

Coast guard probes people-smuggling

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A man turns himself in to police in New Taipei City's Sansia District yesterday after claiming to have entered Taiwan illegally.

Photo: CNA

A Coast Guard Administration task force has been set up after a Taiwanese man said that he paid smugglers to transport him back to Taiwan from China late last year and that others on the boat were carrying pork and other meat products.

A businessman, surnamed Lee (李), on Saturday posted on Baoliao Gongshe (爆料公社), a Facebook page for sharing revelations, that he had smuggled himself out of China after running afoul of Chinese authorities, but had decided to turn himself in to police because he realized that illegal immigration and smuggling are the biggest loopholes in the government's efforts to prevent the spread of African swine fever to Taiwan.

He had a business in China, but was jailed in Guangdong Province for 67 days before being released pending trial and had paid smugglers NT\$1.5 million (US\$48,635) to transport him to Penghu County, he wrote.

He traveled by boat from Quanzhou in China's Fujian Province to Penghu, and then flew from Penghu Airport in Makong to Taipei International Airport (Songshan airport), which meant he did not have to go through immigration, Lee wrote.

Three other Taiwanese who traveled with him on the boat had a lot of Chinese-made meat products, including sausage and pork jerky, but he only realized such products posed a threat once he was back home and read about African swine fever, as China has blocked information about outbreaks of the disease there, he wrote.

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He would surrender to police even though he might face punishment for smuggling himself home, he wrote.

Lee, 46, yesterday made good on his promise, surrendering to police in New Taipei City's Sansia District (新莊), who referred him to prosecutors for allegedly contravening the Immigration Act (移民法) and forwarded information about him to the city government, the coast guard and the National Immigration Agency.

The coast guard is collecting information about Lee's case and has set up a task force, Kinmen-Matsu-Penghu Branch Director Liao Te-cheng (廖德成) said in response to media inquiries.

It would ask Lee to help identify the brokers who arranged his passage, the boat owner and the other passengers, the coast guard said.

As cross-strait travel surges ahead of the Lunar New Year holiday, the coast guard would boost its patrols, targeting fishing boats that are not actually fishing, Liao said.

The coast guard is more active near Kinmen, as it is closer to China, but patrols around Penghu and other areas are strict as well, he said.

It would use coastal radar systems to monitor vessels and prevent illegal immigrants from boarding smaller shuttle boats offshore, he added.

Meanwhile, the Council of Agriculture said more sausage products from China's Jiangsu Province that were dumped in the quarantine amnesty bin at Songshan airport have tested positive for the African swine flu virus.

As of yesterday, of the 813 Chinese pork products seized at customs and sampled for tests, 14 tested positive for the disease, council data showed.

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