

O HERALDO

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Australia's visa crackdown will shatter dreams

Several leading Australian universities have imposed restrictions or halted the processing of student visa applications from six Indian states - Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Jammu & Kashmir. Citing an alarming increase in fraudulent applications and visa misuse, this move has sent shockwaves through Indian households, education consultancies, and the aspiring student community at large. While universities claim they are acting in defence of academic integrity, the implications of this policy shift run far deeper - risking the future of thousands of genuine students and straining the vibrant educational and cultural ties that India and Australia have built over decades.

Australian institutions argue that their crackdown is aimed at stemming the misuse of student visas as a backdoor to immigration. Concerns about falsified academic records, manipulated financial statements, and questionable motivations for overseas education have grown, especially among applicants from the six aforementioned states.

But let us not forget: for every fabricated application, there are countless genuine ones - young minds burning with ambition, willing to invest lakhs of rupees and leave behind families to earn a world-class education. By painting entire states with the same brush, universities risk alienating the very talent pool that has helped establish Australia as a leading global education hub.

This broad-brush policy is not just about fraud detection; it risks becoming a blanket of discrimination, where geography outweighs merit. And for Indian students caught in the crossfire, this is more than a mere inconvenience - it's a life-altering obstacle.

To be sure, the concerns raised by Australia are not without merit. The international education sector has seen a rise in "non-genuine" applications, driven in part by a parallel industry of unregulated agents and consultants in India. These middlemen promise a shortcut to foreign shores - often at the cost of ethics and legality. In states like Punjab and Haryana, where migration aspirations run high, young people can fall prey to such false promises.

But the solution cannot be to close the gates entirely. It must involve bilateral cooperation to root out the systemic rot - starting with a regulatory overhaul of India's outbound education consultancy sector. The Indian government, too, must act swiftly to safeguard its youth from exploitation and work towards rebuilding the credibility of legitimate applicants.

The emotional toll on students is compounded by the financial burden. In the past year alone, student visa fees have more than doubled, and tuition fees at top Australian universities have increased by over 7%, with clinical medicine now costing upwards of ₹60 lakh per annum. The new visa rules, including a higher savings threshold of A\$29,710, only make things tougher.

At a time when Australia has surpassed China to become the top destination for Indian students, such barriers risk undoing years of progress. Instead of encouraging high-achieving students, we are pushing them into uncertainty and discouragement. The pain is particularly acute for those already mid-application or with confirmed admissions - many of whom now face abrupt rejections or added layers of scrutiny.

What cannot be ignored is the broader political context. Opposition leader Peter Dutton's recent proposal to cut international student intake by 80,000, citing housing pressures, makes it clear that migration has become a political hot potato in Australia. The rhetoric is unmistakable: student visas are now seen less as a channel for knowledge exchange and more as a lever to control population growth.

But playing politics with education is a risky game. International students contribute billions to the Australian economy, not just through tuition but through their role in the workforce, research, and cultural integration. Penalising a specific cohort under the guise of migration control could damage not only Australia's global reputation but also its economic standing.

The Ministry of External Affairs in India has so far taken a diplomatic stance, calling visa decisions the "sovereign prerogative" of host countries. While technically accurate, this passive posture will do little to comfort the students now staring at lost opportunities. A more engaged dialogue is needed - one that brings together education ministries, universities, and immigration authorities from both nations to create a transparent, fair, and rigorous admissions process.

Moreover, Indian state governments whose students have been disproportionately affected must take initiative - tightening oversight on local agents, launching awareness campaigns, and even partnering directly with foreign universities to ensure accountability.

What we are witnessing is not just a visa policy shift - it is a fork in the road for international education. If mistrust is allowed to fester, the bonds between India and Australia could suffer long-term damage. But if both nations choose to confront the challenges together - with nuance, integrity, and mutual respect - the outcome can be a system that rewards authenticity and punishes fraud without collateral damage to honest students.



ROBIN ROY

End of Governor Raj?

Even as heat in the political circles is registering a steady rise with reports of how BJP MP Nishikant Dubey's comments have stoked a controversy... forcing his party to distance itself... let's attempt to read between the lines of the order...

The case arose from a long standoff between the DMK-led Stalin government in Tamil Nadu and Governor RN Ravi.

