnet for start-ups. Last year, nearly 3 400 innovating companies called Hong Kong "home". That's up more than 50 per cent over just four years ago.

We're investing in their future as well. Over the past two years, our Innovation and Technology Venture Fund has pumped nearly US\$13 million into 19 local start-ups, while attracting over US\$65 million in private investment.

Innovation and technology is at the heart of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area Development, the cluster-city development integrating

Hong Kong and Macao with nine cities in the Pearl River Delta region.

Add them up and you have a regional marketplace of some 72 million consumers, with collective GDP per capita exceeding US\$23,000. Hong Kong will play a central role in the Greater Bay Area – in sectors such as financial services, aviation and, of course, innovation and technology.

The Hong Kong-Shenzhen Innovation and Technology Park, located near Hong Kong's boundary with Shenzhen, is under development. We expect nearly 5 000 jobs will be created in the Park's first phase, from 2024 to 2027.

On full completion, the Park will become home to some 52 000 jobs, powering the Greater Bay Area's rise as one of the world's leading I&T hubs.

In short, what are you waiting for?

I look forward to seeing you soon in Hong Kong. Where the future is yours.

Thank you.

Labour Department calls on employers to make flexible arrangements for employees taking statutory holiday of Ching Ming Festival to reduce risk of infection

The Labour Department (LD) today (March 18) appealed to employers to have early discussions with employees on flexible arrangements for taking the statutory holiday of the Ching Ming Festival (April 4) so that their employees may stagger grave-sweeping activities before or after the festival, thereby avoiding overcrowding to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. This will help maintain good labour-management relations and protect the health of employees as well as the community.

The LD spokesman said, "The Ching Ming Festival is a statutory holiday and it will fall between the Easter holidays this year. Employers may give prior notice to employees in accordance with the Employment Ordinance (EO) to arrange for employees an alternative holiday within 60 days before or after the statutory holiday. Moreover, with the mutual consent of the employer and the employee, any day within 30 days before or after the statutory holiday or an alternative holiday may be taken by the employee as a substituted

holiday."

For enquiries about the E0, please contact the LD on the 24-hour enquiry hotline at 2717 1771 (provided by 1823) or by email at enquiry@labour.gov.hk. Details of the E0 are also available on the LD's homepage (www.labour.gov.hk).

CHP investigates 10 additional confirmed cases of COVID-19

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health (DH) announced that as of 0.00am, March 18, the CHP was investigating 10 additional confirmed cases of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), taking the number of cases to 11 351 in Hong Kong so far (comprising 11 350 confirmed cases and one probable case).

Among the newly reported cases announced, four are imported cases, three are local cases with unknown sources while the remaining three cases are epidemiologically linked with local cases.

The first case with unknown sources involves a 15-year-old boy (case number: 11345) who developed fever and cough on March 12. He went to a mobile specimen collection station for testing on March 16 and tested positive. He is a student and last attended class at school on March 12.

The second case with unknown sources involves a 35-year-old woman (case number: 11346) who developed loss of smell on March 6 and experienced shortness of breath on March 16. She went to a community testing centre for testing on March 16 and tested positive. She is a marketing manager and last went to work on March 15.

The third case with unknown sources involves a 36-year-old man (case number: 11351) who developed sore throat on March 4. His sample collected on March 16 was tested positive. He is an engineer and last went to work on March 8.

A total of 294 cases have been recorded in the past 14 days (March 4 to 17), including 228 local cases of which 48 are from unknown sources.

The CHP's epidemiological investigations and relevant contact tracing on the confirmed cases are ongoing. For case details and contact tracing information, please see the Annex or the list of buildings with confirmed cases of COVID-19 in the past 14 days and the latest local situation of COVID-19 available on the website "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk).

Meanwhile, the CHP reminded those who had visited specified venues under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Compulsory Testing for Certain Persons) Regulation (Cap. 599J) to receive COVID-19 nucleic acid testing according to the compulsory testing notice. The Regulation also requires all household members of close contacts of confirmed cases to undergo a COVID-19 nucleic acid test within a specified period according to compulsory testing notices published in the Gazette. The public are also urged to seek medical attention early if symptoms develop.

The Government has launched the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme. Members of the public are encouraged to get vaccinated. Details of the programme can be found at the designated website (www.covidvaccine.gov.hk).

The CHP called on members of the public to avoid going out, having social contact and dining out. They should put on a surgical mask and maintain stringent hand hygiene when they need to go out. The CHP strongly urged the elderly to stay home as far as possible and avoid going out. They should consider asking their family and friends to help with everyday tasks such as shopping for basic necessities.

The spokesman said, "Given that the situation of COVID-19 infection remains severe and that there is a continuous increase in the number of cases reported around the world, members of the public are strongly urged to avoid all non-essential travel outside Hong Kong.

"The CHP also strongly urges the public to maintain at all times strict personal and environmental hygiene, which is key to personal protection against infection and prevention of the spread of the disease in the community. On a personal level, members of the public should wear a surgical mask when having respiratory symptoms, taking public transport or staying in crowded places. They should also perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes.

"As for household environmental hygiene, members of the public are advised to maintain drainage pipes properly and regularly pour water into drain outlets (U-traps). After using the toilet, they should put the toilet lid down before flushing to avoid spreading germs."

Moreover, the Government has launched the website "COVID-19 Thematic Website" (www.coronavirus.gov.hk) for announcing the latest updates on various news on COVID-19 infection and health advice to help the public understand the latest updates. Members of the public may also gain access to information via the COVID-19 WhatsApp Helpline launched by the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer. Simply by saving 9617 1823 in their phone contacts or clicking the link wa.me/85296171823?text=hi, they will be able to obtain information on COVID-19 as well as the "StayHomeSafe" mobile app and wristband via WhatsApp.

To prevent pneumonia and respiratory tract infections, members of the public should always maintain good personal and environmental hygiene. They

are advised to:

- Wear a surgical mask when taking public transport or staying in crowded places. It is important to wear a mask properly, including performing hand hygiene before wearing and after removing a mask;
- Perform hand hygiene frequently, especially before touching the mouth, nose or eyes, after touching public installations such as handrails or doorknobs, or when hands are contaminated by respiratory secretions after coughing or sneezing;
- Maintain drainage pipes properly and regularly (about once a week) pour about half a litre of water into each drain outlet (U-trap) to ensure environmental hygiene;
- After using the toilet, put the toilet lid down before flushing to avoid spreading germs;
- Wash hands with liquid soap and water, and rub for at least 20 seconds. Then rinse with water and dry with a disposable paper towel. If hand washing facilities are not available, or when hands are not visibly soiled, performing hand hygiene with 70 to 80 per cent alcohol-based handrub is an effective alternative;
- Cover your mouth and nose with tissue paper when sneezing or coughing. Dispose of soiled tissues into a lidded rubbish bin, then wash hands thoroughly; and
- When having respiratory symptoms, wear a surgical mask, refrain from work or attending class at school, avoid going to crowded places and seek medical advice promptly.