

Crackdown on security of passports

Tough new penalties for fraud

People who use false or forged passports will face up to 10 years' jail and fines of \$100,000 under tough new penalties to be introduced by the Federal Government this week.

This is a big increase over the present penalties of two years' jail and/or a fine of \$5500, and follows an embarrassing failure of the controls to stop a man on bail escaping overseas.

Those who lose two or more passports will be given new travel documents that last for only one year instead of the normal 10 years.

The legislation to be introduced in Federal Parliament this week also clears the way for new high-tech biometric passports that contain computer chips with the holder's image broken down into computerised data.

The move to toughen up passport security follows the escape of suspected terrorist Saleh Jamal, who skipped bail and left Australia on a false passport.

Jamal was eventually arrested in Lebanon, where he is facing a series of terrorist related charges including using a false passport.

Foreign Affairs Minister Alexander Downer will announce the new penalties when he introduces the changes to Parliament later this week.

The tough new standards for passports are aimed at preventing people using false or forged passports from trying to enter or leave Australia. Stringent identity checks are also aimed at preventing other nationalities using a stolen Australian passport elsewhere in the world.

It is an escalating problem. Last year 23,289 Australian passports were reported lost and another 9190 stolen.

On the international black market Australian passports are highly valued, said to be worth \$20,000. It is suspec-



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ted many of those reported lost or stolen were actually sold or given away to be used illegally.

Under the new rules those who report a second passport lost or stolen will have to pay the full \$148, but the replacement will be valid only for 12 months. The new computer-chip bio-

metric passports should eliminate people using other people's passports.

Computers will breakdown facial images into a series of measurements that will be stored on a chip sealed inside the passport.

When passports are scanned they will compare the image stored on the chip to the person presenting the passport.

Bob Nash, head of the passport division of the Foreign Affairs Department said biometric passports using computer facial recognition were 98 per cent accurate, compared with 60 per cent accuracy using the human eye.

Australia has led the world in testing biometric passports and the first are due to be issued later this year.