

Course correction – **Visa crackdown: On Indian students’ arrest** **Students should be made aware of the risks of falling afoul of U.S. immigration laws**

The arrest of 129 Indians on the charge of wilfully violating immigration laws to stay and work in the United States sends a stark message to youth looking for better prospects abroad: their efforts should begin with due diligence and strictly follow the letter of the law. In the sting operation carried out by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, which threatens to encompass many more Indians in the ‘University of Farmington’ case, the contentious issue is whether they fell victim to unscrupulous recruiters who offered to secure an I-20 student document that allowed them to undertake paid work using the provision for Curricular Practical Training, or knowingly engaged in fraud. Going by the indictment of eight recruiters of Indian origin, they knew they were violating U.S. immigration law when they enrolled students using fraudulent and unlawful means, and their profits included negotiated referral fees paid into their accounts by undercover agents. The prosecution has alleged that each student who enrolled in the ‘university’ was aware that there would be no classes, credit scores or academic requirements, and the intention was merely to “pay to stay” and gain access to employment. These statements are, of course, subject to scrutiny during the trial of the alleged recruiters. The Ministry of External Affairs has made the correct distinction between students who may have been duped and the recruiters. Students who are eligible to pursue studies at an authorised university in the U.S. should, therefore, get a further opportunity and not be subjected to summary deportation or humiliation. It must also not prejudice the prospects of such students who may apply in future for legal entry.

The University of Farmington case in Michigan is not the first instance of Indian students falling foul of U.S. immigration laws, although it stands apart as a racket exposed by a sting operation. Others such as Tri-Valley University and Herguan University were degree mills run by individuals that used false claims and documents to enable youth to unlawfully stay in the U.S. and, in many cases, pursue employment. These trends reinforce the need for good communication that would help students identify credentialed institutions that meet the requirements of the Student and Exchange Visitor Program, and highlight the serious nature of visa fraud. If the averments in the Michigan case are correct, the prospect of working in America attracted many of the 600 students who were recruited. This should serve as a reminder to India’s policymakers that access to higher education, job-creation and raising of living standards to meet the aspirations of youth must receive priority. Talk of an impending demographic dividend is meaningless without creating opportunities at home.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **Crackdown** - strong action that someone in authority takes to stop a particular activity
- **Afoul** - in a state of difficulty or conflict with
- **Immigration** - the process in which people enter a country in order to live there permanently
- **Wilfully** - done deliberately in order to cause damage or harm
- **Violate** - to do something that is in opposition to a law, agreement, principle etc
- **Immigration** - the process in which people enter a country in order to live there permanently

- **Stark** - completely clear
- **Prospect** - chances of success, especially in a job or career
- **Due diligence** -the process of carefully examining something or someone, especially before agreeing to buy it or employ them or before advising someone else to buy it or employ them
- **Sting operation** - a deceptive operation designed to catch a person committing a crime
- **Carry out** -to do or complete something
- **Threaten** - to tell someone that you might or you will cause them harm, especially in order to make them do something
- **Encompass** -to include a lot of people or things
- **Contentious** - causing disagreement between people or groups
- **Victim** - someone who has been affected by a bad situation such as an accident or an illness
- **Fall victim to something** - become a victim
- **Unscrupulous** - willing to do things that are unfair, dishonest, or illegal
- **Engaged** - involved in doing something
- **Indictment** - something that shows how bad or wrong something is
- **Violate** - to do something that is in opposition to a law, agreement, principle etc
- **Enrol** - if you enrol at a school or other institution, or if someone enrolls you there, you put your name on the official list of its students or members
- **Fraudulent** - made with the intention of tricking someone, especially illegally
- **Unlawful** - something that is unlawful is illegal, especially something that would be considered legal in a different situation
- **Negotiate** - to try to reach an agreement by discussing something in a formal way, especially in a business or political situation
- **Undercover** - working or done secretly in order to catch criminals, get secret information etc
- **Prosecution** - the lawyers who try to prove in court that someone accused of a crime is guilty
- **Allege** - to say that something is true or that someone has done something wrong or illegal, even though this has not been proved
- **Intention** - a plan in your mind to do something
- **Merely** - only / just
- **Scrutiny** - careful examination of someone or something
- **Trial** - the process of examining a case in a court of law and deciding whether someone is guilty or innocent
- **Alleged** - claimed to be true, even though this has not been proved
- **Distinction** - a difference between two things
- **Dupe** - to trick someone into believing something that is not true or into doing something that is stupid or illegal
- **Deportation** - to force someone to leave a country, especially someone who has no legal right to be there or who has broken the law
- **Humiliation** - to make someone feel ashamed or lose respect for himself or herself
- **Prejudice** - an unreasonable opinion or feeling, especially the feeling of not liking a particular group of people
- **Instance** - an example of something happening

