

Hong Kong Customs combats smuggling activities making use of children (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs mounted a special operation codenamed "Chameleon" in September at land boundary, rail and ferry control points to strengthen enforcement against smuggling activities making use of children.

The operation started on September 1 and concluded on September 30. Customs detected a total of six smuggling cases making use of children, involving possession of duty-not-paid cigarettes, smuggling pork and poultry eggs, as well as failing to declare a large quantity of currency in possession when arriving in Hong Kong. Six persons were arrested.

Four of the six cases involved possession of duty-not-paid cigarettes, in which Customs officers seized about 10 000 suspected duty-not-paid cigarettes with an estimated market value of about \$27,000 and a duty potential of about \$19,000. One case of bringing a large quantity of currency into the territory involved cash worth about \$1.8 million. The remaining case involving pork and poultry eggs was handed over to the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department for follow-up action.

Children suspected of being used in the cases as decoys for smuggling activities are aged from 2 to 11. The six arrested persons, aged between 40 and 64, are their parents or escorts.

Customs reminds members of the public that smuggling is a serious offence which attracts severe penalties. Parents and guardians should not use children as cover for criminal activities. They are also urged to stay alert to prevent criminals from using their children as decoys for smuggling purposes.

Customs has all along been very concerned about smuggling activities making use of children. The department will continue to step up inspections on passengers travelling with children, and enhance publicity and public education at control points.

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).

