

Bogus marriage syndicate smashed by Immigration Department (with photo)

The Outside Investigation Section of the Immigration Department (ImmD) smashed a bogus marriage syndicate in an operation codenamed "Shadowhunt" today (August 9). During the raid, a Hong Kong resident man aged 29 and a Hong Kong resident woman aged 27 were arrested. The arrested man was believed to be the mastermind of the syndicate and the arrested woman was suspected to have contracted bogus marriage.

After in-depth analysis and investigation of dozens of suspected bogus marriages in a similar mode of operation, the ImmD identified a crime syndicate headed by the arrested man. With young women as its target, the crime syndicate published advertisements recruiting "wedding co-ordinator" and "wedding assistant" on social media to attract young people. The crime syndicate then lured the job seekers to contract bogus marriages with others on the Mainland under the pretext of providing training and internship opportunities or induced them with considerable remuneration, so as to assist their bogus spouses to travel to Hong Kong under the pretence of visiting spouses and even apply for settlement in Hong Kong. In addition, members of the syndicate would develop romantic relationship with young women through an online dating platform and later lured them into bogus marriages.

The ImmD believed that the syndicate has arranged for more than 40 bogus marriages between 2017 and 2019. The estimated transaction amount involved in the cases is about HK\$5 million. During the operation, as at today, a total of 49 persons (15 men and 34 women, aged 25 to 50), including the two Hong Kong residents arrested in the operation today, were arrested. Thirty-five of them were Hong Kong residents and 14 were non-local residents. The investigation is still ongoing, and more persons involved in the case may be arrested.

The ImmD has been very concerned about non-Hong Kong residents obtaining residency by means of contracting bogus marriages with Hong Kong residents. The ImmD will continue to spare no effort in combating bogus marriages and other related illicit activities. For people who have obtained their residence in Hong Kong by fraudulent means, their Hong Kong identity card and residence status will be invalidated according to the laws of Hong Kong. They will also be subject to removal back to their place of origin.

An ImmD spokesman urged the public not to defy the law by participating in activities related to bogus marriages anywhere or not to make a false oath before 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 also urged the public to raise the alert when using social networking mobile applications for job seeking and dating, and to avoid falling into the trap of bogus marriage syndicates.

Under the laws of Hong Kong, it is an offence to make false representation to Immigration Officers. Offenders are liable to prosecution and to a maximum fine of \$150,000 and 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 shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable to, upon conviction, imprisonment for seven years and a fine. Anyone who commits the offence of conspiracy to defraud is liable to prosecution and, upon conviction, the maximum penalty is imprisonment for 14 years.

