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Panel on Security

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Smuggling at sea

Smuggling at Sea

The subject of smuggling at sea has not been discussed by the Panel on Security. However, information on smuggling at sea as set out in the following paragraphs, was included in a paper provided by the Administration for the meeting of the Panel on Security on 8 July 2008 when the anti-smuggling work of the Customs and Excise Department (C&ED) was discussed.

2. According to the Administration, the smuggling of general consumer goods (such as computers, electrical appliances and mobile phones) into the Mainland accounts for most of the smuggling activities at sea. Despite enforcement efforts by C&ED, such smuggling activities are expected to continue as long as there are substantive price and taxation differences between the Mainland and Hong Kong. Similarly, illegal importation into Hong Kong of dutiable commodities, notably cigarettes, continues to be lucrative. Smugglers use various means of conveyance, including fishing and cargo vessels, mechanised sampans and speed boats, and employ different tactics to evade enforcement detection. In 2006, C&ED and the Hong Kong Police Force detected a total of 173 sea smuggling cases, in which 405 persons were arrested and goods with a total value of \$215.2 million were seized. Sea smuggling is often characterized by the following -

- (a) it often involves large-scale and organized activities. The prevailing mode of operation adopted by syndicates is to first convey the goods to a remote pier or seashore by vehicle. The goods are then loaded on board speedboats or motorized sampans during the small hours. Once laden, these speedboats or motorized sampans will head towards the Mainland waters at high speed. Common loading points include Lau Fau Shan, Tuen Mun, Lantau Island, Sai Kung and Sha Tau Kok;

- (b) smuggling syndicates also convey smuggled goods by cargo vessel to waters close to the Hong Kong/Mainland sea boundary. The goods are then transferred to speedboats quickly. Once laden, the speedboats will head towards the Mainland waters at high speed. This tactic was once very popular in 2006, but has since subsided as a result of rigorous enforcement actions;
- (c) cargo vessels are sometimes used to smuggle dismantled vehicles and electronic waste into the Mainland; and
- (d) fishing vessels with altered cargo holds are also used to smuggle marked oil and edible oil into the Mainland or cigarettes into Hong Kong.

Enforcement strategy

3. According to the Administration, the following enforcement strategies are adopted to combat smuggling at sea -

- (a) C&ED launches are deployed 24 hours a day to patrol Hong Kong waters to deter and detect smuggling activities. High-speed pursuit craft are used to intercept speedboats involved in smuggling activities. A radar system is used to monitor the movement of fast moving objects within Hong Kong waters. It facilitates the formulation of appropriate operational strategies and deployment of necessary resources to combat sea smuggling; and
- (b) C&ED and the Police have established a Joint Anti-smuggling Task Force to facilitate sharing of intelligence and conducting joint operations against sea smuggling activities. In addition, a multi-agency working group comprising C&ED, the Police, Marine Department and other government departments concerned has been established to take concerted enforcement actions on suspicious cargo vessels at sea. Since its establishment in 2006, the working group has detected 94 smuggling cases, with a total seizure value of \$280 million.