

December 9th news:

International:

U.K., EU Reach Deal on Brexit Divorce Terms

Britain and the EU reached a historic deal on 8th December on the terms of the Brexit divorce after Prime Minister Theresa May rushed to Brussels for talks.

The European Commission said it "recommends sufficient progress" had been made by Britain on separation issues including the Irish border, Britain's divorce bill, and citizens rights.

The agreement paves the way for EU leaders at a summit on December 14-15 to open the second phase of Brexit negotiations, covering trade talks and a transition period.

Britain voted in June 2016 to become the first state to leave the EU, after more than four decades of membership, but the talks have been slow moving and often acrimonious so far.

Britain agreed to pay a divorce settlement amounting to between 45 and 55 billion euros and to protect the rights of some three million European citizens living there after Brexit as part of the deal.

But Ireland's demands that Brexit should not lead to the return of checkpoints on the border with Northern Ireland, which it said could jeopardise the peace process in the north, proved the biggest stumbling block at the end.

National:

Taj Mahal Named Second-Best UNESCO World Heritage Site after Angkor Wat

The Taj Mahal, India's iconic ivory-white marble mausoleum in Agra, is the second best UNESCO world heritage site in the world, according to a new survey by online travel portal TripAdvisor.

The Taj Mahal is rated after Cambodia's Angkor Wat. Other popular heritage sites on the survey include the Great Wall of China (Third) built by Xu Da of Northern Qi Dynasty in 1368 AD.

Machu Pichu in Peru in South America has bagged the fourth spot.

India declared free from Trachoma, an infection of eye

India has been declared free from infective Trachoma which is a contagious bacterial infection of the eye. It causes inflamed granulation on the inner surface of the lids. Releasing the National Trachoma Survey Report (2014-17) in New Delhi on 8th December, Health Minister J P Nadda made an announcement in this regard and termed it as a momentous achievement.

Bilateral:

India set to become member of global defence, space tech export control regime

India is all set to become the 42nd member of the multilateral forum for export control on defence and space technology Wassenaar Arrangement (WA). The decision was taken during its Plenary Meeting on December 6-7 held in Vienna.

India's WA membership is expected to facilitate high technology tie-ups with Indian industry and easy access to high-tech items for its defence and space programmes.

However, this would not automatically translate into a preferential treatment from other WA members but it would create a base for realignment of India in the export control policy framework of other WA members, including eligibility for certain licensing exceptions.

India's entry into the Arrangement would be mutually beneficial and further contribute to international security and non-proliferation objectives

Here is all you need to know about the WA regime:

What is Wassenaar Arrangement?

The Wassenaar Arrangement is an elite club of countries which subscribe to arms export controls, similar to the Nuclear Suppliers Group and the Missile Technology Control Regime.

The body came into being in 1996 to succeed the Cold War-era Coordinating Committee for Multilateral Export Controls. The name comes from Wassenaar, a suburb of The Hague, where the agreement to start such a multi-lateral cooperation was reached in 1995.

Who are all members of the Wassenaar Arrangement?

The WA has 42 members, the latest entrant being India. With the exception of China, all the other permanent members of the U.N. Security Council are signatories of the WA, which is headquartered in Vienna.

How does the Wassenaar Arrangement work?

According to the WA website, the goal of the Arrangement is to "promote transparency and greater responsibility in transfers of conventional arms and dual-use goods and technologies". Participants are required to "ensure that transfers of these items do not contribute to the development or enhancement of military capabilities which undermine the goal". The aim, according to WA, is also to prevent the acquisition of these items by terrorists.

What are Wassenaar Control Lists

The Arrangement works according to what it calls WA Control Lists. The controls are subject to ratification by the participants. WA members agree to exchange information on sensitive dual-use goods and technologies and report on such transfers and denials of controlled items to non-participants.

What does this mean to India?

Since it's a non-signatory of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, India would look up to the WA membership to boost its credentials to enter NSG. Crucially, China, which stands in the way of India's NSG entry, is not a member of WA.

Economy:

EU, Japan conclude world's largest free-trade agreement

The European Union and Japan concluded negotiations on a free-trade deal to create the world's largest open economic area. The two parties agreed the outlines of a deal in July, negotiators had now finished a legal text that would open up trade for economies making up about 30 per cent of global output.

Japan and the EU will join hands and build a free, fair and rule-based economic zone, which will be a model of an economic order in the international community in the 21st century

The deal, combining the 28-nation bloc and the world's third largest economy, will remove EU tariffs of 10 per cent tariffs on Japanese cars and the 3 per cent rate typically applied to car parts.

For the EU, it will scrap Japanese duties of some 30 per cent on EU cheese and 15 per cent on wines as well as allowing it to increase its beef and pork exports and gain access to large public tenders in Japan.

In the past five months, negotiators worked on stabilising tariffs in services, regulatory cooperation and the means to protect food and drink categories so that, for example, only sparkling wines from a specific Italian region can be called prosecco.

Sports:

Kanchanmala Pande Wins Indias 1st World Para Swimming Championship Gold

Nagpur's Kanchanmala Pande created history as she became the first Indian to secure pole position at the World Para-Swimming Championship in Mexico. She won gold in the 200-metre medley event in the S-11 category and was also the only Indian to qualify for the women's category.

Persons in news:

Deepak Parekh: The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan named noted Indian businessman, Deepak Parekh, as 'International Ambassador' who will be tasked with championing the UK capital across the globe. Parekh, is one of the first of a network of international ambassadors, that would include high-level business and cultural figures based in London or overseas. Parekh is the chairman of India's premier housing finance company HDFC Limited.