

H.K. Standard

21 Sept 1982

2.5

1997 fears spark passport racket

by **Marcel Joaillho** and **Cherry Mosteshar**

A GROUP of unscrupulous travel agents have formed a syndicate to "rip off" millions of dollars from local Chinese who want the legal right to stay in another country because of Hongkong's uncertain future, it was learnt yesterday.

According to a travel agent, the syndicate, though only set up recently, is said to be doing a lot of business. It offers moves to South American countries like Argentina and Brazil.

The agent, who wished not to be named, said he too had received a lot of enquiries asking whether his firm dealt with such "emigration". He said the syndicate, based in Central, had hinted to other travel agencies that they could "fix up" legal passports for those who wished

neighbouring country as a tourist, then proceed to Brazil before he is provided with the necessary documents "to stay permanently there". But a Brazilian consulate official in Hongkong firmly denied that such practices were taking place.

He said all those who emigrated to Brazil had to conform to the law, and if they are to be employed, their contracts have to be "duly legalised" by the Brazilian ministry of labour.

"It is a very complicated process that cannot be easily cheated," he said. "However, this is all speculation for Brazil is no longer an immigration country."

The official said some people do try to change their status after arriving in Brazil as visitors, but this is not allowed. "We don't like it... this is cheating... a tourist is a tourist."

He said there had been no increase in the number of applications to emigrate to Brazil, but he did admit that because of its multi-racial and multinational nature, Brazil was an attractive prospect to many immigrants.

Sao Paulo has the second biggest Chinese population in the Americas, second only to San Francisco in this respect, and reports have it that this and reports have it that this is the major attraction for Hongkong people.

The Hongkong travel agent said that though most of the applicants knew that they were taking a great risk with a large sum of money, they still went ahead, because they felt another passport or travel document would help when the time comes.

"It's the fear," he said. "They may not even take the chance to use them, for I doubt if they really want to stay in those countries."

Canadian assistant immigration officer Ronald Button said Canada would allow people in if they could start their own business, which has led many who would go there, say as a mechanic, to have their application "dressed up" to look as if they intended to start a private business with the aid of friends or relatives there.

Mr Button, who deals with immigration applications at the Canadian Commission here, said that this does not necessarily mean that their application will be successful.

However, he said, there had been no rise in the number of applications over the last couple of years, and in fact the number of immigrant visas issued fell significantly in the second half of last year.

Suffering from 12 per cent unemployment, the Canadian authorities have drastically cut back on the numbers and categories of people that are allowed to emigrate there, and the categories are now largely confined to independent and assisted relatives, said Mr Button.

Since May this year, the sponsored movement has been reduced as much as 98 per cent, he said. However, lawyers and travel agents will try and get round these regulations for their clients.

Passport racket

From Page 1
mysteriously acquire large amounts of money, and it is believed that this is part of a pool that is circulated among would-be immigrants.

This practice has been discovered not only by the Canadian authorities, but also by the Australians. When this is suspected the application will be refused, the second secretary for immigration at the Australian Commission in Hongkong, Peter McManus, said.

The Australians have also experienced difficulties with people who go out as visitors and then stay, but these people would have to get jobs out there - not an easy task with a six per cent unemployment rate.

Mr McManus said money does not necessarily make a difference, and those who claim they want to start a business in Australia have to submit detailed proposals and have to go there to discuss the project with the relevant authorities.

Several other consulate officials said that although they had not come across any large-scale attempts to cheat the system as yet, they were constantly aware that this was a very real possibility, and anticipated more of this sort of behaviour in the near future.

Turn to Page 16 Col. 1