December 19, 2025 - Dinamani Newspaper - Tit bits

1. A bilateral Free Trade Agreement was signed following talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq in Muscat, the capital of the Gulf nation of Oman.

   i. Under this Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), Oman has granted complete tax exemption on 98 percent of the goods exported from India, including textiles, agricultural products, and leather goods.

   ii. At the same time, India has provided tax concessions on 77.79 percent of the goods imported from Oman, including dates, marble, and petroleum products.

   iii. The aforementioned agreement is expected to come into effect in the first quarter of next year.

   iv. As the final leg of his official visit to three countries – Jordan, Ethiopia, and Oman – the Prime Minister Modi arrived in Muscat, the capital of Oman. During this visit, undertaken to mark the 70th anniversary of diplomatic relations between the two countries, he met and held talks with Sultan Haitham bin Tariq of Oman.

   v. Export-Import Value: The bilateral trade value between India and Oman is $10.5 billion. Of this, exports amount to $4 billion and imports to $6.54 billion. India imports a large quantity (over 70 percent) of petroleum products and urea from Oman. Other chemicals, iron and steel, and aluminum are also imported.

   vi. Meanwhile, India exports mineral fuels, chemicals, precious metals, grains, ships, boats, floating structures, electrical machinery, boilers, tea, coffee, spices, garments, and food products.

2. Amidst strong opposition from the opposition parties, the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Bill, 2025 (VB-G RAM G), introduced by the Central Government as an alternative to the 100-day employment scheme, was passed in both houses of Parliament.

   i. In the Lok Sabha, opposition MPs engaged in strong protests, tearing up copies of the bill and raising slogans.

   ii. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, introduced during the United Progressive Alliance Government in 2005, is being implemented with 100 percent funding from the Central Government. As an alternative to this, the Central Government introduced the new ' Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Bill, 2025 (VB-G RAM G).

   iii. A system has been established where the Central Government will share the financial burden of the scheme with the State Governments in a 60-40 ratio. Furthermore, the number of workdays, which was previously 100 days, will now be increased to 125 days.

3. The UN has stated that more than 1,000 civilians were killed in an attack carried out last April by the RSF Paramilitary forces, who are engaged in conflict with the army in Sudan, at the Zamzam refugee camp.

   i. Due to a power struggle between Army Chief General Al-Burhan and RSF Paramilitary leader Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, fierce fighting has been ongoing between the two sides since April 15, 2023. Statistics indicate that hundreds of thousands of people have died in this conflict so far.

4. The US Government has announced that it will sell weapons worth approximately $11.15 billion (approximately ₹1 lakh crore) to Taiwan. The statement issued by the US State Department regarding this matter states:

    i. Eight agreements have been concluded for the sale of military equipment to Taiwan, including medium-range missiles, howitzers, and drones.

    ii. China, which claims Taiwan as part of its territory, has opposed these agreements. It is feared that this will create new tensions in US-China relations.

5. The renowned sculptor Ram V. Sutar (100), who designed the 'Statue of Unity' in Gujarat, the world's tallest statue, passed away.

    i. Among his notable works are the world's tallest 'Statue of Unity' erected in Gujarat to honor the country's first Home Minister, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the statue of Mahatma Gandhi in a meditative pose on the Parliament premises, and the majestic statue of Chhatrapati Shivaji seated on a horse.

    ii. In recognition of his artistic contributions, the Central Government honored him with the 'Padma Shri' award in 1999 and the 'Padma Bhushan' award in 2016.

6. The Hate Speech Prohibition Bill was passed in the Karnataka Legislative Assembly amid strong opposition from the BJP.

7. The bill to allow private companies in nuclear power generation was passed by voice vote in the Rajya Sabha.

8. The Joint Parliamentary Committee reviewing the bill that would pave the way for the removal of the Prime Minister, Chief Ministers, and ministers from office has been granted an extension to submit its report.

    i. The Parliamentary Standing Committee has been given an extension to submit its report during the final week of the budget session next year. The budget session usually concludes in the first week of April.

    ii. It is noteworthy that under the current Representation of the People Act, 1951, a person sentenced to imprisonment for a term of not less than two years is disqualified from being a Member of Parliament or a State Legislature during the period of imprisonment and for a further period of six years thereafter.

9. Oman is a major exporting country in the Gulf Cooperation Council. Oman serves as a gateway for Indian goods and services to the Middle East and Africa. More than 700,000 Indians, including Indian business families, reside in the country. Over 6,000 Indian companies operate in various sectors. The remittances sent by Indians in Oman to their homeland amount to $2 billion (₹18,050 crore).

    i. Following the implementation of the Free Trade Agreement between the UAE and India in 2022, this agreement with Oman is the second such agreement within the GCC.

    ii. After 20 years: This is the first time Oman has entered into a Free Trade Agreement with India since its agreement with the United States in 2006. In recent times, India has signed Free Trade Agreements with the United Kingdom (2025), the European Free Trade Association (2024), Australia

(2022), and Mauritius (2021).

Highlights of the Agreement

i. Complete tax exemption for 98 percent of Indian export products (99.38% in value terms); tax concessions for 77.79 percent of Omani import products (94.81% in value terms).
ii. Complete tax exemption for gems and jewellery, textiles, leather products, footwear, sporting goods, plastics, furniture, agricultural products, pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, and vehicles exported from India (these products are currently subject to taxes ranging from 5 to 100 percent).

Market access for the Indian AYUSH sector in Oman

i. The quota for India in the employment of skilled foreign workers in Oman has been increased from 20 to 50 percent.

ii. Provision to extend the stay period of service providers on a contractual basis from 90 days to 2 years or more.

iii. Further relaxation in entry and stay conditions for skilled professionals in sectors such as accounting, taxation, construction, and medicine. Permission for 100 percent Foreign Direct Investment for Indian companies in key service sectors.

iv. Permission for Indian companies to import marble from Oman.

v. Import of 2,000 tons of dates annually with tax exemption.

No tax concessions for agricultural products

- The Ministry of Commerce has stated that no tax concessions have been given to Omani imports in key categories including agricultural products such as dairy products, tea, coffee, and rubber, as well as chocolates, gold and silver jewelry, footwear, sports goods, and metal scrap; thereby protecting the interests of Indian farmers and small-scale industries.