Altogether, the Assembly had passed 13 Bills, out of which the Governor had withheld assent on 10 Bills or sent them back to the Legislative Assembly. The Assembly then endorsed the same (Bills) without any actual changes, but the governor (yet) again referred them to the President's consent... which prompted the court action.

The Supreme Court has re-defined the constitutional boundaries of the Governor's role, reaffirming the principles of federalism and democratic accountability. The ruling delivered by Justices J B Pardiwala and R Mahadevan, addresses several critical constitutional questions regarding the Governor's powers and responsibilities under Article 200 of the Constitution.

*The Stalin government in Tamil Nadu argued that such delays violated Article 200, which outlines specific actions a Governor can take upon receiving a Bill: granting assent, withholding assent and returning it for reconsideration, or reserving it for Presidential assent.

It may be recalled that the court had rejected any interpretation suggesting an implied "pocket veto," where a Governor could indefinitely delay action without explanation or process.

The judgment underscores that Governors, despite being Union appointees, are not autonomous actors but constitutional functionaries bound by ministerial advice. Their role is not to obstruct governance but to act as facilitators within India's federal framework



The Apex Court referred to its earlier ruling in State of Punjab versus Principal Secretary to the Governor of Punjab (2023) which held that Governors cannot use indefinite delays as a tool to veto legislation. By reiterating this principle, the Apex Court clarified that gubernatorial powers are not autonomous but are bound by constitutional morality.

While Article 361 grants personal immunity to Governors, their actions are not beyond judicial review and the court here cited Rameshwar Prasad vs

Union of India (2006) to affirm that any obstruction of legislative processes by a Governor is subject to judicial oversight. In this case, the court found that Governor Ravi acted unconstitutionally by referring Bills to the President without following due process or consulting the Council of Ministers. Such actions were deemed violative of constitutional norms and detrimental to state governance.

WHAT THE COURT DID
The Court established clear deadlines...

*One month for withholding assent or reserving a Bill for Presidential consideration.

*Three months for returning a Bill without ministerial advice.

*One month for granting assent to a re-passed Bill.

It may be noted that the Supreme Court also invoked its extraordinary powers under Article 142 to ensure "complete justice." It declared that all 10 Bills withheld by the Governor would be deemed to have received assent on the date they were re-presented after being passed again by the Assembly. However, in this regard, the Court justified it as necessary to resolve a constitutional deadlock and uphold democratic principles especially in case this unprecedented step may have raised concerns about judicial overreach.

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Oppn-ruled states

Kerala had earlier moved the court against President Draupadi Murmu's act of withholding assent referred by the governor. Some important Bills include University Laws (Amendment) Bill 2021 and Kerala Co-operative Societies (Amendment) Bill 2021.

West Bengal had also complained about the governor sitting on eight Bills, including crucial ones such as the West Bengal University of Health Sciences (Amendment) Bill; Aliah University (Amendment) Bill; West Bengal Town and Country (Planning and Development) (Amendment) Bill, and the state government had called it subverting democratic good governance.

In Maharashtra, the top court alluded to the governor who called for an "controversial" confidence vote in the Assembly in 2022, leading to the fall of the government in the state.

These actions had led to accusations of governors acting as "proxies" for the Centre.

On April 17, while taking a swipe at the Supreme Court's

judgment, Vice-President and Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankar said judges in the country have no accountability and the law of the land does not apply to them.

"I have no doubt the Parliament cannot script a judgment of a court. I have no doubt about it. The Parliament can only legislate and hold institutions, including judiciary and executive, accountable, but judgment writing, adjudication is the sole prerogative of the judiciary as much legislation is that of the Parliament. But are we not finding this situation getting challenged?" Dhankar questioned.

The Vice President reminded the audience of the President's oath—"to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution." He emphasised that the President holds a unique and elevated position, unlike others who merely swear to "abide by the Constitution."

"We cannot have a situation where you direct the President of India and on what basis?" he asked. Referring to constitutional provisions, he said the only authority the judiciary has in such matters is "to interpret the Constitution under Article 145(3)" and even that must be done by a bench of five or more judges.

The court had said the President is required to take a decision on the bills in three months from the date on which such reference is received and in case of any delay beyond this period, appropriate reasons would have to be recorded and conveyed to the concerned state.

