Go to: Guardian Unlimited home ▼   Go

Guardian Unlimited

Read today's paper · Jobs

Search: [   ]   Go

⦿ Guardian Unlimited ◯ Web

politics Special reports

| Home | Local elections | Parties | Backbencher | Polls | Comment | Freedom of information |
| Talk | Election 2005 | Thinktanks | Your MP | Maps | Blog | This week's stories |

Home affairs

Hackers crack new biometric passports

Bobbie Johnson, technology correspondent
Monday August 7, 2006
The Guardian

Hi-tech biometric passports used by Britain and other countries have been hacked by a computer expert, throwing into doubt fundamental parts of the UK's £415m scheme to load passports with information such as fingerprints, facial scans and iris patterns.

Speaking at the Defcon security conference in Las Vegas, Lukas Grunwald, a consultant with a German security company, said he had discovered a method for cloning the information stored in the new passports. Data can be transferred onto blank chips, which could then be implanted in fake passports, a flaw which he said undermined the project.

Article continues

The revelation also casts another shadow over the government's plan for a national ID card, which would contain much of the same information.

"The whole passport design is totally brain damaged," Mr Grunwald told Wired.com. "From my point of view all of these [biometric] passports are a huge waste of money - they're not increasing security at all." Since March anyone applying for a UK passport has been issued with a biometric version, which contains physical identification information.

Mr Grunwald said his discovery was made within two weeks of first attempting to copy the data, and the equipment used cost $200 (£105). It is believed the hacking principle could be applied to any new passport issued in Britain, the US and other countries. But the findings do not mean that all biometric information could be faked or altered by criminals. Although the data held on a

---

Search Politics for MPs and issues

[   ]

Go
Advanced search

Ask Aristotle

Find an MP
By postcode or place:

[   ]

Go
Or browse the map ⦿

How to use Aristotle

In this section

Blair targets failing care homes in social exclusion strategy

Brownfield sites could provide 1m homes

Minister admits malnutrition risk

Opponents raise the stakes as inquiry begins

Leader: Obesity

Lawyers heckle minister into looking again at legal aid plans

Supercasino firm sorry
for twisting clerics'
views

Mary Riddell: If we send
them home, then who'll
do the dirty work?

Foreign prisoners crisis
still costing millions

Crackdown on
encrypted child porn

passport chip is not encrypted, it is not yet possible to
change the cloned data without alerting the authorities.

The Home Office said yesterday that the UK biometric
passport was one of the most secure in the world and while
it might be possible to copy the chip data it was not
possible to modify or manipulate any of the data. Last week
the House of Commons' science and technology committee
called on the government to reconsider the technology
behind the biometric ID scheme.

Science and technology committee report on ID cards (pdf)

Political Alerts
Get the day's top headlines straight to your mobile

Sign up for the Backbencher
Our free weekly insider's guide to Westminster

Explained
03.07.2002: ID cards

Special reports
Home affairs
Identity cards

More on . . .
Labour's asylum and immigration policy

Useful sites
Home Office
Liberty

What do you think?
Email comments for publication to:
politics.editor@guardianunlimited.co.uk

Printable version | Send it to a friend | Save story

Privacy policy | Terms & conditions | Advertising guide | A-Z index | About this site