

Bogus marriage intermediary of crime syndicate jailed for conspiracy to defraud (with photos)

The Special Investigation Section (SIS) of the Immigration Department (ImmD) launched an operation codenamed "Flashspear 2020" and had successfully cracked down a bogus marriage syndicate. A total of 34 Hong Kong residents were arrested, including a 66-year-old core syndicate member arrested in September 2020, who was believed to have solicited at least 37 couples to contract bogus marriages, involving more than HK\$1.5 million. The core syndicate member pleaded guilty to nine counts of conspiracy to defraud at the District Court and was sentenced to 28 months' imprisonment today (Jan 13).

The ImmD has been gravely concerned about non-local residents obtaining residency by means of contracting bogus marriages with Hong Kong residents. The SIS previously probed into two target cases of suspected bogus marriages hence carried out in-depth intelligence analysis and investigation, which resulted in a discovery of more than 30 pairs of suspected bogus marriages and identified the core syndicate member who recruited Hong Kong residents to engage in bogus marriages with the Mainlanders. After months of preparation, investigators launched a series of operations including the successful arrest of the core syndicate member. From his premises, investigators seized bogus marriage agreements, copies of proof of identities of Hong Kong or Mainland residents, notebooks and a mobile phone.

"During the operation, a total of 34 Hong Kong residents (11 males and 23 females) aged from 23 to 66 were arrested, including registered social worker and university student. Among the arrestees, 23 were charged. Apart from the core syndicate member who pleaded guilty to nine counts of conspiracy to defraud at the District Court and was sentenced to 28 months' imprisonment today, seven of them had pleaded guilty in court to the offence of conspiracy to defraud and were sentenced to imprisonment of 8 to 18 months. The remaining 15 arrestees await to be sentenced. The operation is ongoing and more arrests may be made," a spokesman of the ImmD said.

"The ImmD has been aware that crime syndicates have continually advertised and signalled as 'Make Quick Cash' via newspapers, instant messaging software and social networking mobile applications to induce local residents engaging in bogus marriages for huge remuneration. The syndicates would also provide an one-stop service including to provide assistance in applying for marriage-related documents and accompanying local residents for marriage registrations in the Mainland. The syndicates even offer rewards to those who were already involved, for any recruits of new members to the illicit business," the spokesman said.

"The ImmD will continue to spare no effort in combating bogus marriages

and related fraud activities of non-local residents. For people who have obtained their residency in Hong Kong by fraudulent means, their residence status and Hong Kong identity card will be invalidated according to the laws of Hong Kong. They will also be subject to removal back to their place of origin. Any person should not defy the law by participating in activities related to bogus marriages anywhere and should not make a false representation to immigration officers for the purpose of procuring a marriage in Hong Kong. Those directing others to contract a bogus marriage may also be guilty of the offence of conspiracy to defraud," the spokesman stressed.

"According to section 42 of the Immigration Ordinance, any person who makes any statement or representation which he knows to be false or does not believe to be true to immigration officers commits an offence. Offenders are liable to prosecution, and upon conviction face a maximum fine of \$150,000 and to imprisonment for 14 years. Aiders and abettors are also liable to prosecution and the same penalties. Any person who for the purpose of procuring a marriage, or a certificate or license for marriage, knowingly and wilfully makes a false oath or makes or signs a false declaration is guilty of an offence and is liable, upon conviction, to imprisonment for seven years and to a fine. Anyone who commits the offence of conspiracy to defraud is liable, upon conviction, to imprisonment for 14 years," the spokesman warned.

