

Abducted crewmen still being questioned

EASTERN EXPRESS
04 APR 1995

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The Government yesterday expressed frustration over China's refusal to release two Hong Kong crewmen who were forcibly escorted out of the territory's waters by Public Security Bureau officers last month.

The comments came as the head of the Zhuhai *Gongan* (Public Security) Bureau, Guan Yujia, rejected joint calls by the Hong Kong and British governments for the pair to be released.

The men have been under arrest in Zhuhai since March 18 for their alleged involvement in car smuggling.

The Zhuhai authorities claimed to have extracted a confession and were reported to have seized at least 40 stolen vehicles from a locally registered lighter under the men's command.

Yesterday Guan said the two men were under *Gongan* investigation for smuggling and would not be allowed to meet their families.

A Government spokesman said Hong Kong was disappointed by Zhuhai's response.

"The key issue is that the Hong Kong residents were detained in Hong Kong waters," the spokesman said.

"The Chinese side has acknowledged this and admitted that it was a mistake."

The spokesman said Hong Kong was continuing to press for the immediate return of the vessels and crew.

The Chinese News Agency yesterday accused the Governor, Chris Patten, of using the incident to gain political capital through confrontation with China.

Patten had upgraded the incident to worsen the Sino-British relationship and because he did not want Britain to change its policy towards China, it said.

According to the Zhuhai authorities, the crewmen and a tug and lighter were initially intercepted and arrested in Chinese waters during an anti-smuggling operation.