

False passports: 'A thousand euros is all it takes'

Gulf News has learnt the false documents are readily available for 1,000 euros through criminal contacts in Dublin.

- By Mick O'Reilly, Deputy Managing Editor
- Published: 00:00 February 21, 2010



Dubai: False Irish passports, as used by the killers of Hamas commander Mahmoud Al Mabhoh in Dubai last month, are considered to be the gold standard for use on illegal international travels.

Gulf News has learnt the false documents are readily available for 1,000 euros through criminal contacts in Dublin.

"Two passport photographs, a thousand euros and two weeks is all it takes," said a *Gulf News* source who used forged travel documents for five years while on the run from authorities when wanted for terrorist offences.

"Irish passports are highly valuable," the source said, adding that they come without the baggage of US or British documents.

No suspicions

"Ireland is a well-respected and neutral country. Even if you go back to the Iran-Contra affair, a senior American official travelled to Tehran on a false Irish passport," the source said.

But like most illegal documents, some are better than others.

"The best sort you can get are those belonging to a person who has just passed away," the source said.

"Then there are blank ones, while the highest risk are those stolen from real people. If you need to use one of those, use it at your peril."

The source said republican militants have used false passports to travel the world — with three being arrested in Colombia last year on forged papers.

Criminal gangs operating in the lucrative drug trade in Dublin are the point of contact for the illegal documents.

"Passports, birth certificates, driving licences — all are readily available at a price," the source said.

Security measures

A spokesman for the Department of Foreign Affairs in Dublin told Gulf News that Irish authorities in recent years have invested very heavily in extra security measures to prevent the nation's passports from being forged.

"We have introduced an automated and integrated biometric passport system to minimise the risk of fraudulent or other misuse of Irish passports or passport information," he said.

"The government takes extremely seriously any actions that have the potential to affect the security of our citizens travelling overseas and will act to protect Irish interests."

The Irish documents used by the three assassins were of a 10-year validity issued preceding the latest biometric measures.

These new biometric passports feature a chip for security purposes and includes holograms and a greyscale digitally printed photograph of the passport holder.

The DFA spokesman said the Irish Embassy in Abu Dhabi made immediate contact with the UAE authorities on February 4, when the first media reports circulated that Irish passports may have been involved.

"We have been in close coordination with the Emirate's authorities since through both police and diplomatic channels," the spokesman added.

© Gulf News 2010