

Passport Forgery and Forensic Examination of Indian Passport



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Abstract

Passport forgery has increased in the last two-three decades due to various reasons which is also a threat to the internal security of our country. Passport is an important travel document issued by Government of India. Fake/counterfeit passports are prepared by criminals /anti-social elements by making addition, alteration or modification in particulars on genuine passport. Different types of cases related with passport forgeries were examined depending on the nature of query asked. The objective of this article is to elaborate the advance security feature of Indian Passport. Now a day's examination of such fake/counterfeit travel document has thrown a big challenge before the investigator as well as forensic document experts. A forensic document expert plays an important role in examination of such crime cases in order to solve the problem and produce proof of evidence for criminal justice systems.

Keywords: Passport forgery; Security features; Forensic examination

Abbreviations: DS: Diplomatic Security; DFA: Department of Foreign Affairs; MRTD: Machine Readable Travel Document; MRZ: Machine Readable Zone; ICAO: International Civil Aviation Organization; HAUV: Heat Activated Ultra Violet Film

Introduction

In the changing scenario, crime is organized in a modern way and criminals are more updated than the investigators, forensic scientist and public at large as they are using all modern techniques and tools in order to execute their plans to destruct the society. Due to rapid changes in technology and availability of high-tech instrument the criminals are more active in unlawful activities to produce counterfeit travel documents. Passport is an important travel document issued by the Government of India. Passport forgery is directly related with the diplomatic as well as internal security of the country. Indian passport is undoubtedly the most valuable travel and identity document in the world issued by Passport authority of India, Ministry of External Affairs and Government of India to a citizen of India for travel abroad.

Indian passport can be classified in to various categories such as Red Passport called Diplomatic passport, issued to Government diplomats and staff of High Commission posted abroad or to the Government officers posted abroad, White passport, issued to Government officers on temporary duty/deputation to foreign country and Blue passport, issued to

common Indian citizen. In addition to these three types of passport, there is a Jumbo passport containing 60 pages for the frequent travelers and another type known as Hajj Passport are also being issued by the Government of India. Hajj passport is a special passport used only for a Hajj pilgrimage to visit the holy place Mecca. Unlike a regular passport, a Hajj passport is valid for one year and can be used only to participate in the pilgrimage. Passport forgery has increased in the last two-three decades due to various reasons which is also a threat to internal security of our country.

Fake/counterfeit passports are prepared by criminals /anti-social elements by making addition, alteration or modification in particulars on genuine passport. Now a day's examination of such fake/counterfeit travel document has thrown a big challenge before the investigator as well as forensic document experts. A forensic document expert plays an important role in examination of such criminal cases in order to solve the problem and produce proof of evidence for criminal justice systems. This paper is focused on various aspects of passport forgery and important security features of Indian Passport. This paper will also help to update the knowledge and create awareness among

Police Officers, Forensic Scientist, Passport Issuing Authorities, law enforcement agencies and common people who are users of passport [1-6].

Passport Forgery (At a Glance)

Passport fraud is a global crime and not the one to be taken lightly at any level. The U.S. Department of State's law enforcement arm, Diplomatic Security (DS) Service, uses special agents who coordinate with other federal and international law enforcement agencies in more than 160 countries around the world to investigate passport and visa frauds. This article will first provide some background on the crime of passport fraud, and then address the detail of its forensic examination. The crime related with Passport Fraud is committed by the offenders who conceal their identity for fulfillment of their own desire in order to execute financial crime, bank fraud and other criminal activities. Fugitives and terrorists also involve in illegal activities such as drug trafficking or alien smuggling through passport forgery.

Thousands of the cases related with the passport forgery and visa fraud were investigated in recent years at global level. In year 2012, U.S. Department of state investigated over 3,900 new cases of passport and visa frauds. Without a valid passport, legal international travel is impossible, however using fraudulent travel document/fake passport the terrorist and anti-social element continues to cross the international borders and there by threatening the country's internal security. A major Visa-cum- Passport forgery had come in knowledge in year 2004 where the involvement of Tour and Travel Agency New Delhi was found. The Police collected the advanced printing unit and number of Visas of different countries, including United States and Canada along with Fake Indian Passport. Recently incident of Hajj passport Scam occurred.