- **Fall foul of** - to get into trouble with someone or something
- **Racket** - an illegal activity that makes money
- **Reinforce** - to make an idea, belief, or feeling stronger
- **Credentials** - documents that prove who you are or that show your qualifications or status
- **Averment** - an affirmation or allegation
- **Aspiration** - something that you want to achieve, or the wish to achieve something
- **Impending** - an impending event or situation, especially an unpleasant one, is one that will happen very soon
- **Demographic** - relating to populations

Course correction – **The peace holds: On Assam blasts case verdict**

A harsher penalty in the 2008 Assam serial blasts case could have led to wider trouble

Rocked by protests against the Centre's proposed Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, Assam's Bodo-populated areas were on edge for another reason last week. Over a decade after nine serial bombs ripped through four towns, the clamour for the death penalty to be awarded to the perpetrators had put the State on alert, after a district and sessions court set up for the CBI case had convicted 14 of them. The October 30, 2008 bombings exacted a severe toll. Eighty-eight deaths, 53 of them in Guwahati, with 540 injured, it was argued, passed the Supreme Court's 'rarest of the rare' test. And yet, mindful of the "entire facts and circumstances of the case", the judge on January 30 sentenced 10 of the convicted, including Ranjan Daimary, to life and handed out limited terms to the others. Most of the convicts belong to a faction of the National Democratic Front of Boroland, of which Daimary is the chairman. The NDFB(R) has had a ceasefire agreement with the Assam and Union governments since May 2005. The NDFB (Progressive), led by Gobinda Basumatary, is also in peace talks. Recent incidents in Bodo areas — including the May and December 2014 attacks against Muslim migrants and Adivasis, in which over 100 civilians were killed — have been attributed to the rebel NDFB faction, led earlier by I.K. Songbijit and now by B. Saoraigwra.

These groups and their predecessors, many of which have given up arms and joined the formal political process, espouse causes ranging from secession to a Bodoland State carved out of Assam. The violent phase peaked in the late 1980s and early 1990s, but ebbed with the creation of the Bodoland Territorial Council in 2003. It absorbed the likes of Hagrama Mohilary, formerly a Bodo Liberation Tigers militant, whose Bodoland People's Front has been an alliance partner of both the erstwhile Congress-led State government and the current BJP regime of Sarbananda Sonowal. While NDFB(R) supporters chanted slogans demanding Bodoland to protest against the judicial order, a death sentence for Daimary could have sparked wider convulsions, and pushed some of the fringe groups back into militancy, creating a 1990s redux. The BJP has backed the creation of smaller States, but Bodoland is unlikely to be realised any time soon. The Bodo case for statehood is also hamstrung by the fact that non-Bodos account for nearly 70% of the population in the Bodoland Territorial Area Districts that will comprise the core of such a State. New Delhi is focussing instead

on devolving more powers with its constitution amendment Bill — likely to be introduced in Parliament this week — to bring 10 autonomous district councils under the purview of the Central Finance Commission. Along with ideologically agnostic partnerships with the State government in Dispur, this is the way forward for now.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **Verdict** - an official judgment made in a court
- **Protest** - a strong complaint or disagreement
- **Amendment** - a change made to a law or agreement
- **Rip through** - if something such as a fire, storm, or bomb rips through a place, it damages or destroys the place very quickly
- **Clamour** - an urgent request for something by a lot of people
- **Death penalty** - legal punishment by death
- **Perpetrator** - someone who has committed a crime or a violent or harmful act
- **Convict** - to prove in a court of law that someone is guilty of a crime
- **Exact** - to get something from someone by threatening or forcing them or using your authority
- **Toll** - the total number of people who have been killed or hurt
- **Injured** - hurt in an accident or attack
- **Mindful** - careful about or conscious of something
- **Circumstance** - a fact or condition that affects a situation
- **Ceasefire** - an agreement to stop fighting for a period of time, especially in order to discuss permanent peace
- **Migrant** - someone who travels to another place or country in order to find work
- **Rebel** - someone who tries to remove a government or leader using force
- **Faction** - a small group within a larger group, consisting of people with different opinions from the rest
- **Predecessor** - the person who had a job or official position before someone else
- **Espouse** - to give your support to an idea, principle, or belief
- **Ebb** - to gradually become smaller or less
- **The like of** - similar in character or quality to the one mentioned
- **Formerly** - in the past
- **Alliance** - an arrangement between two or more people, groups, or countries by which they agree to work together to achieve something
- **Erstwhile** - an erstwhile friend, employer etc was a friend, employer etc until recently but is not any more
- **Regime** - a system or form of government
- **Chant** - to keep shouting or singing a word or phrase many times
- **Slogan** - a short phrase that is easy to remember and is used to advertise something or to express the beliefs of a political party or other group
- **Convulsion** - a sudden or extreme change that causes major problems or serious harm
- **Fringe** - people or activities that are considered strange or extreme
- **Redux** - brought back; revived