The Supreme Court clarified that in cases where a bill has been reserved because it involves questions of Constitutional validity, the executive should not assume the role of the courts in determining the vires of a bill and should, as a matter of practice, refer such question to the Supreme Court under Article 143.

"We are of the considered view that although the option to refer a Bill to this Court under Article 143 may not be mandatory, yet the President, as a measure of prudence, ought to seek an opinion under the said provision in respect of Bills that have been reserved for the consideration of the President on grounds of perceived unconstitutionality," the Supreme Court had said.

Impact on State governance: For Tamil Nadu, this ruling clears legislative roadblocks and will enable implementation of crucial laws. It also sets a precedent for other states facing similar situations.

(Robin Roy is a Senior Journalist and Former Senior Associate Editor, O Herald, Goa)

people's edit

ADIEU TO BELOVED POPE FRANCIS

EUSEBIO GOMES

It is a sad day for the Catholic Church and the Catholic community as our religious head, beloved Pope Francis passed away on April 21, Easter Monday. With his passing away, the Church has lost a dynamic leader who was a voice for the voiceless and who advocated for the defence of the human rights. By birth he was Argentinean but his grandparents were Italians who migrated to Argentina with their son Mario (Pope's father) in 1929. He was elected a pope on March 13, 2013 and was the first pope from Latin America. His original name is Jorge Mario Bergoglio and was the first Jesuit to become a pope and the first to take the name of Francis in memory of St Francis of Assisi.

Pope Francis was born on December 17, 1936 in Buenos Aires. He entered the Society of Jesus and was ordained a priest in 1969. In Latin America, majority of the people live in conditions of squalor, poverty, hunger and diseases. He was greatly inspired by the Church's stand in Latin America i.e. 'preferential option for the poor', the formula adopted by the Third General Conference of Latin American Bishops at Puebla in Mexico in 1979. The nomenclature Francis he adopted after Francis of Assisi was an indication of his simplicity, love and concern for the poor. He chose this papal name because St Francis of Assisi was a man of poverty and a man of peace. Pope Francis described the emotional moments immediately after his election in a secret conclave in the Sistine Chapel on March 13. He had been sitting next to Brazilian Cardinal Claudio Hummes, the Archbishop Emeritus of Sao Paulo. Cardinal Claudio hugged him and kissed him and told him not to forget the poor. That word went to pope's mind and he immediately thought of Francis of Assisi. Pope Francis had expressed his wish of having a poor Church for the poor. He was not interested in paraphernalia and showmanship and lived with his feet on the ground, identifying with the poor and the marginalised. For him, the office of a pope was a service of extending his arms to protect all of God's people and embrace with tender affection the whole of humanity, especially the poorest, the weakest, the least important.

The encyclical letter "Laudato Si" of Pope Francis issued on May 24, 2015 called on to take care of our planet earth, the common home, which was accepted and appreciated by people of all religions as it addressed the issue of environment. Another encyclical letter "Fratelli Tutti" issued on October 3, 2020 aimed to promote universal aspiration toward fraternity and social friendship in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic. He declared this year 2025, a Year of Jubilee with a papal bull, titled "Spes Non Confundit," meaning "Hope does not disappoint." In his Easter Message "Urbi Et Orbi", he expressed his closeness to the sufferings of people of Palestine, Israel and Ukraine and appealed to the warring parties for ceasefire, to release the hostages and to come to the aid of a starving people that aspires to a future of peace.

Let us pay homage to our beloved Pope who loved the people of God. Requiescat in pace!

Pope led the life of a real saint

It is an established truth that Pope Francis was an embodiment of compassion, love and humility. He was an adorable religious leader and a most loved human being, par excellence. He served as an ambassador of the poor and needy. Though he was the uncrowned monarch of the Vatican City, we never found him exhibiting power at any time or enjoying a luxurious life. His frequent visits to the slums to serve the poor, jails to comfort the prisoners and fight for the rights of the underprivileged and the continuous efforts made by him to stop the wars marked his Papacy. His compassionate gestures have served as a great solace to those who became victims of the ongoing wars and the recommendations made by him to the other rich nations to give asylum to them proved beyond doubt that he was indeed a true disciple of Lord Jesus and a strict follower of his teachings.

In short, Pope Francis led a life of a real Saint and his loss is irreparable not only to the Catholic community but humanity in its entirety. It is unfortunate that we have lost Pope Francis at a time when the world needs him the most. May his noble soul rest in peace.