A Hajj passport is based on the quotas for a country set by the Saudi government to regulate the huge number of Muslims from all over the world wanting to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. Indonesia's quota for this year was reportedly already filled while the Philippine quota still had slots available. The Filipino travel facilitators were taken into custody when they returned to the country following the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia, from Sept. 9 to 14 2016. Authorities believe that around 500 Indonesians faked their identity to be able to use Filipino Hajj passports and join the religious pilgrimage. Immigration Commissioner stated that 17 persons were in the custody of the National Bureau of Investigation and were being questioned on the extent of their involvement in the Hajj passport scam. The Authorities are investigating 17 Filipinos who had accompanied around 500 Indonesians posing as Filipino Hajj pilgrims to Saudi Arabia last month. Most of the Philippine passports were released by the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and some by the Philippine's consulate in Malaysia.

According to the report, Indonesians resorted total practice and illegally acquired Philippine's Hajj passports as otherwise

one would have to wait for 20 years to get a slot in the regular Indonesian quota for pilgrims. The task force was able to identify and take into custody another 103 Indonesians and 18 Malaysians who also illegally obtained Hajj passports from the Philippines (Philippine Daily Inquirer / October 10, 2016).

Forensic Examination of Indian Passport:

A Fake passport can be used for escaping into exile, identity theft, age fabrication, illegal immigration and organized crime. Hence forensic examination of fraudulent passport is a vital aspect in solving such cases. Fake passports are prepared by addition alteration or modification by persons not authorized to do so. For conducting forensic examination, original passport of contemporary period is essentially required for the comparison purpose as a standard. Thorough scientific examinations of details of security features provide important information regarding the genuineness of such travel documents. Forensic examination of Indian passport can be divided into two different zones such as Visual inspection zone and Machine readable zone.

Visual inspection zone contains all the personal details of passport holder such as type of passport, country code, name of passport holder, nationality, sex, date of birth, place of issue, date of issue, date of expiry etc., on the front page. Last page of the passport contains father's name, mother's name, address, file number, passport number below the barcode as well as perforated or punched passport number. Machine Readable Zone (MRZ) is printed in OCR-B form which is readable with the OCR-B reader used by immigration/border authorities. Standard specifications of Machine Readable Travel Document (MRTD) are decided by International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).



Figure 1: Showing Ashoka Chakra on outer cover of Passport (under UV light).

Some of the security features of Indian passport are illustrated by (Figures 1-8). There are multiple number of security features that are incorporated in our Indian passport such as Cover page containing Invisible Ashoka Chakra (visible under ultra-violet light), Cylindrical Water Mark of Ashoka Pillar,

Tiny fluorescent paper fibers, Micro printing, Invisible visa page numbers, Heat Activated Ultra-Violet Film (HAUV), etc. The base printing of the passport is done with water soluble fugitive ink of light blue color and on application of a few drops of water or alcohol, the ink of base printing will get smeared. This security feature provides excellent security against chemical erasures in our Indian passport. Recently Government of India had taken excellent step for incorporation of advanced security features in our Indian Passport in year 2013 in the form of Ghost Image and double lamination sheet in new passport in order to make our Indian passport more secure. Personal data such as name, address, date of birth and passport registration number has been embedded in tiny fonts on the ghost image to prevent counterfeit. None of the data will be visible to the naked eye, but can be seen with a magnifying glass. This new passport series, having ghost prints of the photograph, is an attempt to strengthen the passport delivery mechanism leaving no scope of duplication (Figures 1-8).



Figure 2: First Laminated sheet of Passport.



Figure 3: Showing Page no. 2 Second Laminated Sheet of Passport (With Scanned Signature & ghost image of Passport holder).



Figure 4: Showing Ghost Image contains details of Passport Holder.

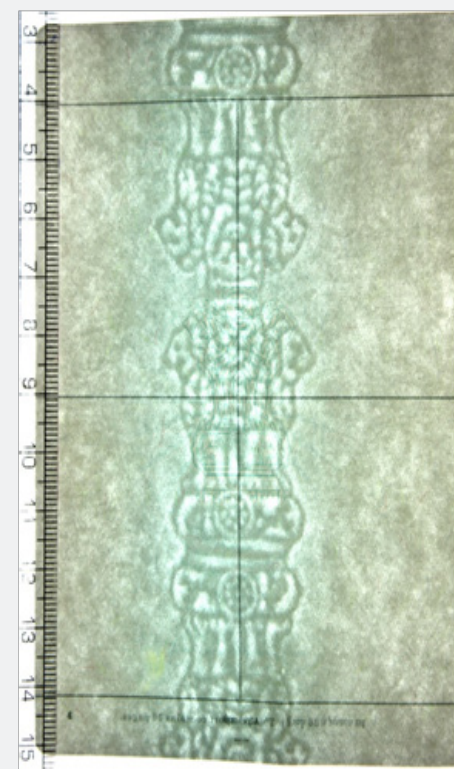


Figure 5: Showing Watermark (Ashoka Pillar) of Passport.

