

## Mastermind of syndicate arranging bogus marriages jailed for conspiracy to defraud

The Special Investigation Section (SIS) of the Immigration Department (ImmD) has smashed a bogus marriage syndicate. A 53-year-old female mastermind pleaded guilty to five counts of conspiracy to defraud at the District Court and was sentenced to 20 months' imprisonment yesterday (June 19).

The ImmD has been gravely concerned about non-local residents obtaining residencies by means of contracting bogus marriages with Hong Kong residents. The SIS previously probed a target case of a suspected bogus marriage, meaning that it carried out an in-depth intelligence analysis, which resulted in a discovery of more than 20 pairs of suspected bogus marriages, and identified a crime syndicate recruiting Hong Kong residents to engage in bogus marriages with non-local residents. After an in-depth investigation, the ImmD successfully smashed the syndicate. During the operation, a total of 28 persons (13 males and 15 females) including the mastermind, aged 27 to 56, were arrested. Twenty-three of them were Hong Kong residents and five were Mainland residents. Apart from the mastermind, who was sentenced to imprisonment yesterday, six persons involved were sentenced to 10 to 16 months' imprisonment, while some are pending sentencing or trial by court. The operation is ongoing and more arrests may be made.

"The ImmD has been aware that crime syndicates have continually advertised the opportunity to 'make quick cash' via newspapers, instant messaging software and social networking mobile applications to induce local residents to engage in bogus marriages for huge remuneration. The syndicates would also provide a one-stop service including the provision of assistance in applying for marriage-related documents and accompanying local residents for marriage registrations. The syndicates even offer rewards to those who are already involved to recruit any new members to the illicit business," an ImmD spokesman said.

"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," the spokesman stressed.

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

Under the laws of Hong Kong, it is an offence to make a 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.