

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR
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Passport forgery

Periodic assessments needed to address systemic flaws

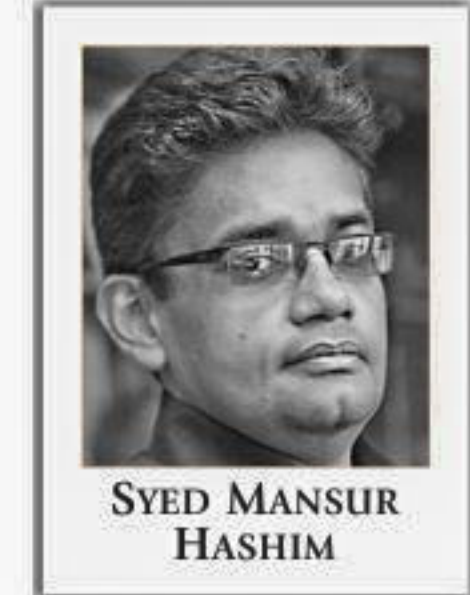
THE experience of a woman, who found when trying to collect her machine readable passport that someone else had fraudulently had one made with the same number, is frightening. Alarmingly, the authorities were in the dark for almost two years until the victim, upon returning to the country from abroad went to collect her MRP, and uncovered the fraudulence.

This only exposes the systemic and security flaws in the passport issuance system. And what this also shows is the lack of periodic assessment of the system to check the competence of its workings.

This is particularly worrying in light of a Department of Immigration and Passport's internal probe finding last year that one syndicate alone had issued at least 170 official passports between November 2014 and April 2015. One DIP director, one assistant director and two employees were suspended for their involvement in the scam. A similar incident involving DIP officials last month again exposed the forgery and distribution of official passports to private citizens, showing that the system, even when it comes to official passports, is in no way full proof, though it should be.

This may well endanger national security, as militants and extremists, among others, may use forged passports to travel freely and unobtrusively. Given that innocent civilians may, in fact, also get into trouble because of such forgeries, the authorities concerned immediately needs to act on such concerns and strengthen the passport issuance system in general. The errant officers in the system should also be held to account.

The fight for Jihadi leadership



SYED MANSUR HASHIM

THE fight between al-Qa'ida and the Islamic State (IS) has been going on since 2006 when the latter split from al-Qa'ida and declared the establishment of the Islamic State of

Iraq. Today the IS finds itself embroiled against forces of several nations and is losing ground in both Iraq and Syria. Some political commentators have been predicting its impending defeat in the battlefield, but there is another war going on in the sidelines and that is the fight between the old guard (al-Qa'ida) and the IS for leadership of the global jihad movement. On July 21, al-Qa'ida leadership issued a statement saying that fighters or groups making a pledge to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi meant being a "partner in every curse upon the Muslims" including "killing thousands of Mujahideen".

And as IS loses ground in the Middle East, it is branching outwards to carry out terrorist hits far from its stronghold – in Europe and in Asia. Today we have various jihadist movements in different parts of the world and al-Qa'ida and IS have been vying for their loyalty. We see local home grown jihadi outfits in Bangladesh like Ansarulla B team, JMB and others declaring allegiance to one of the two. The breaking of ties with al-

Qa'ida as affiliates the world over found new direction when IS took over Mosul in Iraq and declared a caliphate in 2014 and the battle for the hearts-and-minds of the global jihadi movement was born. Indeed, over the last two years, al-Qa'ida has seen its dominance over its custodian role in many countries as factions have weaned away and found guidance under the more brutal IS in countries like Algeria, Pakistan and Yemen; where groups like the Boko Haram and Ansar beit al Madisi have split from al-Qa'ida and pledged allegiance to the IS.

History is full of instances where new and more violent elements within groups have split from the old guard vying for control and leadership. According to Chris Watts, Senior Fellow at the Center for Cyber and Homeland Security at George Washington University, this has been going on for decades in the Middle East: "In Egypt, during the 1990s, the Muslim Brotherhood, faced off against younger, more violent jihadist groups. Similarly, Algeria in the 1990s witnessed the emergence of the FIS (Islamic Salvation Front) in opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood. FIS leaders were then assassinated in mid-1993 by the more junior and violent Armed Islamic Group (GIA), which ultimately declared war on the FIS and Islamic Salvation Army (AIS) and killed hundreds of Islamists. Internal fractures and splintering among Palestinian extremists, whether the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), Palestinian Islamic

Jihad, Hamas, or Fatah, show a persistent trend of the young breaking away from their older forefathers. In all of these cases, younger extremists – detecting a pause, moderation, or shortcomings of the older generation – believe a new strategic direction incorporating greater violence will bring about the ultimate victory. Al-Qa'ida and the Islamic State's modern global jihad follow a similar pattern, where each generation of foreign fighters have splintered from their forefathers and become increasingly violent and aggressive."