- **Hamstrung** - prevented from doing what you want to do
- **Account for** - to be the reason why something exists or happens
- **Autonomous** - an autonomous state, region, or organization is independent and has the power to govern itself
- **Purview** - the area of responsibility or influence that a person or organization has
- **Agnostic** - someone who believes that it is not possible to know whether God exists or not

Course correction – **Unedifying episode: On Kolkata stand-off**

The Supreme Court has defused the situation, but concerns remain over stand-off in Kolkata

In its ostensibly even-handed intervention in the stand-off between the Central and West Bengal governments over the manner of investigation of the Saradha Chit Fund case, the Supreme Court has de-escalated political tensions, at least for now. The decision allowed both sides in the face-off to claim “moral victory” — even if it was West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee who was forced to climb down from the aggressive posture she took in denying the Central Bureau of Investigation room to question Kolkata Police Commissioner Rajeev Kumar. However, while ordering him to cooperate with the CBI in “neutral” Shillong, the Court restrained the CBI from taking any coercive action against Mr. Kumar. The Police Commissioner and his Special Investigation Team investigating the chit fund case had been served a number of notices to appear before the CBI before it sent a team to his house in Kolkata. While Ms. Banerjee may have reason to believe that the timing of the CBI’s operation was politically motivated, her government’s response — manhandling and detaining the CBI officials — was shocking and inexcusable. In the polarised political atmosphere, her belligerence expectedly secured the backing of a large number of Opposition parties, and even had the Congress rally around her during an impromptu sit-in protest. However, in attempting to obstruct the CBI action in a court-ordered investigation, Ms. Banerjee once again demonstrated that she is prone to taking arguments over administrative procedures to the streets. A decade ago, she burnished her credentials as the Opposition leader who would dethrone the Left Front combine in West Bengal with her agitation over the Singur land acquisition. But her attempt now to bring the State, where she heads the government, to a grinding halt speaks poorly of her political maturity. Ms. Banerjee is free to read political motives into the actions of a Central agency — but she must conduct that fight politically and by heeding her responsibilities as a Chief Minister. To hold a dharna in aid of an officer who is required for questioning does her no credit.

There are bound to be questions whether this matter should have been escalated to such an unpleasant level. The CBI says there was no proper response to the earlier summonses it sent to the Police Commissioner, and alleges that he could have destroyed evidence that was initially gathered by the Special Investigation Team that he had supervised in the initial stage of the probe. But it is doubtful whether descending on a senior officer’s residence on a Sunday evening with a large team of officers was the right course of action for the CBI, as it was liable to be interpreted as a high-handed attempt to browbeat and embarrass the State government. The only way the CBI can escape

this impression is by showing that it was justified in demanding the questioning of Mr. Kumar and establishing proof of its suspicions about his role in covering up the scam.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **Unedifying** - unpleasant and without any useful or positive features
- **Stand-off** - a disagreement or fight in which neither opponent can do anything to win or achieve their aim
- **Defuse** - to make a situation more relaxed by making people feel less angry or less worried
- **Concern** - a feeling of worry about something, especially one that a lot of people have about an important issue
- **Ostensibly** - used for saying that although someone pretends to have one reason for something, there is in fact another reason
- **Even-handed** - dealing fairly with all the people involved in a situation
- **Intervention** - a situation in which someone becomes involved in a particular issue, problem etc in order to influence what happens
- **De-escalate** - to (cause to) become less dangerous or difficult
- **Face-off** - if people or groups face off, they compete or fight with each other
- **Moral victory** - if you win a moral victory, you feel that you have shown you were right about something, even though someone else has officially won the argument
- **Climb down** - to admit that you were wrong, especially after expressing an opinion or argument very firmly
- **Aggressive** - behaving in an angry or rude way that shows you want to fight, attack, or argue with someone
- **Posture** - an attitude, or the way that someone behaves towards other people
- **Restrain** - to prevent someone or yourself from doing something
- **Coercive** - using force or threats to make someone do something
- **Manhandle** - to touch, push, or pull someone in a rough way
- **Detain** - to keep someone in a police station or prison and not allow them to leave
- **Inexcusable** - inexcusable behaviour is so bad or rude that you cannot forgive the person who behaved like that
- **Polarise** - to form two very different groups, opinions, or situations that are completely opposite to each other, or to cause this to happen
- **Belligerence** - very unfriendly and angry
- **Backing** - support, help, or active approval
- **Impromptu** - not planned or prepared
- **Obstruct** - to physically prevent someone or something from moving along or through a path, passage, door etc by blocking it
- **Prone** - likely to do something or be affected by something, especially something bad
- **Burnish** - to improve your reputation or the way you appear to other people
- **Dethrone** - to remove a king or queen from power
- **Agitation** - an attempt to cause social or political changes by arguing or protesting, or through other activities

