

New SA Passports On The Cards For April

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A new South African passport with improved security features will be introduced in April this year, Home Affairs Minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula said on Thursday.

Speaking at a justice, crime prevention and security cluster briefing in Pretoria, Mapisa-Nqakula said the passports would be phased in, beginning with re-applications.

She would not divulge what the additional security measures were, saying she was only privy to some of them.

"We [Cabinet ministers] are equally ignorant of that fact. I am confident that the people who designed the passport know what they are doing."

It was hoped this would help stop the circulation of fraudulent passports.

Safety and Security Minister Nathi Mthethwa said the initiative formed part of the multi-pronged approach to stamp out corruption.

"During the 2008/2009 financial year 66 home affairs officials were arrested and a further 18 suspended on allegations of fraud," he told the briefing.

He said the counter-corruption unit continued to work with police and the National Intelligence Agency to identify those involved in corrupt activities.

The introduction of the passports came against the backdrop of the United Kingdom's decision last month to impose visa requirements on visiting South Africans due to the prevalence of fraudulently issued passports.

In response the government announced it was tightening security around passport production.

Government spokesman Themba Maseko said in February that the visa requirements were "unfortunate".

South Africa had been working closely with British authorities, prior to the UK's decision, on the security problems.

"Unfortunately, the time frames given to address many of the challenges that were identified were just not sufficient," he said at the time.

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