When we take into account the fact that there has been a realignment of focus out of the Middle East to the Indian subcontinent by both al-Qa'ida and the IS, primarily because Bangladesh sits strategically between two major targeted countries, i.e. India and Myanmar, there really is no room for complacency. Yes, the government has done a commendable job till date in making it near impossible for any rebel group to operate from Bangladeshi soil to launch operations in neighbouring countries, but the jihadi threat is a whole different ball game. And when we throw in jihadi competition between al-Qa'ida and IS into the volatile brew, one cannot but agree with the Prime Minister when she says there will be more attacks.

The Gulshan attack in July put the global media spotlight on Bangladesh. A brutal and violent attack that took international headlines by storm and was successfully claimed by the IS as a "hit" –

the first of its kind on Bangladeshi soil, in the heart of the most protected part of the capital city. It was carried out by members of an affiliate which swore loyalty to the IS; whether we choose to agree with that statement or not is another argument altogether. It is safe to assume that al-Qa'ida in the Indian subcontinent (AQIS), that aims to fight the governments of Pakistan, India, Myanmar and Bangladesh, would like to outshine its upstart breakaway faction with something equally, if not more deadly. Going by what has dominated local print and electronic media for the last couple of weeks by the number of suspected militants either being killed or apprehended – something is brewing somewhere.

So where does that leave us? How do we counteract this phenomenon of more violent, more aggressive behaviour? We can certainly take lessons from countries that have fought off their versions of jihadi revolt and one must remember that the battle for containing any such movement, whether it is in its nascent form or in maturity is not one that will be dealt with in months, but years. This remains an ideological war, and ideas must be fought with ideas as much as with feat of arms; it involves wider participation of communities and greater debate on what religion is all about. Treating the jihadi threat as merely a law enforcement issue will only stoke the fires of extremism, not help extinguish it.

The writer is Assistant Editor, The Daily Star.

PROJECT ■ SYNDICATE

TAKING TURKEY SERIOUSLY



CARL BILDT

ISTANBUL, in western Turkey, is one of Europe's great cities. As Constantinople, it was the capital of the Roman and Byzantine Empires, and after its capture and renaming by Mehmed II in 1453, it served as the capital of the Ottoman Empire for nearly another 500 years.

Throughout its history, the city on the western side of the Bosphorus Strait separating Europe from Asia has been an epicentre of the relationship between the geopolitical West and East. And Istanbul will most likely continue to play that role, given the current importance of mostly Christian Europe's relationship with the wider Muslim world.

Turkey itself emerged from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, and Turkish political life has often been tumultuous, marked by competing visions and aspirations, successes and setbacks. Still, during the last two centuries, reformers seeking to modernise Turkey have looked to Europe for inspiration.

This was certainly true of Turkey's first president, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who pushed through authoritarian reforms in the 1920s and 1930s to secularise the country; and it has been true for Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who, over the past 13 years, first as Turkey's prime minister and now as its president, has emerged as a towering personality on the world stage.

Erdoğan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) spent their first decade in power pushing through impressive economic and, yes, democratic reforms. Turkey, whose membership in the European Union Customs Union was already supporting its economic transformation, moved closer to eligibility for eventual EU membership – a process that reinforced the country's motivation to make progress on democratic reforms. Hope that the country had finally overcome its checkered history of military dictatorships was gaining strength.

However, much changed in the last few years. Turkey's accession talks with the EU have ground almost to a halt, owing partly to outright hostility against Turkey in some EU member states. The motives behind this animus vary, but the overall effect has been to alienate many Turks, who now feel rejected by a Europe that once inspired them. Not surprisingly, some Turks now look for inspiration and opportunities elsewhere.

Moreover, the situation inside Turkey has worsened in recent years, with Turkish society becoming dangerously polarised under the strain of the escalating conflicts in Syria and Iraq. Threats from militant Kurdish factions have resurfaced after a long ceasefire, and the Islamic State has launched a series of terrorist attacks in Istanbul and Ankara. It is a testament to Turkey's resilience that, under such conditions, it has still managed to host up to three million refugees.

Turkish politics since 2013 has also suffered from a ruthless and increasingly destructive silent civil war between the AKP and its former allies in the Gülenist movement, an Islamic community nominally led by the exiled preacher Fethullah Gülen, who now lives in the United States, outside Philadelphia.



PHOTO: TWITTER

The AKP and the Gülenists were once united in seeking to eradicate the Kemalist "deep state" – an alleged network of anti-democratic, nationalist agents embedded in the state's security structures with a mission to uphold Atatürk's secular vision. Part of this united effort involved, in 2007, show trials of senior Turkish generals that were based on fabricated evidence – an episode that many now agree led the country astray.

The years since then have been marked by warnings of Gülenist infiltration of the police force, the judiciary, and parts of the military. This silent civil war has significantly degraded the country's democratic development, with the elected government resorting to more authoritarian measures to respond to the perceived threat of Gülenist subversion.

The silent civil war became audible with the failed coup in July, which most observers believe was orchestrated by Gülenist forces, though Gülen himself has denied any involvement. If the coup had succeeded, Turkey likely would have descended into open civil war with no end in sight, and with all hope for democracy extinguished.

