

March 26th and 27th news:

International:

Australia junks work visa programme used largely by Indians

Australia has abolished its popular employer-sponsored 457 visa programme, widely used by Indians, replacing it with new stringent programme that requires higher English-language proficiency and job skills. The 457 visa programme, used by over 95,000 foreign workers, majority of them Indians, was replaced on March 18 by a new Temporary Skills Shortage visa programme.

The 457 visa programme allowed businesses to employ foreign workers for a period up to four years in skilled jobs where there was a shortage of Australian workers.

The majority of the visa holders under the category were from India, accounting almost a quarter of the intake, followed by the UK and China at 19.5 per cent and 5.8 per cent respectively.

The visa allowed people to live in Australia with their immediate family. It was designed to fill gaps in skilled labour but it had been criticised as being too accessible.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull in April last year had announced that his government will abolish the popular work visa programme to tackle the growing unemployment and replace it with a new programme. He had said that Australia will adopt a new 'Australians first' approach to skilled migration.

The new visa programme which came into effect from March 18 after an official notification issued by Department of Home Affairs, comprise two streams – Short Term and Medium Term – and is underpinned by more focused occupation lists that are responsive to genuine skill needs and regional variations across Australia.

Short term visas will be issued for two years, while medium term visas will be issued only for more critical skills shortages and for up to four years.

More stringent requirements for the new visas, including at least 2 years of work experience, better English language proficiency and a criminal check are also a part of new programme.

Other key reforms that have been included are a minimum market salary rate which ensures overseas workers cannot be hired to undercut Australian workers, labour market testing, making it mandatory for employers to ensure there is no suitable candidate in the local labour market and extending the permanent residency pathway from two years to three years.

Apart from that more than 650 jobs were available for 457 holders, but under the new visa rules it has been reduced by 200.

The new visa programme also include a strengthened training obligation for employers sponsoring foreign skilled workers to provide enhanced training outcomes for Australians in high-need industries and occupations.

The 457 visa was introduced in the 1990s to quicken the entry of business professionals and highly skilled migrants but over time it was opened up for a broad category of workers.

The programme was hit by controversy with allegations that the visa was being misused by employers to import cheap workers who lack necessary skills

US Pak companies to list of risk to national security

The United States has added seven Pakistani companies to a list of foreign entities that pose a significant risk to the national security and policy interests of the country. The list has been prepared by the US Bureau of Industry and Security. It declared that all seven companies are reasonably believed to be involved in activities contrary to the national security or foreign policy interests of the United States.

According to the End-user Review Committee (ERC) of the US Department of Commerce, three companies are listed for their involvement in the proliferation of unsafeguarded nuclear activities. Two are for procuring supplies for nuclear-related entities and the remaining two are for acting as fronts for listed entities. The move would have a negative impact on Pakistan's efforts to join the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). A total of 23 entities added to the list include 15 from South Sudan and one from Singapore. They will now face stringent export control measures, which could prevent them from conducting international trade.

National:

Saras Aajeevika Mela launched

Rural Development Minister Narendra Singh Tomar on 26th March inaugurated Saras Aajeevika Mela at Pragati Maidan in New Delhi. The SARAS Aajeevika Mela 2018 in New Delhi is an endeavour of Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana - National Rural Livelihoods Mission. It aims to provide a national platform and an opportunity to the rural women producers to showcase their products and seek buyers, either individuals or bulk buyers for sale nationally or internationally.

This year, 700 women from 28 states are selling their products in over 350 stalls in the Mela. Mr Tomar also released a directory of the products of all the women who will be showcasing their products in the Aajeevika Mela 2018.

Bilateral:

Trade deficit with India unsustainable, needs to be addressed: China

The Chinese government has agreed that a massive imbalance in its trade with India is "unsustainable" for long-term trade growth and needs to be addressed. On 26th March, the sentiment was shared by a Chinese delegation led by Commerce Minister Zhong Shan, senior sources in the know said.

The minister, stated the commerce and industry ministry after the meeting, "welcomed Indian investment in China and promised to address the trade deficit".

The bilateral engagement, under the aegis of the India-China Joint Group on Economic Relations, Trade, Science and Technology, was used by Delhi to push hard on the subject. And, to get less restrictions on agricultural export. "After the lengthy military standoff at the disputed Doklam plateau of Bhutan, further conclusive talks on trade issues looked slim since last year.

