

December 20th news:

International:

At 1.7 crore, India has most migrants abroad

India has topped the list of people living abroad at 1.7 crore with about 50 lakh Indians residing in the Gulf region alone, according to a new UN report. Mexico, Russia, China, Bangladesh, Syria, Pakistan and Ukraine also have large migrant populations living abroad, ranging from 60 lakh to 1.1 crore each, according to the 2017 International Migration Report released

In 2017, India was the largest country of origin of international migrants at 1.7 crore, followed by Mexico at 1.3 crore. Other countries of origin with large migrant populations include Russia at 1.1 crore, China at 1 crore, Bangladesh at 70 lakh, Syria at 70 lakh and Pakistan and Ukraine at 60 lakh each.

The migrants from India now reside in multiple destination countries, including the UAE at 30 lakh, and the US and Saudi Arabia at 20 lakh each, the report said. There are now an estimated 25.8 crore people living in a country other than their country of birth — an increase of 49 per cent since 2000

International migration is a critical concern for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it said. The report shows international migration is key contributor to population growth in many parts of the world and even reverses population decline in some countries or areas. Between 2000 and 2015, migration contributed 42 per cent of the population growth in North America and 31 per cent in Oceania. In Europe, the size of the total population would have declined during this period in the absence of migration.

Panel formed for return of Rohingya

Bangladesh and Myanmar have formed a 30-member Joint Working Group (JWG) which will oversee the repatriation of Rohingya refugees. The formation of the JWG, a follow-up to an agreement signed on November 23, was announced on 19th December after Foreign Secretary-level talks between the two countries in Dhaka.

Bangladesh's Foreign Secretary Shahidul Haque and his Myanmar counterpart, U Myint Thu, led their respective teams.

The JWG is likely to take assistance from UN agencies. It will develop appropriate arrangements for the refugees' return.

Though, as per the November 23 deal, the repatriation was to start from January 21,, it is likely to begin in February

Switzerland tops in Global Innovation Index

India currently ranks 60th out of 127 countries on the Global Innovation Index (GII)2017 as compared to 66th rank on GII 2016.

The list was topped by Switzerland. NITI Aayog, Department of Industrial Policy & Promotion (DIPP) and Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) together launched a mega initiative “India Innovation Index”.

This Index will rank states on Innovations through country’s first online innovation index portal that will capture data on innovation from all Indian states on innovation and regularly update it in real time.

National:

Parliament gives nod to IIM Bill

Parliament on 19th December unanimously passed a Bill to grant the Indian Institutes of Management the power to grant degrees instead of post-graduate diplomas. The Bill also allows students to acquire doctoral degrees from the IIMs. The Bill, passed by the Lok Sabha earlier, was passed by the Rajya Sabha on 19th December.

The Bill also confers on the 20 IIMs the status of institutions of national importance, granting them greater functional autonomy by restricting the role of the government in them.

Till now, the Centre had a role in the appointment of the chairpersons and directors to their Boards and also fixing the pay of the directors. As per the IIM Bill, 2017, a Board of Governors will appoint the Director of each IIM.

A search-cum-selection-committee will recommend the names. And the director will be eligible for variable pay as determined by the Board.

230% increase in ceasefire violations: govt.

There was a 230% increase in ceasefire violations along the Line of Control (LoC) this year compared to 2016, the government informed the Lok Sabha on 19th December.

In 2017, Pakistan violated ceasefire 771 times along the LoC while the figure stood at 228 last year. There were 153 violations in 2014. There were 110 violations along the International Border in Jammu and Kashmir, the lowest in four years.

Pakistan violated the ceasefire a total of 881 times along the Line of Control (LoC) and the International Border (IB) in Jammu and Kashmir this year, killing 30 people, the Lok Sabha was informed.

The 740-km LoC is under the operational control of the Army and 192 km of IB in Jammu is manned by the Border Security Force.

The truce between India and Pakistan along the International Border, the Line of Control and the Actual Ground Position Line in Jammu and Kashmir came into force in November 2003.