Tharcus S. Fernando, Chennai

RIP Pope Francis

Born as Jorge Mario Bergoglio in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Pope Francis made history as the first Jesuit and the first Latin Ameri-

letterstotheeditor

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can to become Pope. He was elected as Pope on March 13, 2013 at the age of 76 after Pope Benedict XVI resigned. He became known for focusing on humility, helping those in need, and fairness.

During his tenure as Pope, he made changes within the Vatican to improve financial transparency and address clerical abuse issues.

He inherited a Church that was under attack over a child sex abuse scandal and torn by infighting in the Vatican bureaucracy, and was elected with a clear mandate to restore order.

He is best known for his humility, his strong emphasis on God's mercy, his global visibility, and his commitment to social justice and inter-religious dialogue. He's also recognized for his advocacy for the poor, his openness, and his simplified approach to the papacy, choosing to live in a guesthouse rather than the papal residence.

He chose the name Francis in honor of Saint Francis of Assisi, a figure known for his love of the poor and nature. His death on April 21 is a loss to the Catholic Church the world over.

Jubel D'Cruz, Mumbai

A blast from the past and a sad present

Earlier this month, it was a delight to be back in Goa, my first visit after being bestowed the

Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) status.

I was so very pleased to attend the Golden Jubilee Reunion of our SSC batch at our school Bal Bharati Vidya Mandir in my native Ribandar. Meeting up with my fellow students and dear teachers after 50 long years was heart-warming. A flashback of nostalgic memories.

However, on the other side it was so very distressing to learn that the Home for the Aged next to Don Bosco High School in Panaji run by Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity, was going to be shut down this month end. This was a much needed shelter for the destitute and homeless. An immense solace to the poor, downtrodden and impoverished.

Seven years ago, I had requested the nuns there to house a woman from Ribandar whom they willingly accommodated, and it was a setback to be told that she now had to leave. It was too sudden and at a very short notice. Fortunately, I was able to relocate her to another charitable home in South Goa.

Let us hope that the authorities will do everything possible to restore this institution in Panaji so that the Missionaries of Charity can continue providing the laudable service in helping the underprivileged and needy. May the focus at all times be on

Care, Concern and Comfort for the poorest of the poor. Through concrete measures, there is need to usher the much-needed succour and solace to these unfortunate brothers and sisters who languish without a shelter.

Nelson Mandela had so very rightly said, "Freedom is meaningless if people cannot put food in their stomachs, if they can have no shelter, if illiteracy and disease continue to dog them".

Aires Rodrigues, London

Brilliant editorial

I read with very keen interest, your today's editorial titled "people lose when institutions clash"

I had the opportunity to read as well as listen to various views and opinions expressed by eminent lawyers as well as retired judges of Supreme Court about the recent Supreme Court landmark judgement on April 8.

Each one of them gave their valuable comments upholding the constitutional validity of the verdict.

However, the views, opinions and observations made by you, in your editorial are very sensible, meaningful and far-reaching. Without criticising the opponents of the verdict, who are not agreeing with the Supreme Court judgement your view points appear to be filled with common sense with clear explanations of far reaching outcomes that will protect the le-

gitimacy of State Assemblies and also expedite the bills adopted by state legislatures which are then sent to the governors and even to the President of India for their assents. It's found that often there is inordinate delay in returning them back to the respective State Assemblies, within a reasonable time limit. Hence it has been observed that lack of action from the constitutional authorities is causing immense problems to the people of the states, who elected their representatives with the hopes and aspirations to resolve all their pending issues at the earliest. The latest verdict of the SC apparently takes care of such inherent drawbacks.

Antonio Diniz, Fatorda

FDA needs more teeth

The FDA in Goa is news these recent few days with regards to conduction raids on eateries and fruits. There are many hotels and eateries shut down by FDA for not maintaining hygiene, also many fruits are destroyed as they are artificially ripened or coloured.

FDA is seen now during mango season or during Ganesh or Diwali times where they check for adulterated foods. I request health minister and FDA to carry out frequent checks are required and punishment even behind bars as these people are playing with the health of citizen.

Chemical like formalin and carbide which is used to ripen fruits should be treated as controlled drugs.

George Fernandes, Navelim