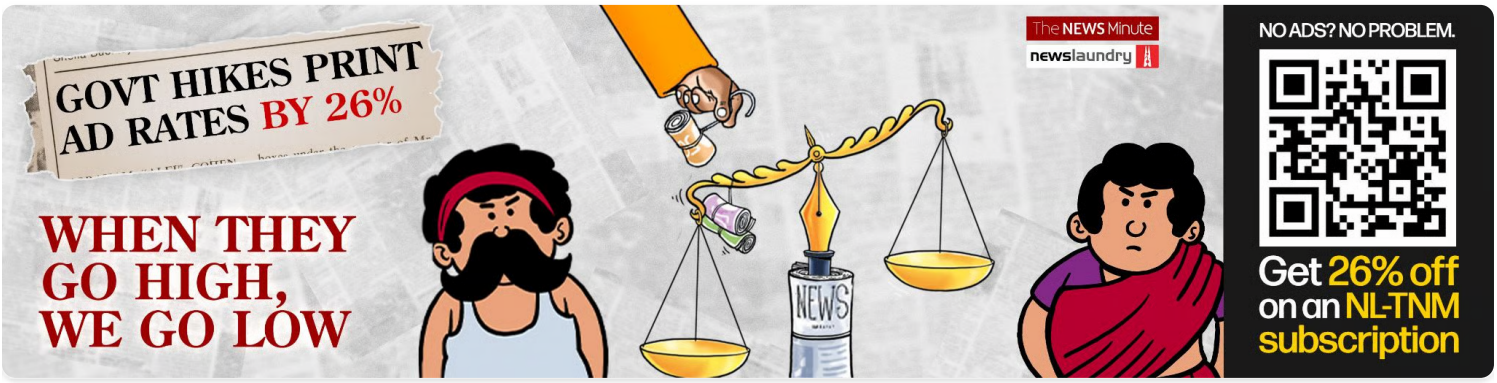
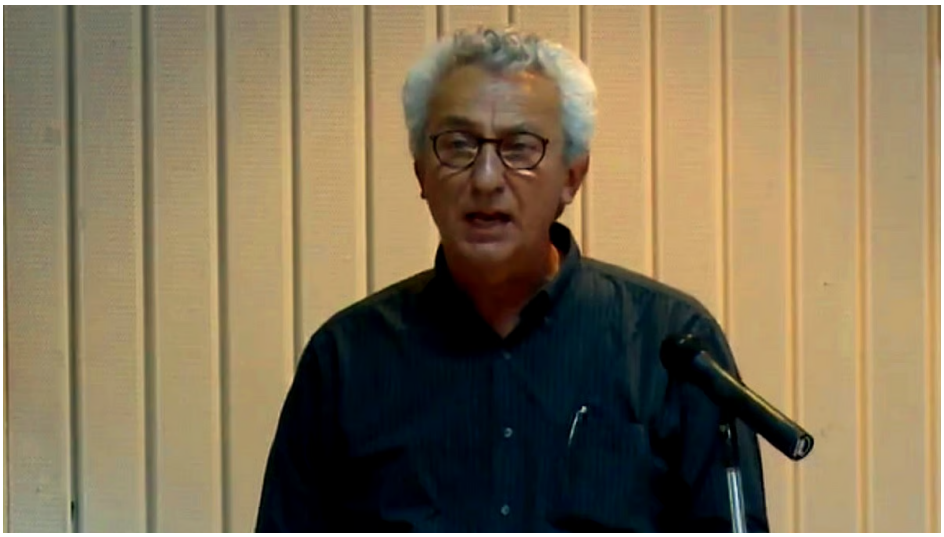


Kerala

‘I am shocked and saddened, Kerala is my second home’: Filippo Osella on deportation

University of Sussex professor Filippo Osella, who was deported to the UK from Thiruvananthapuram with no explanation on March 24, suspects his visits to Pakistan for academic purposes was the reason.



Filippa Osella

Written by: Haritha John

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After 36 agonising hours spent on flights from the UK to Kerala and back, renowned anthropologist Filippo Osella, sitting in a bus from London's Heathrow airport, wrote in an email statement how he was threatened to be restrained by the security at the Thiruvananthapuram International Airport. Osella, a professor of Anthropology and South Asian Studies at the prestigious University of Sussex, was denied entry and deported to his country after he landed in Thiruvananthapuram on the morning of March 24 to attend a conference in the city.

"My passport and visa were checked, photo and fingerprint taken, all routine immigration stuff. But once these procedures had been completed, with stern words an immigration supervisor informed me that I would not be granted entry, and will be deported back to UK immediately (sic)," Osella wrote. He said this decision was premeditated and taken even before his arrival, "because an Emirates employee was already present to march me back to the same plane on which I arrived".

Though he had a valid visa, the professor was denied an explanation as to why he was being sent back. "The immigration officers behaved in a remarkably rude and unprofessional way, even when I tried to explain that I was an academic who had been doing research in India for more than 30 years. In addition, when I asked to be given access to my luggage to retrieve my BP (blood pressure) medications before being taken back to the Dubai-bound flight, the reply was that unless I shut up immediately I would be restrained by security," wrote the academician, adding he was not even allowed to connect to his friends in Kerala.

The professor asserted that he possessed a one-year

The professor asserted that he possessed a one-year

multiple entry research visa, which would expire only on April 7, well after his planned departure from the country. He is sure this action from the authorities had nothing to do with his current research in southern Kerala, which is not only approved by the Indian government but also funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (UK), he added.

