

New ID cards may work at ATMs

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By S'THEMBISO MSOMI, 27 Febraury, 2005

SOUTH Africa's new ID cards, to be launched next year, could be used to draw and deposit money from automated teller machines if a Department of Home Affairs proposal becomes law.

However, this proposal depends on the extent to which the department can convince banking institutions to agree to replace debit cards with the new smart card.

Home Affairs Minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula revealed to the Sunday Times on Friday that her department was holding discussions with banks to have the credit-card size ID cards loaded with banking details.

Mapisa-Nqakula said the card could be used as an ID, a driver's licence, a firearm licence and a bank card.

"We are in discussion with banks... the added advantage of using the smart card as an ATM card is that, instead of punching a pin number, you use your fingerprint. Therefore you are the only person who can draw money.

"If banks agree, we can load a person's bank information into the smart card," she said.

The government is to start issuing the smart cards, which are to be part of the new Home Affairs National Identity System (Hanis), from March next year as part of the process to phase out the existing green identity documents.

Hanis has been in the pipeline for more than seven years, but logistical problems and lack of capacity in the department resulted in several delays.

The other reason it could not be implemented was because of the paralysis which existed in the department during the tenure of former Minister Mangosuthu Buthelezi, who constantly bickered with the ANC.

Mapisa-Nqakula said preparations for the rolling-out of the smart cards were at an advanced stage.

On Tuesday, she briefed the Inter-Ministerial Committee about the governance and administration of the plan and would soon present it to the Justice, Crime Prevention and Security Cluster before taking it to the full Cabinet for final approval.

She said her goal was to have four million smart ID cards issued to pensioners between March and June next year before issuing the cards to the entire population.

The cards would be issued to citizens free of charge, but a person would have to pay a yet-to-be-determined fee were they to lose their card and apply for a new one.

Countries that already use such identification cards include Italy, Belgium, Saudi Arabia, Finland and Israel.

The major point of disagreement with the financial institutions, Mapisa-Nqakula said, was their insistence that their individual logos be inscribed on the smart cards.

"That would be impossible to do," she said.



As part of Hanis, the department is converting 65000 fingerprint records per day into a new computerised system. The intention is to have more than 30 million fingerprint records captured onto the Automated Fingerprint System (Afis) by September next year.

The innovations are part of Mapisa-Nqakula's strategy of transforming the notoriously inept department into an efficient service-delivery machine.

Over the past three months, Mapisa-Nqakula's department has installed computers in 69 hospitals as part of a drive to ensure that newborn babies are registered at birth.

The computers, she added, would shortly also be used to issue death certificates.

The head of the anti-censorship unit at the Freedom of Expression Institute, Kimani Ndungu, said that while the government's reasons for introducing Hanis made sense, the smart cards posed "a huge threat" to individuals' right to privacy

"This means that a person's full details can be easily accessed at a touch of a button.

"There is a high risk of unauthorised access to personal data if this is implemented," said Ndungu.