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Dr M launches chip-embedded, intelligent passport

PRIME Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad yesterday unveiled Malaysia's new chip-embedded passport, paving the way for higher security in government-issued travelling document for the country.

He said the electronic microprocessor-based intelligent passport, pioneered by Iris Technologies (M) Sdn Bhd, will be made available immediately.

The new passport maintains compatibility with other machine-readable passport systems used in other countries. It also includes the passport holder's details in a tamper-proof electronic substrate embedded in the passport.

"True electronic passports incorporate a silicon chip with many orders of magnitude higher than paper-based security," he said in his speech at the launch at Iris Smart Complex at Technology Park in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Dr Mahathir was issued the country's first electronic passport by the Director-General of the Immigration Department Datuk Aseh Che Mat.

He added that the vastly superior security features, differentiate the electronic passport from one with paper-based security features.

Dr Mahathir said government-issued travel documents are increasingly being upgraded to accommodate new security features, the most recent additions being loosely termed as electronic-based security features.

Only the Immigration Department will be able to read the electronic information in the new passport to verify the authenticity of the document.

The new passports, part of the department's investments in its RM430 million computerisation project (1994-1999), will initially be issued at all Immigration offices in the Klang Valley. It will then be extended nationwide in stages.

It is only valid for five years and no renewal will be extended. Holders will be charged RM300 (32 pages) and RM600 (64 pages).

Unlike the existing passport, the new one will not incorporate details of holders' children. Hence, the smart passport is meant for a single holder.

The use of the new passport will enable the Immigration Department to record the entry and exit of holders.

Nevertheless, existing holder only need to change to the new passport when his present one expires.

At present, there are about seven million passport holders and the number is expected to continue to grow at about 700,000 each year over the next few years. The department is expected to issue 350,000 passports this year.

Iris Technologies also manufactures and distributes smart contact cards, contactless cards and substrates for a variety of applications such as identification cards and multi-purpose transaction cards, as well as electronic travel documents, digital conferencing systems, integrated passenger and baggage systems.

At the same function, the Prime Minister also launched Iris's smart complex which is a one-stop integrated manufacturing centre for all aspects for smart technology products.

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