

An experiment with drug

Canada becomes first major economy to fully legalise cannabis

● Canadians at least 18 or 19 years old may buy up to 30 grams of cannabis, and grow up to four plants at home

● Sales of derivatives like edibles will be legalised next year

● Sales are forecast to boost economic growth by up to US\$847,000

AFP | Ottawa, Canada

Canada on Wednesday became the world's first major economy to fully legalize cannabis, sparking celebrations as the nation embarked on the controversial experiment in drug policy.

Throughout the country huge lines outside pot shops snaked around city blocks, cannabis flew off store shelves and government websites processed 100 pot orders per minute.

Scores of customers braved the cold for hours outside Tweed, a pot boutique in St John's, Newfoundland that opened at midnight, to buy their first grams (ounces) of legal cannabis.

Ian Power said prior to its grand opening, he was happy to "make history" by being the first to legally buy pot in Canada, adding that he would frame those few grams rather than smoke them.

"I'm elated. I'm so excited, I can't stop smiling. I'm not cold. It's freezing cold out, but I'm not cold," he said.

In Cape Breton, platinum record-selling fiddler Ashley MacIsaac was among the first buyers, while in Toronto revelers attended a "Wake and Bake" party with music, a glass pipe blower and campfire treats.

"It's fun, good for the soul, and now legal so we don't have to stress about that any more," Sebastien Bouzats from Montreal told AFP. "We don't have to hide it any more."

"I did not honestly expect to witness the legalization of cannabis in my lifetime, and I am proud to be a Canadian as we take this monumental step towards providing access to cannabis," Toronto resident Katie, 27, said.

Legalization has sent stocks in pot companies soaring over the past year on the Toronto and New York stock exchanges (before retreating five percent on



Cannabis items for sale are seen on October 16, 2018 in a Montreal cannabis store owned by the SQDC (Societe quebeoise du cannabis)



A customer shows a marijuana product that he bought after entering a cannabis store

US says it will stop Canadian pot bizmen

AFP | Washington, United States

Canada may have legalized recreational marijuana Wednesday, but executives of the country's booming pot industry need to be aware that they are not exactly welcome south of the border in the United States.

As the world's first major economy fully legalised cannabis, officials of US Customs and Border Protection warned they won't admit anyone arriving with the intent "to aid in the

proliferation of the marijuana business."

Even if some US states and localities, including the capital Washington, permit medical or recreational pot use, the CBP warned that the drug remains illegal under US federal law, giving them the responsibility to fight its use and promotion.

"If... a Canadian is coming to the United States and it has nothing to do with the marijuana industry or the proliferation of the industry, that person

would generally be deemed admissible," CBP officer Christopher Perry said in a press conference in Detroit, Michigan, on the Canadian border.

But "if they're coming to the United States... with the express interest to facilitate or develop the marijuana industry, they would generally be deemed inadmissible."

The stance posed a new threat to the already extensive cross-border exchanges of supplies, technology and investment in the marijuana sector.

Wednesday), but has also been sharply questioned by some health professionals and opposition politicians.

Second after Uruguay

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has defended legalisation -- the fulfilment of a 2015 campaign promise -- as intended to protect young people and to shut down drug dealers.

"I don't drink much alcohol, I don't drink coffee, I have no intention of using marijuana," Trudeau, who has admitted to smoking pot in the past, said Wednesday.

In parliament, he also lamented that prohibition had had a "disproportionate and unfair impact on marginalised and radicalised communities."

The entry into force of the Cannabis Act makes Canada only the second nation after Uruguay to legalise the drug.

How well it goes could have an impact on Canada's next election in 2019, and on whether other countries follow in its footsteps.

"When people start to see the consequences (of legalisation) they will blame Trudeau's failures for it," opposition Tory leader Andrew Scheer commented.

In the United States, recreational cannabis has been legalized in eight states, while countries such as the Netherlands and Spain have decriminalized pot possession.

"There is no question that the world is watching Canada," Justice Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould told a press conference.

In total, Statistics Canada says 5.4 million Canadians will buy cannabis from legal dispensaries

in 2018 -- about 15 percent of the population. Around 4.9 million already smoke.

Public Safety Minister Ralph Goodale announced a plan to pardon past convictions for simple possession, giving people "greater access to job opportunities, education and housing."

A new industry

Under the new regulations, Canadians at least 18 or 19 years old may buy up to 30 grams of cannabis, and grow up to four plants at home.

A patchwork of private and public cannabis retail stores and online sales have been set up across the 13 provinces and territories, ramping up to 300 storefronts by year's end, the government predicts.

Sales of derivatives like edibles will be legalised next year.

To meet demand, hundreds of growers have been licensed, some taking over horticulture and floriculture greenhouses.

The new industry has attracted billions in funding, as well as interest from major alcohol and soft drink makers in developing cannabis infused drinks.

Cannabis sales are forecast to boost economic growth by up to Can\$1.1 billion (US\$847,000) and provide a Can\$400 million tax windfall for the government, according to official data.

It's still unclear if legalisation will undercut the black market. Prices for illicit pot have plunged to an average of Can\$6.79 per gram, and most legal sellers are charging more.

According to a recent Abacus Data poll published on Monday, 70 percent of Canadians accept or support legalisation.



A young man holds a bag of marijuana he bought in a cannabis store in Quebec City, Quebec

Massive tax scam cost Europe 55 billion euros: report

Frankfurt am Main, Germany

A gigantic years-long tax scam saw banks drain 55 billion euros (\$63 billion) from national treasuries in Europe, a far larger sum than previously thought, media from across the continent reported yesterday.

The so-called "cum-ex" deals relied on complex tax trickery that allowed owners of shares to claim several times over re-

funds for tax paid only once on dividend payouts -- effectively syphoning off taxpayers' money into investors' pockets.

So far estimates of the damage had ranged from 5.3 billion euros according to the German finance ministry to 30 billion, according to press reports.

But a joint investigation by European media outlets has concluded that at least 55.2 billion euros were stolen from 11 coun-



The cum-ex scandal first exploded in Germany in 2012, with six criminal investigations opened and a trial against Berger and several stock market traders.

tries: Germany, France, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Denmark, Belgium, Austria, Finland, Norway and Switzerland.

Reportedly conceived by well-known German lawyer Hanno Berger, the cum-ex method relies on several investors buying and reselling shares in a company amongst themselves around the day when the firm pays out its dividend. The stock changes hands so quickly that the tax

authorities are unable to identify who is the true owner.

In Germany, investors spirited away 31.8 billion euros, according to calculations by University of Mannheim tax specialist professor Christoph Spengel.

Meanwhile French taxpayers lost out to the tune of "at least 17 billion euros", Italians 4.5 billion, Danes 1.7 billion and Belgians 201 million.