



Wong (right) speaking to a Customs officer at a duty-free shop in Labuan.

## Voice up Labuan woes in Parliament, reps urged

### Sohan Das

LABUAN: Political representatives should voice up in Parliament the island's "grave concern" over the new Customs rules curbing the sale of duty-free items as this will severely affect the limping local economy caused by the shrinkage of the oil and gas sector.

The new rules came into force on Nov 1.

"We have forwarded our views through various channels and it is regrettable that the voice of Labuan remains unheard by the Customs Department and Finance Ministry," said Labuan Chinese Chamber of Commerce Chairman Datuk Wong Kii Yii.

Regrettably, he added, the high-powered Special Task Force established to address Labuan's problems, headed by Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Zahid Hamidi, appeared to be a lame duck though it knew very well that removing the duty-free status partly would further aggravate the island's woes.

Wong said Federal Territories Minister Datuk Seri Tengku Adnan Mansor whose ministry is responsible for Labuan and Member of Parliament Datuk Rozman Isli should no longer keep quiet and must convey the island's concerns to the top level, since "shouting from the bottom has gone unheard."

He said this after visiting a few shops

which have been classified as Kedai Bebas Cukai (KBC or Duty-Free Shops) out of the 21 short-listed for the classification.

Those with the classification could continue to be engaged in the sale of cigarettes, liquor and beer at duty-free prices.

Wong said the feedback from his visit was that the traders complained that the presence of an unformed Customs official at their premises was serving as a deterrent and sales had dropped substantially.

"The new rules require all sales to be recorded in a computer by a Customs official and the particulars of buyers recorded as well, making all customers look like a smuggler," he said.

"The present Customs action is akin to plugging the small holes but the big gaping hole is ignored."

Another angry local resident, who expressed his anger in a *WhatsApp* message, said:

"Biggest laugh in Labuan. Duty-free shop has a Customs officer stationed to record the sales...nothing better to do but waste of money on employees. Joke of the world.

"Smuggling is rampant everywhere in Malaysia and not only in duty-free ports. You can purchase from underground suppliers in Kuala Lumpur at duty-free prices plus delivery charges."