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PASSPORT THIEVES CAUGHT

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By Shawn Cumberbatch

SCORES of passport thieves are getting caught in the web of increased security instituted for Cricket World Cup (CWC) 2007.

International law enforcement agency Interpol disclosed that following its provision of a near 14 million database of stolen passports and other travel documents to CARICOM countries, more than 40 stolen and lost ones had been identified in Barbados and other ports of entry in the region.

It confirmed that on March 16, Barbadian immigration officers at the Grantley Adams International Airport discovered that a Nigerian man who claimed to have been naturalised in Venezuela was travelling on a stolen Venezuelan passport .

Interpol said following this hit , the Interpol National Central Bureaus in the countries on his travel itinerary were alerted, and the man was arrested upon landing in Guyana. He was to travel on to Brazil and Venezuela .

The organisation noted these discoveries had been possible because of its technical solution called MIND/FIND, which allowed police and immigration at air and sea ports to instantly check passports against the large database. The overall aim was for law enforcers to decide within seconds whether an individual posed a potential security threat to the cricket tournament.

Interpol said since MIND/FIND became operational in the Caribbean, the number of searches in its database from the nine CWC host countries had skyrocketed , racing from 455 queries in 2006 with five hits to 241 400 searches and 44 hits between January 1 and March 21 this year.

According to the organisation, it worked with the host nations Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago to expedite the installation of MIND/FIND before the tournament started last month. It noted the border-protection system currently in place was among the most advanced in the world.

Interpol s provision of the system is just one of the ways it and several other international law enforcement and security agencies are helping the region ensure no harm comes to the world-class event.

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An Interpol Major Event Support Team (IMEST) is already on the ground in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, to assist officers from host countries' National Central Bureaus and international liaison officers at the Regional Intelligence Fusion Centre.

Additionally, a 77-member South African Police Service (SAPS) team, which recently arrived in the region, has become the latest addition to a number of international security personnel already working alongside Caribbean officers and the IMEST. The South Africans are from that country's elite special task force and national intervention unit.

South African police commissioner and Interpol president, Jackie Selebi was in charge of the deployment of the group, which also included bomb disposal experts, crime scene investigators, bomb-sniffer dogs and their handlers, and a command and control group under the direction of Deputy National Commissioner, André Pruis.

The risk of international terrorist groups targeting major public events is always a concern. The frontline deployment of the SAPS group and the support of Interpol's IMEST are intended to bolster local and international security efforts at this major event, Interpol said.

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