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Myanmar to launch Iris' e-passport system Monday

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IRIS Corp Bhd's electronic passport (e-passport) will be put to test for international recognition when Myanmar launches the system at the Yangon International Airport on Monday.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is scheduled to witness the launching of the system in conjunction with his two-day working visit to Myanmar starting tomorrow.

It is learnt that Iris and the Myanmar Government will sign a contract for the installation of the e-passport system during the launch.

Iris Corp managing director Tan Say Jim, when contacted by Business Times, said he was not aware of the launching ceremony but he will be in Yangon today to make sure that the auto gateway works. "At the moment, we are installing the system at Yangon International Airport. Hopefully, we will be asked to install the system at other airports in Myanmar," he said.

Iris Corp has started offering the system to other countries of Association of South-East Asian Nations (Asean) besides Myanmar.

Earlier reports had quoted Tan as saying that the company is eyeing contracts in at least four other Asean countries. "We showcased the auto gateway in Bali during the working visit to Indonesia by the Prime Minister early this month," he said.

Tan said the company received the letter of intent to install the e-passport system as a pilot project by the Myanmar Government about three weeks ago.

It was reported that Iris Corp has clinched a deal with Myanmar's E-National Task Force to develop an initial 5,000 smart passports from end-August.

Tan had said the pilot project involves the supply and implementation of Iris' technology for faster immigration processing at Myanmar's international airport.

He declined to reveal the value of the deal but had said that the company expects the project's contribution to its earnings to be not less than the RM2.2 million it earned during the last financial year ended December 31 2001.

Iris had been making losses in the previous five years before the RM2.2 million profit.

The e-passport will be modelled after Malaysia's e-passport that was implemented on March 23 1998. Myanmar will be the second country in the world to adopt e-passport technology, after Malaysia.

The e-passport eliminates the need for air travellers to wait at long queues for their passports to be stamped by immigration officials. It will also help reduce manpower needs.

Iris' microchip technology includes a complete system from front-end capture systems for passport personalisation to auto gates for faster immigration processing.

Iris, or Image Retrieval Identification System, will also supply the retrieval and encoding systems for chip personalisation, use of finger print biometrics and systems integration to existing back-end databases.

Set up in 1994, Iris is a Multimedia Super Corridor status company. It also co-invented the Government's multi-purpose smart card, or MyKad, in 1999. Iris was listed on the Mesdaq market on July 18.