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DFA's e-passport system starts

THE Department of Foreign Affairs has started issuing the machine-readable passports in a bid to conform to international standards.

Diplomatic sources said the processing of the modern passports started last month.

The DFA proceeded with the processing of new passports with security features following the signing of a memorandum of understanding with a French company, Hologram, which will make the lamination of the passports.

DFA Undersecretary for Administration Franklin Ebdalin, whose office oversees passport processing, was "out of the loop" since he was not involved in the electronic passport system.

The Central Bank is processing the machine-readable passports but lamination of information details appearing on the second page of the passport is done by Hologram at US\$1 for every passport.

Sources said the DFA was forced to proceed with the processing of the new machine-readable passport to avoid a shortage of passport forms.

Last March, the DFA said it could proceed with the implementation of the e-passport system once the Supreme Court lift the injunction order issued by a lower court.

DFA Undersecretary for Special Concerns Rafael Seguis and DFA Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs Domingo Lucenario said that the e-passport project will be implemented in the third quarter of the year.

Congress approved a P1.4 billion budget for the e-passport project under the 2007 General Appropriations Act.

There are around 7,500 passport applicants everyday in its Manila office, its regional consular offices nationwide and diplomatic posts abroad. Around 50,000 passports are issued every week.

Last February, Pasig City Regional Trial Court Judge Franco Falcon issued an injunction stopping the DFA from implementing the e-passport project, but the DFA filed a petition with the SC seeking its lifting of the order. **Cristina Plisco**