One silver lining of the recent putsch is that, after years of division, it has united Turkey's democratic political parties around the shared goal of defending democracy against future internal threats. The West's lack of empathy for Turkey during this traumatic period has been astonishing; it can be in no Western country's interest that Russian President Vladimir Putin was the first to meet with Erdoğan in the episode's aftermath.

No one should be surprised that Turkey is now trying to purge Gülenists from positions of power. Any state faced with insurrection from within would do the same.

To be sure, we should not ignore abuses in the immediate post-putsch crackdown; but we should put ourselves in the authorities' shoes. It is hard to know at this stage if the government is casting the net too wide or not wide enough, but erring in either direction will only create new problems.

For what it's worth, senior Turkish officials, in a meeting with Council of Europe Secretary-General Thorbjørn Jagland, have promised to uphold the rule of law in accordance with Council membership. In any case, there will be opportunities for the Council to address abuses after the immediate furore has subsided.

Turkey is at a historical crossroads, but it is still too early to tell where the country is headed. If the previous trends toward polarisation and authoritarianism continue, the country could eventually reach a breaking point. But if national unity, based on shared commitment to democracy, ultimately prevails, Turkey's political climate will improve, allowing for a resumption of the Kurdish peace process, further progressive political reforms, and new hope for future integration with Europe.

And make no mistake: the West's attitude toward Turkey matters. Western diplomats should escalate engagement with Turkey to ensure an outcome that reflects democratic values and is favourable to Western and Turkish interests alike.

A democratic and European Turkey could be a bridge to deliver reform and modernity to the Muslim world; an alienated and authoritarian Turkey could bring conflict and strife back to Europe's eastern borderlands. What happens on the Bosphorus affects us all.

The writer is a former prime minister and foreign minister of Sweden.

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The menace of overloaded vehicles

Stop their plying

IT is indeed disheartening to note that the plying of overloaded vehicles in the highways and over the bridges have been going on unabated right under the nose of the law enforcers. These lorries are one of the biggest contributors to the damage of vehicles and the road, and, worst still, are a leading reason for the premature destruction of small bridges across the country. Allowing overweight vehicles to pass causes development of cracks even on the surface of big infrastructure. The recently discovered crack in the Jamuna Multipurpose Bridge is just an example for a long time.

These vehicles are also prone to accidents, a serious threat to public safety, and are the prime actor behind many road mishap-related tragedies in the country. What is indeed shocking is that a section of police officials reportedly in connivance with erring lorry-owners let overweight vehicles pass in exchange of sweeteners. There are places where the weighing bridges are out of order.

Coordination among the major stakeholders, especially the authorities at the point of origin and the representative organisations of businesses and industries, holds the key. There is no denying that overloading should be stopped at the source, still we cannot but stress the need for vigorous monitoring on the streets.

Monitoring devices should be put in place to record stress level on bridges. The weighing bridges need to be fixed on an immediate basis. Signs with the maximum weight a vehicle can carry must be posted near a bridge, violating which one should be brought to book.

COMMENTS

"Khaleda not celebrating birthday today" (August 15, 2016)

Md Moniruzzaman

She has finally realised the sentiment of the common people after so many years. Many thanks for getting out of such a political sham.

Back Streetboy

Though it's too late, I appreciate this move.

"When pedestrians are forgotten" (August 15, 2016)

Muhammad Moinuddin

There should be separate routes for pedestrians and cyclists. It will help reduce traffic congestion. People will also find space for physical exercise.

Bimal Parui

Another example of negligence from the city authority.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Elevated bus for Bangladesh

The Chinese innovation of elevated bus is absolutely brilliant. Considering the traffic congestion in mega cities in Bangladesh, I believe it will be perfect for our country. They can stop anywhere to pick-up and drop passengers without halting traffic. These buses are extremely large and can carry vast number of passengers at a time. Moving along specialised tracks—making it more

like a train than a bus—it features an elevated midsection that glides over two lanes. Receiving electricity through the tracks, the vehicle travels at 40 km to 60 km (25 miles to 37 miles) per hour. It could be powered partly by solar energy. I think our government should seriously consider introducing it in our country.
Aminur Rahim, H-251, Road-18, New DOHS, Mohakhali, Dhaka



Finding the right hospital abroad

Many patients of our country travel to India, Bangkok, Singapore and other countries for seeking better medical treatment. But they are unaware that not all the hospitals offer treatment for all the medical problems. To find the appropriate facility, it is perhaps wise to seek the help of a medical tourism agency.

When I took a patient to India, I contacted a Mumbai-based Indian international medical tourism agency called "Indicure".

They helped me to get my patient's medical history reviewed by leading doctors in best hospitals in India with multiple treatment options and cost estimates. They did it free of charge. The agency also helps patients with follow-ups and all other matters relating to travel and stay in India.
Professor M Zahidul Haque
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