In 2016, there were 449 ceasefire violations in which 13 civilians and 13 security personnel were killed. As many as 83 civilians and 99 security personnel were injured.

The government also released data on the impact of demonetisation on terror incidents, which showed an increase in Jammu and Kashmir in 2017 in comparison to last year. There were 341 terror incidents in Jammu and Kashmir from November 1, 2016, to October 31, 2017 in comparison to 311 in the corresponding period the previous year, the Lok Sabha was informed.

Economy:

Govt auditor raps Finance Ministry for putting off fiscal deficit targets

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India has pulled up the Finance Ministry for deferring its fiscal deficit targets and opaqueness in Budget classifications. The issues have been raised in two audit reports on the Provisions of the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act 2003 and Accounts of the Union Government for 2016-17, which were tabled in Parliament on 19th December.

It had proposed adopting the new 'Debt and Fiscal Responsibility Act' and had suggested a new roadmap for fiscal indicators.

In Budget 2016-17, the target date of elimination of effective revenue deficit was deferred from March 2018 to March 2019 without corresponding amendment in the Act.

Further, in Budget 2017-18, the target date of effective revenue deficit was deferred beyond financial year 2019-20, and that of fiscal deficit to 2018-19 by the government, without amending the Act.

The CAG in its report also noted the wide gap in projections and actuals for 2015-16 included in Medium Term Fiscal Policy Statement for gross tax revenue, outstanding liabilities and disinvestment varied significantly.

For instance, in 2015-16, the Budgeted annual reduction of revenue and fiscal deficit was only 0.1 per cent and 0.2 per cent of the GDP, respectively, as against the required reduction of 0.4 per cent for each.

The CAG also called for full disclosure on liabilities relating to annuity projects and said that the Centre must transfer specific-purpose levies and cess collected to the designated funds.

About Rs. 20,911 crore was collected under levies and cess forming part of tax and non-tax revenue, but was not transferred to earmarked funds, leading to understatement of revenue and fiscal deficit by an equal amount in 2015-16.

In its audit of government accounts, the CAG found that 14 regulatory bodies and autonomous agencies had at the end of March 2017 retained funds to the tune of Rs. 6,064 crore outside the government account, contrary to the instructions of the Finance Ministry.

Further, the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) incurred Rs. 2,598 crore expenditure as interest on refunds in 2016-17 without Parliamentary approval. In total, it spent Rs. 58,537 crore on interest payments over the last nine years without obtaining the approval of Parliament, said the CAG.

Environment

All railway stations to be 100 pc LED lit by April 2018: Railways

In an eco-friendly measure to cut power consumption, the Indian Railways said it planned to make all stations cent per cent LED lit by March 31, 2018.

The railways said it was actively working to provide 100 per cent LED lighting for energy needs in railway staff colonies, stations and platforms. LED or light-emitting diode bulbs are more energy efficient and have a longer lifespan than traditional lamps.

Till November 2017, about 3,500 railway stations had already been provided with cent per cent LED lights. About 20 lakh such lights were installed.

The initiative will reduce consumption by about 10 per cent of the total energy being utilised for its non-traction uses, conserving about 240 million units of electricity, which will save the Railways about Rs 180 crore annually

Awards:

Goswami: Eminent Bengali poet Joy Goswami will be given the 31st Moortidevi Award for the year 2017. The committee, headed by poet and scholar Satya Vrat Shastri, unanimously decided to confer the award upon Goswami for his poetry collection titled Du Dondo Phowara Matro.

It is the first time the award will be given to a Bengali poet. Du Dondo Phowara Matro is an autobiographical account of the poet's life featuring his close ones including a pet cat. The award consists of a Saraswati Statue, a Citation Plaque and cash award of Rupees 4 lakh.

Persons in news:

Swatantra kumar: National Green Tribunal (NGT) Chairperson Justice Swatanter Kumar on 19th December retired from the post after completing his five-year tenure.

Justice Kumar resigned as Supreme Court judge after he was appointed NGT chairperson on December 20, 2012. During his tenure as NGT chief, he passed several landmark orders and judgements.