



CREEPY-CRAWLY CARGO. Tarantulas inside plastic containers are shown at the Philippine Department of Environment and Natural Resources in metropolitan Manila, the Philippines. Philippine customs district collector Carmelita Talusan said in a statement that 757 live tarantulas, with an estimated value of P310,000 (about U.S. \$6,000), were seized by customs agents at Manila's airport. The endangered wildlife species were found concealed in gift-wrapped boxes of cookies and oatmeal shipped from Poland. (AP Photo/Aaron Favila)

Creepy cargo: Philippines seizes 757 tarantulas from Poland

MANILA, The Philippines (AP) — Philippine customs officials were astonished when they opened nicely gift-wrapped boxes of cookies and oatmeal flown in all the way from Poland and found a hair-raising contraband: hundreds of live tarantulas.

Bureau of Customs personnel seized the 757 tarantulas at a mail exchange center near Manila's international airport and later arrested a Filipino man who tried to claim the long-legged and venomous

spiders, which were declared as "collection items."

Philippine wildlife laws prohibit the trading, collection, and possession of such spiders, which are popular pets among arachnid enthusiasts, without permits.

Despite threats of hefty fines and imprisonment, a startling array of wildlife have been seized by customs inspectors by the hundreds in Manila since last year, including geckos, iguanas, chameleons, and a popular reptile called bearded dragons.

Philippines bans workers' deployment to Libya amid fighting

MANILA, The Philippines (AP) — The Philippine labor secretary says the government has imposed a total ban on the deployment of Filipino workers to Libya because of fighting between rival militias for control of the North African nation's capital.

Labor secretary Silvestre Bello III said the indefinite ban would affect new Libya-bound workers and even Filipinos who are scheduled to return there after

work breaks. The deployment ban was imposed after the Department of Foreign Affairs in Manila raised the threat level in Libya's capital to 3 and urged Filipinos in Tripoli and outlying areas to consider leaving to avoid getting caught in the fighting.

Bello says if the threat level is raised to 4, the government will have to implement a forced evacuation of Filipinos to ensure their safety.

Hong Kong customs seizes \$13 million worth of cocaine

By Katie Tam
The Associated Press

HONG KONG — Hong Kong customs agents have seized a massive haul of cocaine with an estimated street value of \$13 million and arrested one suspect.

The customs service in the semi-autonomous Chinese territory said the operation that targeted a private residential apartment in the Shatin neighborhood netted 91 kilograms (200 pounds) of the drug — making it the single largest in terms of value and amount outside of the territory's ports.

Head of the Customs Drug Investigation Bureau Hui Wai-ming said the suspect, described as a "core member" of a drug syndicate, was stopped after leaving the apartment with four kilograms (nine pounds) of cocaine found in his bag.

Agents then took him back to the apartment where the remainder of the cocaine was found. Hui said the 41-year-old suspect was a Hong Kong resident with connections to the territory's organized crime groups known as triads. More arrests are possible in the case, he said.

The syndicate had only been operating for about a month, Hui said.

"They are not fully operational yet, therefore there isn't a huge amount of drugs distributed to the market yet," Hui told reporters at a news conference.

The drugs were believed to have arrived by ship from South America, Hui said. The cocaine was in the form of bricks covered in a waterproof wrapping and stamped with



DRUGS DISCOVERED. Head of the Customs Drug Investigation Bureau, Hui Wai-ming, holds seized cocaine during a news conference in Hong Kong. A haul of cocaine with an estimated market value of \$13 million has been seized in Hong Kong, according to customs agents. (AP Photo/Kin Cheung)

a brand — either dolphin, horse, or leaf.

As a major Asian port city, Hong Kong is considered a key transit point for contraband from illegal drugs to endangered wildlife parts. Much of that is bound for mainland China or Southeast Asia where drug laws tend to be much more strict.

Meanwhile, Hong Kong's large population of finance workers, lawyers, and others in well-paid white collar sectors also provides a lucrative market for drugs including cocaine and marijuana.

Hong Kong's past is steeped in the drug trade, having been founded as a British colony in 1842 as a result of the First Opium War.

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