

\$120m cigarette seizure foils smuggling scam

CLIFF BUDDLE

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Customs officers dealt a devastating blow to an international cigarette smuggling syndicate yesterday by seizing 10 containers of contraband from a freighter.

The containers with more than \$2 million cigarettes worth \$120

million were seized from a 37,000-tonne German-registered freighter at Kwai Chung terminal.

It was the second most valuable haul to be discovered by Customs officers, and the duty which would have been avoided in Hong Kong was more than \$462 million.

The cigarettes, including well-

known brands, had been legitimately exported from Hong Kong a month ago. They were shipped via China to Japan where their cargo classification was changed to "lift parts" and "aluminium".

The haul was then shipped back to Hong Kong, in transit to China where they would have

been sold on the black market. Ronald Au Yee-leung, head of the Prosecution, Intelligence and Investigation Bureau, said arrests should follow soon.

Another officer, Pang Kuisum, said the complex route showed syndicates were becoming more sophisticated.

