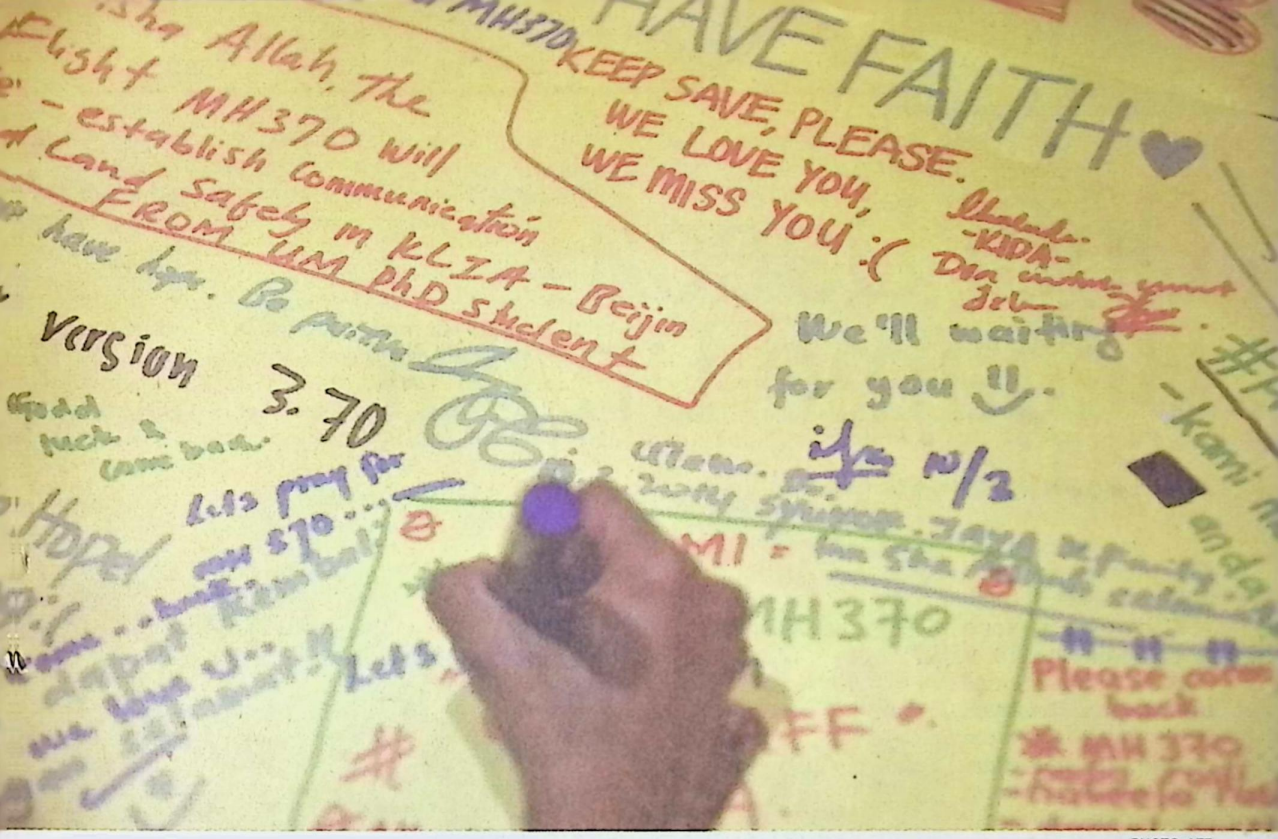


A man writes on a poster carrying messages for the passengers of the missing Malaysia Airlines plane at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport.

PHOTO: AFP

4. Thailand the hub

Thailand is a centre for fake passports because of its booming tourist industry, which attracts a large pool of European, American and Australian travellers. According to a 2012 report in the Bangkok expatriate magazine The Big Chilli, the Department of Special Investigation created the Transnational Crime Intelligence Operation Centre (TCIC) specifically to target gangs which forge and/or steal travel documents. The centre's head, Tinawut Slilapa, estimated that there were about 20 foreign gangs specialising in passport fraud. Reuters reported that according to Thailand's ministry of foreign affairs, more than 60,000 passports, both Thai and foreign, were reported missing or stolen in Thailand between January 2012 and June 2013.



5. Price of fake passports

Tinawut told The Big Chilli that a passport in good condition, with three to five years left before its expiration date, can sell for US$1,500 to $3,000. There are extra charges for other changes, such as amending the photographs or adding visa stamps and stickers. Syndicates now have so many passports in their possession they can wait for a client who actually resembles the passport holder, and thus minimise changes to the document and ensure the fake passport holder has a better chance of clearing checks.

6. Crime syndicates

Terrorists are not the only ones relying on fake and/or stolen passports. Organised crime syndicates, drug smugglers and human traffickers also use fake papers to travel. In September 2013, Malaysian authorities arrested Seyed Ramin Miraziz Paknejad, 45, in Kuala Lumpur. He had fled Thailand where he was arrested in June 2012 for providing counterfeit travel documents to terrorists who carried out bombings in the country. According to a report in the New Straits Times, he was also suspected of providing more than 3,000 fake documents and responsible for trafficking thousands of people from different countries through the Middle East, Europe, Australia and Canada.

**sources: Associated Press, Reuters, www.interpol.int, New Straits Times*

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