

# Immigration Department smashes syndicate of foreign domestic helper working visas scam

The director of a foreign domestic helper (FDH) employment agency was convicted of three counts of conspiracy to defraud and five counts of using false instruments and had been sentenced to 43 months' imprisonment today (May 29) at the District Court. Another 17 Indonesian and Filipino domestic helpers involved in the case had been convicted at the Shatin Magistrates' Courts earlier for offences of conspiracy to defraud, making false representation to an immigration officer and breach of condition of stay and were sentenced to up to eight months' imprisonment.

The mastermind is a 43-year-old Hong Kong resident who is the director of the employment agency. During the investigation of a case in which FDHs were suspected of working in Hong Kong illegally, Immigration investigators detected that the employment agency had been arranging for foreigners to apply for employment visas in Hong Kong by means of false FDH employment contracts. After months of in-depth investigation and intelligence analysis, a syndicate was identified as having arranged Indonesian and Filipino to work in Hong Kong illegally by false FDH contracts. Since March 2018, the Immigration Department had launched a series of enforcement operation codenamed Operation Shadowcatcher. Over thirty persons, including the mastermind, other Hong Kong residents, Indonesian and Filipino who had applied for the FDH visas using false contracts, were apprehended in the operation. In addition, a considerable amount of false instruments were seized, including forged bank statements, telecommunications service bills and water bills.

Investigation against other suspects is ongoing.

"It is an offence to make, possess or use false instruments. Upon conviction, offenders are liable to a maximum penalty of 14 years' imprisonment. In addition, it is an offence to make false representation to an immigration officer. Offenders are liable to prosecution and to a maximum fine of \$150,000 and imprisonment for 14 years. Furthermore, anyone who commits the offence of conspiracy to defraud is liable to prosecution and, upon conviction, the maximum penalty is imprisonment for 14 years," an Immigration Department spokesman said.

The spokesman also stressed that FDHs should only take up employment as a domestic helper as approved by the Director of Immigration. Offenders are liable to prosecution and upon conviction to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for two years. Aiders and abettors are also liable to prosecution.