

December 6th news:

National:

International Tourism Mart in Guwahati

In order to improve ties with ASEAN countries, the 6th International Tourism Mart began in Guwahati on 5th December. The 3-day event where delegates from several countries are taking part, will put the spotlight on India's "Act East Policy", blossoming ties with ASEAN and larger East Asia region. The event has been organized by Ministry of Tourism in association with all North Eastern states.

Sharad Yadav, Ali Anwar disqualified as Rajya Sabha members

Rebel JDU MPs Sharad Yadav and Ali Anwar were disqualified from the Rajya Sabha on 4th December. Both of them cease to be members of the House.

The disqualification was ordered under Paragraph 2 (1)(a) of the Tenth Schedule. The Chairman had been petitioned for action by Ram Chandra Prasad Singh, leader of the JD(U) group in the Rajya Sabha. Naidu said he had arrived at the decision "after taking into account the facts of the case, the comments of the Respondent and the Petitioner, the Respondent's oral submission during the personal hearing on November 8, 2017, and the observations of the Committee of Privileges of the Eighth Lok Sabha and Hon'ble Supreme Court's Judgement in the 1994 Ravi Naik Vs. Union of India case and observations in similar anti-defection cases. A similar order was passed in the case of Ansari.

Ram Chandra Prasad Singh had filed the petitions on September 2, 2017, stating that by his repeated conduct, public/press statements against the JD(U) and its leadership, and by openly aligning with a rival political party, the RJD, Yadav had proved that he has voluntarily given up the membership of the party, thus becoming subject to disqualification under the Tenth Schedule to the Constitution.

Economy:

Foreign Trade Policy: More incentives for exports, focus on ease of trading

Commerce Minister Suresh Prabhu on 5th December unveiled more incentives to boost labour-intensive and employment-oriented merchandise and services exports while releasing the much-awaited mid-term review of the Foreign Trade Policy 2015-20. The annual incentive increased by 33.8 per cent or Rs 8,450 crore.

This financial year (FY18), it will be an additional incentive of Rs 2,816 crore. This will benefit leather, handicraft, carpets, sports goods, agriculture, marine, electronic components, and project exports in merchandise, and legal, accounting, architecture, and education in services.

Exporters demanded the incentives be extended to other products as well since they were facing challenging times because of demonetisation last year and the goods and services tax (GST) roll-out this year.

The policy, however, cautioned exporters that the current WTO rules as well as those under negotiation envisage the eventual phasing out of export subsidies.

The government assured exporters that it would release their blocked funds expeditiously, but advised them to file forms correctly, as many were filing for more input credit than taxes paid.

It, however, disputed the claim that Rs 50,000 crore of exporters' money was stuck in yet-to-be-cleared GST refunds.

The policy also did not say much on achieving the target of \$900-billion exports by 2020. There were speculations that the target would be truncated.

Merchandise exports touched \$170.29 billion in the first seven months and services exports \$80.33 billion in the first six months of the current financial year, totaling only \$250.62 billion. The policy focused on exploring new markets and new products, as well as in increasing India's share in the traditional markets and products.

The commerce department announced an increase in the Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS) incentives for two sub-sectors of textiles — readymade garments and made-ups — from 2 per cent to 4 per cent. This translates into an annual incentive of Rs 2,743 crore. The increase had been announced earlier and was reiterated on 5th December.

The government has also increased existing MEIS incentives by 2 percentage points for exports of medium and small enterprises. This would be an annual amount of Rs 4,567 crore.

The Services Exports from India Scheme (SEIS) incentives have also been increased by 2 percentage points, amounting to Rs 1,140 crore. MEIS and SEIS provide incentive in the form of duty credit scrip to the exporter to compensate for his loss on payment of duties. The incentive is paid as percentage of the realized freight on board value (in free foreign exchange) for notified goods and services going to notified markets. He also said jewelry exports can grow from \$7 billion to \$20 billion.

The department has also abolished the GST for transfer and sale of these scrips to zero from 12 per cent, increased the validity period for these tradeable papers to 24 months from 18 months.

The round-the-clock customs clearance facility has been extended at 19 sea ports and 17 air cargo complexes. Through export promotion of capital goods and the 100 per cent EoU scheme, exporters have been extended the benefit of sourcing inputs and capital goods from abroad, as well as domestic suppliers for exports without upfront payment of the GST.

Merchant exporters have been allowed to pay nominal GST of 0.1 per cent for procuring goods from domestic suppliers for exports.

The commerce & industry minister said India could partner with other nations, like Japan and South Korea, to tap into markets like Africa. Teotia said the MEIS covered 8,000 product lines — two-third of the total.

Federation of Indian Export Organisations President Ganesh Kumar Gupta said the MEIS should be extended to other exports, since they were also facing numerous challenges.

He said a one-time relaxation to meet export obligation could be provided to industry, so that they could escape the penal provisions.

Sports:

India wins in South Asian badminton title

India has won the first-ever South Asian Regional Badminton Team Championship. In the title clash played in Guwahati on 5th December, India defeated Nepal, 3-0. The tournament lasted for 11 days, from November 8th, and the venue is Guwahati. The 11-day long event will be played at the Deshbhakta Tarun Ram Phookan Indoor Stadium. India, Bhutan, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and Maldives participated in tournament

Russia banned from 2018 Winter Olympics

Russia were banned from the 2018 Olympics on 5th December over state-sponsored doping but the International Olympic Committee (IOC) said, Russian competitors would be able to compete under strict conditions.

The IOC announced the decision after examining evidence of state-sponsored doping over several years that reached a high-point at the Winter Olympics hosted in Sochi, Russia, in 2014. The decision was taken in the IOC's executive board meeting on 5th December in Lausanne, Switzerland.

However, the IOC said that Russian athletes would be able to take part in the Games, as independent competitors under the Olympic flag.

Nations have in the past been barred from taking part in the Olympics, notably South Africa during the apartheid years, but none has ever been handed a blanket ban over doping.

Persons in news:

Narendra Modi: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi continues to be the most followed Indian on Twitter even as the growth in his follower base at 52 per cent was lower than that of Indian cricket captain Virat Kohli, according to the microblogging site.

According to a Twitter report capturing trends in 2017, Modi saw his follower base increasing by 52 per cent to 37.5 million (as of December 4), from 24.6 million in 2016. However, Kohli saw his followers grow by 61 per cent during the same period although on a smaller base. The cricketer is ending the year with 20.8 million followers, as against 12.9 million last year.

Kamala Harris: Indian-American California senator Kamala Harris topped the prestigious Foreign Policy magazine's 2017 list of '50 Leading Global Thinkers' which also features US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley.

Besides Harris and Haley, Indian-origin stand-up comedian Hasan Minhaj has also made it to the list. South Korean President Moon Jae-in is ranked second in the list for trying to rebuild decent democratic leadership in South Korea. Popular comedian Minhaj is placed third in the ranking for defining the narrative of a "New Brown America".