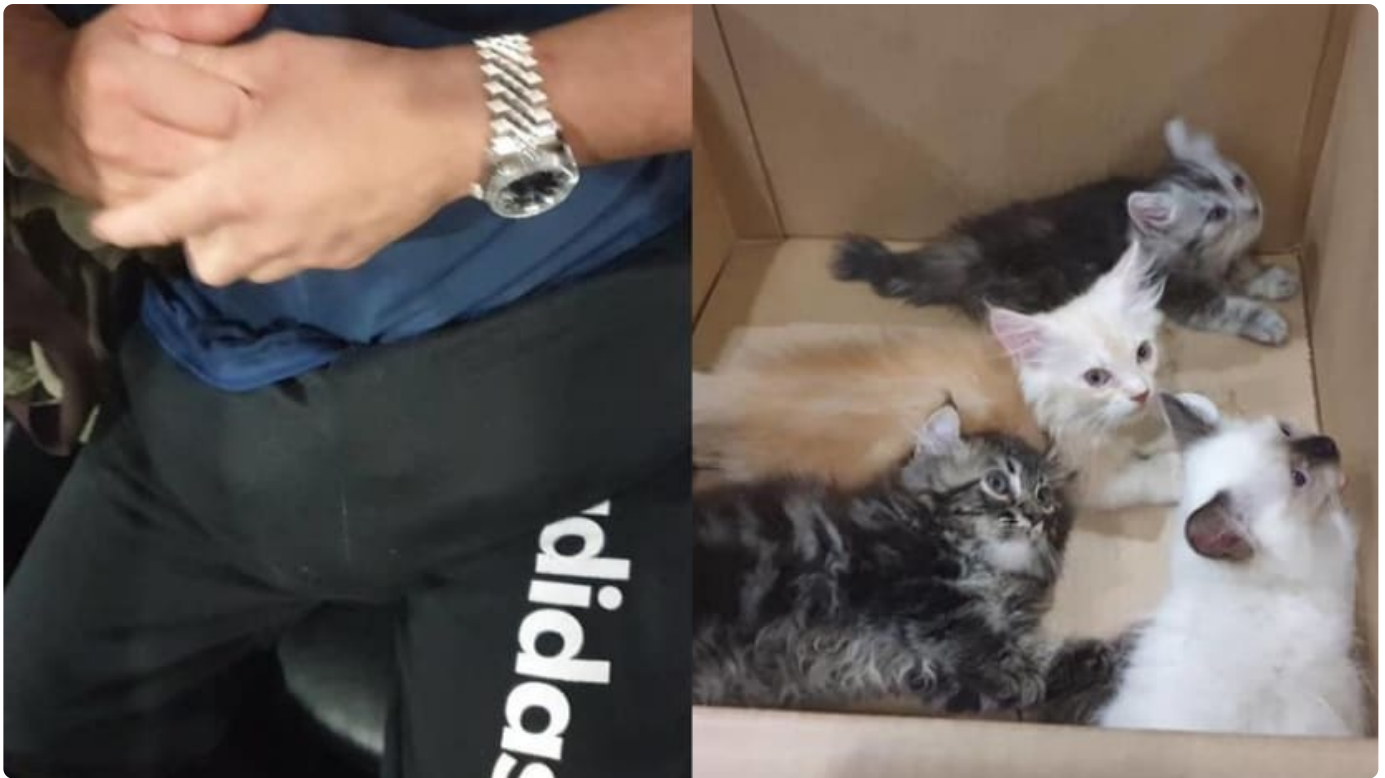


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Singapore

Man who hid smuggled kittens in pants jailed; elderly mother also imprisoned



The kittens were put under the care and quarantine of the Animal & Veterinary Service. (Photo: Facebook/Immigration & Checkpoints Authority)



Lydia Lam

23 Jul 2021 06:05PM | (Updated: 23 Jul 2021 09:06PM)



SINGAPORE: An elderly woman who smuggled seven cats into Singapore was



Leong Sok Boy, 72, was given 40 days' jail, while her son, 47-year-old Justin Ng Chin Boon, was jailed for 12 weeks from Friday.

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Leong pleaded guilty to three counts of importing a live cat without a licence, with another four charges considered in sentencing.

Her son pleaded guilty to two counts under the Animals and Birds Act of failing to ensure that the kittens were not transported in a manner that subjected them to unnecessary suffering and one count of importing a live kitten in his pants. Another 12 charges were taken into consideration.

The court heard that Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA) officers stopped a Singapore-registered car at Tuas Checkpoint that was entering the country from Malaysia on the night of Aug 11, 2018.

Leong was seated at the back while her son was in the front passenger seat. A third co-accused, 42-year-old family friend Leow Hua Liang, was behind the wheel.

The ICA officers found a live cat in Leong's hand-carry bag, and six others in a plastic canvas bag in the rear of the car. Neither of the trio had declared the animals, instead trying to conceal them.

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The seven cats were seized. Leong claimed that the cats were her pets and were not for sale.

SON CAUGHT WITH FOUR KITTENS IN HIS PANTS



ICA officers asked the pair if they had anything to declare, and they said "no". However, the officers heard meowing sounds from the passenger seat and saw Ng placing both hands over his stomach.

The officers noticed that Ng's pants were "bulky" around the crotch area, said the National Parks Board (NParks) prosecutor.

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They conducted a check and found four live kittens hidden in Ng's pants. He later said they were his pets and not for sale.

A veterinarian later reviewed the conditions that the kittens had been transported in and found that they suffered during the journey due to the way they were confined.

They were concealed in Ng's pants and subjected to very cramped conditions, unable to stand upright or move normally. There was also poor ventilation and temperature control and they were subjected to Ng's body heat.

A RISK TO PUBLIC HEALTH: PROSECUTOR

The prosecutor said there was a substantial risk to public health, as smuggled animals are not subjected to health and quarantine checks and may introduce diseases such as rabies into Singapore.

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Leong's lawyer told the court his client was a retired nurse who had suffered hardship and a divorce. He asked for a fine, adding that the level of sophistication was "not there" as the cats were just in her bags.



If not for the attentiveness of the officer, the animals could have slipped through the borders, he said.

NPARKS REMINDS ALL TRAVELLERS THAT APPROVAL IS REQUIRED

In a statement after the hearing, NParks reminded all travellers that the import of all animals into Singapore requires approval from NParks.

"Animals that are smuggled into Singapore are from unknown sources, have unknown health status and may introduce exotic diseases into the country. The well-being of the animals will also be affected by poor conditions during the smuggling process," said the spokesperson.

The board strongly encourages prospective pet owners to buy pets from licensed pet shops that maintain records, and discourages them from buying from unknown sources such as on online platforms, she added.

Under the Animals and Birds Act, first-time offenders caught importing any animal or bird without a licence could be fined up to \$10,000, jailed up to 12 months, or both.

Leow's case is pending.

Source: CNA/II(ac)

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