Six Things About Fake Passports

The two passengers who managed to board Malaysia Airlines flight MH370 with stolen passports have brought to light the loopholes in immigration checks as well as the booming trade in fake credentials. We look at some facts and figures behind stolen passports.



A Malaysia Airlines plane makes its way on the runway at Kuala Lumpur International Airport. PHOTO: AFP

1. Number of missing or stolen passports
More than 40 million travel documents have been reported lost or stolen by 167 countries, according to Interpol's Stolen and Lost Travel Documents database.

2. Database for fake passports
Interpol's database was set up in 2002 because Interpol and its member countries saw a link between terrorist activities and the use of lost or stolen travel documents. Convicted terrorist Ramzi Yousef, who helped build the bomb which killed six people in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing, travelled to the United States on a stolen Iraqi passport. Milorad Ulemek, who assassinated Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Dindic and former Serbian President Ivan Stambolic in 2003 , crossed 27 borders with a missing passport before he was caught.

3. Few checks carried out
While all 190 member countries can access the database to countercheck travel documents, "only a handful of countries worldwide are taking care to make sure that persons possessing stolen documents are not boarding international flights", according to Interpol Secretary-General Ronald Noble. The United States is the biggest user, with 250 million annual checks. The United Kingdom follows with 120 million and the United Arab Emirates with 50 million. Despite this, passengers boarded planes more than a billion times last year without being checked against the database.