Osello's research is concerned with "finding effective ways to make south Indian small scale artisanal fishers' livelihoods more secure and sustainable by improving safety at sea". While small-scale/artisanal fishing plays a crucial role in the economy and daily diet of Kerala, fishing is one of the most dangerous occupations in the state, he pointed out.

In the email, Osello described how his "years of research on social reform movements … have contributed to the development of the Izhava and Muslim communities in Kerala". His research has also explored other aspects of Kerala life and culture, from gender and masculinity, to Malayali culinary traditions and fashion, and even film stars and their fan clubs ("I must confess that I have remained a great admirer of Mammootty!"), he added.

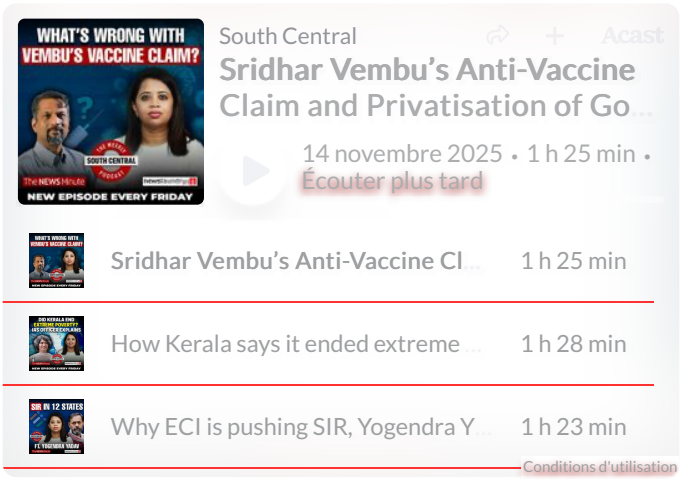
The professor has a suspicion that the authorities' action has something to do with his past visit to Pakistan for academic purposes. "Old Pakistan visas … are normally treated with some surprise every time I show my passport to immigration officials," he pointed out. "Collaborative research projects on charities in urban Sri Lanka and education opportunities in rural Pakistan were funded by the Economic and Research Council (UK) and the British Council respectively. I have never tried to hide my short research trips to Pakistan from the scrutiny of the Indian authorities," he said, further explaining how deeply he was involved in academic research across South Asia.

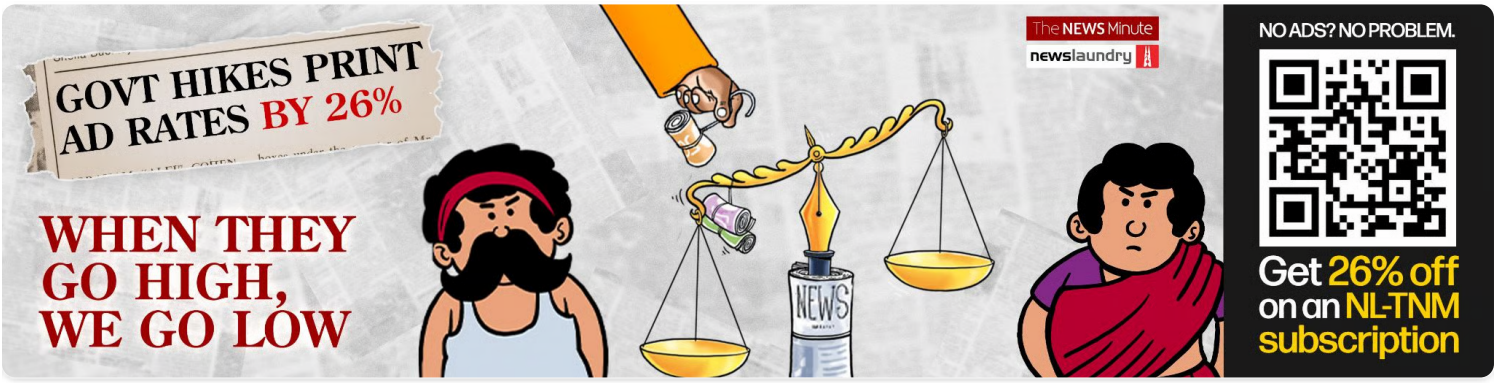
He also expressed how pained he was by the events that unfolded because of the strong connections he shared with Kerala. “I am utterly shocked and saddened by the deportation order that was served on me today. This is not because it might come in the way of conducting future research in India, but because over the years Kerala has become a second home to me, a place whose culture I love deeply, and where I have countless friends,” he says.

Osello, however, added that he was relieved the decision for deportation did not come from the Kerala government. “Indeed, I was relieved to be told that my deportation was decreed by an order from the government of India, and not from the government of Kerala. In 30 years of research in the state, I have interacted with and got to know countless politicians, bureaucrats and social activists who always treated me with great respect and generosity,” he said.

He hoped this was not his last (attempted) visit to Kerala, he wrote. “However, my unfortunate experience does not even come close to the predicaments of many Indian colleagues whose freedom of academic expression in recent years has been severely constrained, often making them the object of censorship and disciplinary measures. My thoughts and solidarity goes to them (sic)!”

Controversy





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Written by: Dhanya Rajendran, Pooja Prasanna, Shabbir Ahmed

Published on: 25 Nov 2025, 3:46 pm

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