

## 24 cargo ships stay put

**T**HREE more cargo ships bearing Vietnamese flags left port despite increasing fears of being stopped by Chinese vessels.

The majority of Vietnamese ship operators appeared to waver in their resolve to rush a Chinese gauntlet off Hongkong waters.

Marine officials said 24 ships remained in port.

The three departing ships are smaller than the 3,900-tonne *Yoshi Uni*, the Panamanian-registered ship which was stopped 3.3 nautical miles south of Waglan Island on Thursday night.

A Government official said the incident might not affect

Hongkong's status as a free port.

A Marine Department spokesman said the Chinese had not troubled with larger vessels, but had instead concentrated on the smaller vessels bearing "weak" flags.

The spokesman said that all ship captains and owners should be aware of the restricted boundaries, especially those off Waglan Island.

In the meantime, the Government was still awaiting word from China on why the vessels were stopped.

"The Chinese can take law enforcement actions in their waters but it would be nice if they could tell us what is happening," he said.