

Two masterminds of syndicate arranging bogus marriages convicted of conspiracy to defraud

The Outside Investigation Section of the Immigration Department (ImmD) has smashed a bogus marriage syndicate. Two masterminds, female Hong Kong residents aged 70 and 64, pleaded guilty to 23 and 17 counts of conspiracy to defraud respectively today (December 6) at the District Court. The two masterminds were both sentenced to 36 months' imprisonment.

The ImmD has been gravely concerned about non-local residents obtaining residencies by means of contracting bogus marriages with Hong Kong residents. After an in-depth analysis and investigation of dozens of suspected bogus marriages in a similar mode of operation, the ImmD identified a crime syndicate active in New Territories West recruiting Hong Kong residents to engage in bogus marriages with non-local residents. The syndicate built up and expanded their social network through mobile games to solicit local residents in New Territories West area to engage in bogus marriage activities. The syndicate would also disseminate messages via instant messaging software and offer large remunerations to induce local residents to contract bogus marriages with Mainland residents who intend to settle in Hong Kong. The syndicate was believed to have arranged more than 128 bogus marriages. The estimated transaction amount involved in the cases is over \$7 million.

The ImmD successfully smashed the syndicate in a series of operations conducted since August 2019. During the operation, a total of 154 persons (78 males and 76 females aged 25 to 70) including the two masterminds, were arrested. Of them, 93 were Hong Kong residents and 61 were Mainland residents. Apart from the two masterminds who were sentenced to imprisonment today, 12 persons involved were sentenced to 10 to 20 months' imprisonment earlier. The operation is ongoing and more arrests may be made.

The ImmD will continue to spare no effort in combating bogus marriages and other related illicit activities to obtain Hong Kong residency. 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 be vigilant when using social networking platforms, and to avoid contravening the law inadvertently.

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.