Shan's visit signifies that China wants to engage a major trade partner," an expert said. India's imports from China were \$61.3 billion and exports at a much lower \$10.2 billion in 2016-17.

The government has been worried by increasing friction between the US — India's largest export destination — and China, this country's largest import source, which could lead to a fall in global demand and rise in the cost of trade. Commerce and Industry Minister Suresh Prabhu said the trade deficit issue remained among the foremost of problems in expanding economic relations.

He asked his counterpart for greater market access for agricultural products such as rapeseed, soybean, basmati and non-basmati rice, fruit, vegetables and sugar.

The two governments had signed an agreement in September 2014 to achieve bilateral trade balance by 2019, via promotion of trade and investment.

The agreement also talked of easing the restrictions by Beijing against high-potential export items from here, such as bovine meat, fruit & vegetables and basmati. Of these, only basmati has seen a breakthrough, with 14 companies allowed to export to China in 2016.

The government also said at the meet that India was looking to expand its export of pharmaceuticals. India's exports in this segment were \$27.1 million in 2016-17, a rise of 18 per cent. It also pitched for export of information technology and its enabled services, apart from cooperation in the sectors of tourism and health care.

Economy:

IMF may revise India's fiscal deficit upwards by 0.3% of GDP in WEO report

The International Monetary Fund's (IMF's) upcoming World Economic Outlook (WEO) report may paint a less rosy picture of the government's fiscal consolidation plan, with the ambitious public sector banks' (PSBs') recapitalisation exercise.

The Fund has written to the finance ministry that it might revise the fiscal deficit estimate upward by 0.3 percentage points of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2017-18, in the WEO report. The latter is due for issue next month.

Sports:

Ball-tampering row: Australian Captain Steve Smith suspended for one Test match by ICC

Australia captain Steve Smith was on 25th March handed a one-match suspension and fined 100 percent of his match fee by ICC after he owned up to a ball-tampering conspiracy in South Africa. Smith

admitted that he was party to a decision to attempt to change the condition of the ball in order to gain an unfair advantage during the third day's play in the Cape Town Test against South Africa on 24th March

Additionally, Australia opener Cameron Bancroft has been fined 75 per cent of his match fee and handed three demerit points for breaching Level 2 of the ICC Code of Conduct during the third day's play.

ICC Chief Executive David Richardson laid the charge against Smith under Article 2.2.1 of the ICC Code of Conduct for Players and Player Support Personnel which prohibits to 'all types of conduct of a serious nature that is contrary to the spirit of the game'.

Smith accepted the charge and the proposed sanction of two suspension points which equates to a ban for the next Test match and which will see four demerit points added to his record.

Hockey Punjab wins 8th Hockey India Sr Men National Ch'ship

Hockey Punjab have won the 8th Hockey India Senior Men National Championship title. In the final in Lucknow on 25th, Punjab team defeated Petroleum Sports Promotion Board. In the Bronze medal match, defending champions Railway Sports Promotion Board (RSPB) defeated Air India Sports Promotion Board 5-3 on penalties after the scores were tied at 1-1 after regulation time.

Awards:

G.K.Reddy: Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh presented the G.K. Reddy Memorial National Award for journalism to senior journalist and television presenter Karan Thapar.

Persons in news:

J S Rajput: Professor J S Rajput, a former Director NCERT is selected as India's representative to the Executive Board (EXB) of UNESCO. Notably, Professor J S Rajput is an eminent educationist with rich experience in various fields including UNESCO. The EXB has a four-year term of office and 58 seats.

The executive board is one of the constitutional organs of UNESCO and is elected by the General Conference.

The executive board examines the work for the organization and the corresponding budget estimates. In practice, the executive board is the main organ responsible for all policies and programmes of UNESCO.

The elections of Members of the EXB for the term 2017-21 took place on 8th November 2017, in which India won with 162 votes in Group IV during the 39th session of the General Conference which was held from 30th October to 14th November 2017.

Being a member of the board enables us in principle to play a role in shaping and reviewing UNESCO's policies and programmes corresponding to its five major programs on education, the natural science, the social and human Sciences, Culture and Communication and Information.

Martin Vizcarra: Martin Vizcarra was sworn in as the country's new president of Peru. Before the appointment, he was Peru's first vice president and ambassador to Canada. He has replaced Pedro Pablo Kuczynski who has resigned from the post recently.