

China-Canada row escalates

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## ▶ Court in Dalian sentences Canadian drug suspect to death

**BEIJING:** A diplomatic spat between Beijing and Ottawa intensified yesterday as Canada warned its citizens of the risk of “arbitrary enforcement” of laws in China after a Canadian drug suspect was sentenced to death.

The Canadian government updated its travel advice hours after a court in northeast China sentenced Robert Lloyd Schellenberg, 36, to death at a retrial after his previous 15-year prison term was deemed too lenient.

The punishment was handed down amid a clash between Ottawa and Beijing over Canada’s arrest of a top executive from telecom giant Huawei last month on a US extradition request related to Iran sanctions violations.

In a move observers see as retaliation over the Huawei case, Chinese authorities detained two other Canadian citizens – a former diplomat and a business consultant – on suspicion of endangering national security.

Schellenberg was detained well before the diplomatic feud, back in 2014.

He was originally sentenced to 15 years in prison and a 150,000-yuan (RM90,162) forfeiture in November.

But in December, following an appeal, a



A still image taken from a CCTV video shows Schellenberg in court on Monday. - REUTERSPIX

High Court in Liaoning ruled that the sentence did not fit the severity of his crimes and ordered a new trial.

The court in Dalian on Monday found Schellenberg guilty of being the main suspect in a case involving an international syndicate that planned to send some 222kg of methamphetamine to Australia.

He can appeal the ruling.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau expressed “extreme concern” that China had “chosen to arbitrarily” apply the death penalty.

The Canadian government then issued a new travel advisory urging citizens to “exercise a high degree of caution in China

due to the risk of arbitrary enforcement of local laws”.

China executes one or two foreigners every year – nearly all for drug offences, according to John Kamm, director of the US-based Dui Hua Foundation rights group.

But the timing of Schellenberg’s sentence raised suspicion among observers that China seized on the case to pressure Canada over the Huawei arrest.

Experts said retrials are rare in China, especially ones calling for a harsher sentence.

Rights groups noted that courts are not independent and can be influenced by the Communist Party. – AFP