

OUTLOOK

Aviation Security: Better To Err On The Side Of Caution

Dr Sanat Kaul , Chairman of International Foundation for Aviation, Aerospace and Drones.

UPDATED: 30 MAY 2022 5:48 PM

The FATF first put Turkey on its grey list in 2011 and removed it in 2014 after the Turkish government made various amendments to Turkey's regulatory framework.

That India needs to steer clear of Turkish involvement in aviation space is a no brainer.

Of late, one new area of geopolitical concern which has emerged is Turkey under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan . Erdogan has been critical of India- especially over Kashmir, favouring Pakistan and has been raising the issue of Kashmir in forums like the United Nations other places. He has also made speeches criticising Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. What is now greatly upsetting about Turkey is that its name appears in the 'grey list' of FAFT.

This list has countries that are considered safe haven for supporting terror funding and money laundering are put in the FATF grey list. This inclusion serves as a warning to the country that it may enter the blacklist.

The FATF first put Turkey on its grey list in 2011 and removed it in 2014 after the Turkish government made various amendments to Turkey's regulatory framework. In December 2019, the FATF warned that unless it improved its "serious shortcomings," However, in 2021 Turkey was again placed on the grey along with

Pakistan and other countries, for deficiencies in its regime to counter money laundering and terror financing.

Under these circumstances what should be India's stance towards Turkey in terms of Aviation security? Turkish company Celebi as a ground handling agent is well established in India providing its services in six major metro airports in India. Should not India consider to black list Celebi from Indian operations at least till such time Turkey continues to be on the grey list of FAFT and maintains its hostile attitude towards India?

Further, Air India, post privatisation, announced the appointment of the former chairman of Turkish Airlines Mehmet Ilker Ayci as the CEO and MD of Air India, as he had a history of turning around similar companies. In Mr. Ayci's favour is the fact that he was in part responsible for turning Turkish Airlines around under his stewardship between 2015-2022. However, when it came to be public knowledge in India that he shared a close relationship with Turkish president Erdogan. Ayci decided not to accept the offer.

Reportedly, the RSS and its affiliates mounted pressure on the NDA government to annul his appointment citing national security concerns. Before the government could pull the plug, Ayci quite disenchanted by reports in Indian media about issues with his appointment decided to recuse himself from the employment with AI.

The RSS successfully foiled the appointment of a Turkish national as CEO of a private airline. However, another Turkish company's participation in bidding for ground handling services of AI has unfortunately escaped the Hindu Nationalist Wing's hawk eyes. As per recent reports, Celebi has elicited its interest in bidding for Air India's ground handling services. The company's existing presence poses a significant national security threat. Imagine the

magnitude of threat Celibi can assume if it manages to acquire AI's ground handling.

Finally, we have been informed by the press very recently that Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has proposed the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor(CPEC) be turned into a trilateral arrangement between China, Pakistan and Turkey. The Turkish President has replied that that he is willing to share its expertise with Pakistan in the area of defence 'as the country was located in a strategic location in South Asia'. While CPEC is an economic corridor the response of the Turkish President, as quoted in the newspaper, is surprising and startling. There is no doubt that Turkey wants to enter into Kashmir issues and, therefore, should be kept at an arms distance where Indian security issues are concerned.