

Hong Kong Customs teams up with Mainland Customs to detect largest speedboat smuggling case on record (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs and the Mainland Customs mounted a joint anti-smuggling operation codenamed "Xun Lei" since March this year. Hong Kong Customs has conducted enforcement operations from June 2 to 7 and detected a suspected speedboat smuggling case. A batch of suspected smuggled goods with an estimated market value of about \$120 million was seized, including about 66 000 pieces of high-value goods, about 2.3 tonnes of expensive food ingredients and about 186 kilograms of scheduled endangered species. This is the largest speedboat smuggling case detected by Hong Kong Customs on record in terms of the seizure value.

In view of the recent upward trend of sea smuggling activities, Hong Kong Customs has particularly stepped up intelligence exchanges with the anti-smuggling departments of the Mainland Customs, and targeted a cross-boundary smuggling syndicate for an in-depth investigation. The "Xun Lei" operation was jointly conducted by Hong Kong Customs, the Anti-Smuggling Bureau of the General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China (GACC), the Anti-Smuggling Bureau of the Guangdong Sub-Administration of the GACC, and the Anti-Smuggling Bureau of Shenzhen Customs. From March to April, authorities of the Mainland Customs first took action and raided three storehouses suspected to be used for storing smuggled goods in places including Guangdong, Guangxi and Anhui. A total of 11 people were arrested and about 2.42 tonnes of suspected smuggled pangolin scales with an estimated market value of about RMB50 million were seized.

Hong Kong Customs then conducted operations from June 2 to 7. Customs officers on June 2 spotted several suspicious men moving cartons of goods from a lorry to a speedboat using a ladder with metal rollers at a seashore in Lau Fau Shan. The officers then took action and those men immediately jumped onto the speedboat and fled. A lorry suspected to be connected with the case was intercepted at the scene. A large batch of suspected smuggled goods, including luxury handbags, valuable watches, expensive food ingredients and highly endangered species, was seized on board the lorry. After a follow-up investigation, Customs officers raided three storehouses and a residential unit in the New Territories. A large batch of suspected smuggled goods was further seized in the storehouses.

During the whole operation, the total value of the suspected smuggled goods seized by Hong Kong Customs is about \$120 million. Together with the smuggled goods seized by the Mainland Customs, the total value of the seizures has amounted to over \$180 million.

Four men suspected to be in connection with the case, aged between 35

and 62, were arrested by Hong Kong Customs during the operation.

An investigation is ongoing. All arrested men have been released on bail pending further investigation, and further arrests are not ruled out.

The Assistant Commissioner of Customs and Excise, Mr Chan Tsz-tat, stressed at a press conference today (June 10) that the department has always been fiercely combating cross-boundary smuggling activities and would continue working closely with the law enforcement agencies in the Mainland through intelligence exchanges and joint enforcement actions, with a view to further increasing the enforcement effectiveness in the anti-smuggling realm by the Mainland and Hong Kong enforcement agencies.

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 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).

