

Mastermind of syndicate arranging bogus marriages convicted of conspiracy to defraud and perverting the course of justice

The Immigration Department (ImmD) neutralised a crime syndicate arranging bogus marriages in a series of operations codenamed "Tracker" conducted since March 2017. A total of 37 Hong Kong and Mainland residents and foreign domestic helpers were arrested, including the mastermind of the syndicate who was a Hong Kong permanent resident aged 55. The mastermind was convicted of 4 counts of conspiracy to defraud and 1 count of perverting the course of justice at the District Court today (February 8) who will be sentenced on February 28.

An ImmD spokesman said that in the course of investigation of a case of suspected bigamy, a photo of the suspected mastermind was unearthed from the mobile phone of a female Mainland suspect, but she could not provide other details of the mastermind. Through online research and site visits after examining the clothing and backdrop of the photo, investigators successfully identified the mastermind. In May 2017, the mastermind was arrested. A pile of documents relating to bogus marriages including copies of Hong Kong Identity Cards, Mainland travel documents, foreign passports and transaction records, etc. were seized from the dwelling of the mastermind. Large quantity of personal information, photos and certificates of marriage, etc. of the persons involved were also found from the memory cards and mobile phones seized. Apart from nine Mainland residents suspected to have been involved in bogus marriages, investigators had for the first time unearthed eleven (eight Indian and three Nepalese) foreign domestic helpers who were suspected to be involved in bogus marriages by applying for residence as dependants after coming to Hong Kong. After detailed analysis of the relevant information, two more foreign domestic helpers (one Indian and one Nepalese) suspected to be arranged by the same syndicate for entering bogus marriages with Hong Kong residents were identified.

"During the investigation, the Immigration Department arrested a total of 37 Hong Kong residents, foreign domestic helpers and Mainland residents (17 men and 20 women) aged 29 to 65. Fifteen arrestees were convicted of the offence of conspiracy to defraud. Of these 15 persons, 11 were sentenced to imprisonment of 10 to 18 months while the remaining four, including the mastermind, are pending sentence by court. The operation is still ongoing and more people may be arrested and prosecuted." the spokesman said.

"The Immigration Department 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," the spokesman said.

The spokesman urged the public not to defy the law by participating in activities related to bogus marriages and not to make 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.

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.