

Lives of crews on high  
seas in danger

# BIG SEAMEN RACKET HAS HONGKONG HQ

**A HIGHLY organised forgery ring based in Hongkong is supplying hundreds of seamen seeking jobs with forged certificates.**

Both the Marine Department and the Commercial Crimes Office are now investigating the syndicate which was believed to have international connections.

Director of Marine Malcolm Alexander said last night his department had received 95 cases of forged certificates of competency of senior officers supposedly issued in Hongkong.

He said these documents were passed to the department by the Liberian Maritime authorities in New York two days ago.

The documents were submitted to them by applicants for Liberian licences for sea service as masters, first and second officers, and chief, second and third engineers.

Mr Alexander said after carefully studying the documents, they were passed to the Commercial Crimes Office for further investigation.

It was learned that most of these senior officers paid thousands of dollars for these forged certificates in order to find jobs mainly in New York.

Mr Alexander said this was the first time his department had come across such forgeries and that he believed the syndicate was based in Hongkong.

According to a police source, the Commercial Crimes Office had obtained a warrant to search a office in Kowloon which they believe is connected with the syndicate.

He said up till early today no suspect had been picked up but police had the "matter well-in-hand."

The source said a total of 174 seamen of Hongkong had successfully obtained Liberian licences by using similar documents and it was possible they would soon be arrested.

A spokesman for the Marine Department said in each case the application was based upon submission of papers which were claimed to be photocopies or electrostatic copies of certificates of competency issued in Hongkong and elsewhere under the provisions of the Merchant Shipping Act.

He said the department was aware to whom these Liberian certificates, which have since been invalidated, were issued, but its principal immediate concern was to advise the shipping industry of the existence of more than 170 supposedly qualified ships officers in Hongkong who had obtained their Liberian licences by dubious means.

"These men have not been found by any Commonwealth examining authority to be competent to discharge the duties in respect of which they were issued with Liberian licences.

"Their presence in a position of authority on any vessel places in the greatest jeopardy the lives of the remainder of the crew who may not be aware until it is too late that their officers are not in fact qualified or have insufficient experience for the position they hold."

He said after receiving the certificates from the Liberian Maritime authorities in New York, the crews division of the department had examined them and established that all these supposed copies were in fact copies of forgeries.

The spokesman added that it was anticipated that inquiries conducted by the police and by the department into this "skilfully organised" operation would be protracted but would thorough.

"Eventually it is hoped to bring to court all those who are now identified as having made fraudulent applications for Liberian licences to serve as ships officers," he said.