- **Acquisition** - the process of buying something or obtaining it in some other way
- **Grinding halt** - a situation in which something gradually stops operating completely
- **Heeding** - to pay attention or notice
- **Escalate** - to become much worse or more serious, or to make something do this
- **Allege** - to say that something is true or that someone has done something wrong or illegal, even though this has not been proved
- **Supervise** - to be in charge of a person or group of people and to check that they are behaving or working correctly
- **Probe** - an attempt to find out the truth about an issue, problem, or accident
- **Descend on** - if people descend on a person or a place, a lot of them arrive, often unexpectedly
- **Liabile** - legally responsible for causing damage or injury, so that you have to pay something or be punished
- **High-handed** - speaking or acting without considering other people's opinions
- **Browbeat** - to make someone do something by asking or threatening them until they agree
- **Embarrass** - to make someone feel nervous, ashamed, or stupid in a social situation

Course correction – **Timely review: On start-up tax**

The very idea of an ‘angel tax’ on start-ups must be reconsidered

Start-ups troubled by the so-called angel tax may soon receive some concession from the government. On Monday, the Centre set up a five-member working committee to look into revising the norms of the angel tax imposed on start-ups. The tax, which was first introduced in 2012 to curb money-laundering through the sale of shares of private unlisted companies at bloated prices, has caused a lot of anguish among start-up investors in the country. Start-up owners have complained that income tax officials have asked many start-ups to cough up money when they try to attract capital into their entities by issuing new shares. For its part, the IT department fears that start-ups may be used as convenient tools to launder illegally acquired money, so a tax on investments beyond a certain threshold is necessary to deter such shady operations. But while the intent of such an angel tax may be justifiable, the arbitrary nature of it means the cost of unintended consequences could be larger than the supposed benefits. In trying to curb money-laundering, Section 56(2)(viib) of the Indian Income Tax Act, 1961 gives income tax officials a free hand to harass even genuine start-ups looking to raise investments for their growth. Under the Act, the IT department is free to arbitrarily decide the fair value of a company's share and tax start-ups if the price at which their new shares are sold to investors is higher than the fair value of these shares. The broad-brush tax on all investments means an unnecessary cost is imposed on the wider start-up community simply because of the lack of better means at the government's disposal to tackle black money.

The committee set up by the government will, among other things, consider raising the threshold beyond which new investments into start-ups will be taxed. It is expected that start-ups with aggregate paid-up share capital and share premium of less than RS. 25 crore, against the previous threshold of only RS.10 crore, will not be taxed while attracting new investment. This would

definitely make life easier to a certain extent for angel investors and start-ups. But it will not address the real problem with the angel tax, which has to do with the unbridled power that it vests in the hands of the income tax authorities. Investors, foreign or domestic, may become wary of investing in new ideas when they are taxed while risking money on untested ventures. So the government should look to withdraw the angel tax and focus instead on building the capability to better identify and rein in illegal wealth. Otherwise it risks killing the nascent start-up ecosystem in the country.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- **Start-up** - a small business that is just being started
- **So-called** - used for showing that you think a word used for describing someone or something is not suitable
- **Concession** - something you give or allow to someone in order to reach an agreement
- **Curb** - to control or limit something that is harmful
- **Laundering** - to hide the origin of money obtained from illegal activities by putting it into legal businesses
- **Bloated** - larger or richer than necessary:
- **Anguish** - a feeling of great physical or emotional pain
- **Cough up** - to give money to pay for something, especially when you would prefer not to
- **Threshold** - a limit at which an arrangement changes
- **Deter** - to make someone decide not to do something
- **Shady** - secret and probably dishonest or illegal
- **Intent** - the intention to do something
- **Justifiable** - if something is justifiable, there is a good reason for it
- **Arbitrary** - not based on any particular plan, or not done for any particular reason
- **Consequence** - a result or effect of something
- **Genuine** - real, rather than pretended or false
- **Broad-brush** - very general and without many details
- **Aggregate** - total
- **Address** - to give attention to or deal with a matter or problem
- **Unbridled** - free or uncontrolled in your emotions
- **Rein in** - to control something and stop it increasing
- **Nascent** - beginning or formed recently
- **Ecosystem** - all the different activities, companies, systems etc that are involved in a particular area of business, especially new technology

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