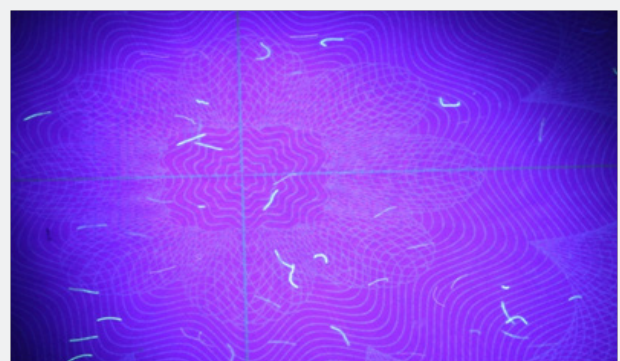


Figure 6: Showing micro printing and tiny paper fibers on inner pages of Passport (under UV light).



Figure 7: Last Non-laminated Page No.34 of Passport (With Perforated Passport Number).



Figure 8: Laminated sheet of Passport Page No. 35 (With details of Passport holder Father's name, Mother's name, Address, File Number, Bar Code and Perforated Passport Number).

Result and Discussion

Forensic Examination of Indian passport reveals that it contains multiple security features such as Double lamination sheet, Paper security features, Optical fibers, Micro printing, Fluorescent feature, Secret watermark, Fluorescent stitching thread and binding etc. These security features provide more protection against counterfeiting of Indian Passports. The paper used in Indian Passport is suitable to accept security printing ink. Tiny multi-color fibers are used which are invisible to naked eyes, can be seen under ultra-violet light on both sides of the paper page. Passport fraud is often committed or attempted by replacing the original photograph on an existing passport,

particularly with older passports. Attempts were also made by certain criminals to create fake date of birth certificate which matches with the stolen passport in order to facilitate the issue of visa document for their visit abroad.

Other ways include using the identity of a person who has died and circumventing the requirement of change in particulars of passport holders as per their own desire. Indian passport is regarded as among the most valuable travel and identity documents to travel abroad. It provides citizenship identity of passport holders. These important travel documents are extremely desirable to terrorists and other criminals, who typically commit passport fraud. Someone who commits passport fraud is, not surprisingly, most often doing so to achieve some kind of benefit that he or she would not otherwise be accorded, or to travel and live in someplace without revealing the true identity.

The most typical passport fraud crimes are committed by people attempting to illegally obtain citizenship of another country and people wishing to hide or change their identity, people committing financial fraud, fugitives, terrorists, people committing other crimes, such as drug trafficking and alien smuggling. A careful and systematic forensic examination of fake passport will reveal the fraudulent condition and more over the intense scrutiny by the immigration authorities will also check the misuse of passport.

Conclusion

The Government of India has introduced multiple numbers of security features in Indian passport which are updated from time to time. In spite of these security features, causes related to Passport forgery has not stopped. Introduction of new advanced security features in Indian passport by using highest level of security printing technologies which provides more security against counterfeiting. Excellent advanced security feature in the form of Ghost Image and double lamination sheet introduced in year 2013. It will definitely protect the passport from fraudulent reproduction. Besides these, the proposed introduction of e-passport is also a good step to ensure foolproof security feature in our Indian passport.

These new advanced security features are definitely a better deterrent to stop the unlawful activity of counterfeiting important travel documents. In spite of these security features, attempts are being made by the criminals to overcome the safeguards and to misuse the travel document to achieve their end purpose. In order to further strengthen of security features of our Indian Passport, it is advisable to have interaction among passport issuing authority, with forensic document experts and immigration officers for the purpose of regular review of safety of this important travel document which will definitely provide protection against counterfeiting. Knowledge and awareness regarding the security features is very necessary for all of us to protect our self from any criminal activity. This will also help to

protect our society as well as internal security of country. We should always have to look forward to make advance change in security feature of passport.

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