

Tax Hotline

November 27, 2003

FINANCE MINISTRY REINTRODUCES THE EXEMPTION FOR PAYMENTS IN FOREIGN EXCHANGE BY SERVICE PROVIDERS

The service industry may now breath easy as the Ministry of Finance ("Ministry") has, vide its Circular No. 21/2003 dated November 20, 2003, reintroduced the exemption to service providers in respect of services, for which payments are received in India in convertible foreign exchange. However, the exemption is not available when the payment received in India in convertible foreign exchange is repatriated from or sent outside India.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Taking into account the growing contribution of the services sector to the Indian gross domestic product, service tax regime was introduced in India for the first time in 1994, vide Chapter V to the Finance Act, 1994 ("Act"). Subsequent Finance Acts and notifications/ circulars issued by the Ministry have widened/clarified the provisions of the Act. The most controversial being the exemption in relation to export of services wherein the Ministry has wavered time again about the scope of the applicability of the exemption, as summarised hereunder:

- **April 9, 1999:** Exemption was introduced for payments received in India in convertible foreign exchange.
- **March 1, 2003:** Circular April 9, 1999 was rescinded. It was clarified that only those services which were rendered prior to March 1, 2003 and in respect of which payments were received in convertible foreign exchange in India, would be exempt from service tax.
- Anxious about the ramifications of this notification, several representations were made to the Ministry requesting clarifications on whether there was a change in Government's policy and that whether the intention was to now tax export of services.
- **April 25, 2003:** The Ministry clarified that "service tax is a destination based consumption tax and it is not applicable on export of services. Export of services would continue to remain tax-free even after withdrawal of notification no.6/99 dated 9.4.99."
- This "*clarification*" led to debate in the professional and government official circles alike as to what constituted "export of service". There could be no consensus of interpretation, as the Act itself does not throw any light on what would be regarded as "export of services" or "place of consumption of service".
- **November 20, 2003:** Exemption reintroduced.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE REINTRODUCED EXEMPTION

- The exemption does not state that it has been introduced retrospectively. Thus, services rendered during the interim period viz. March 1, 2003 to November 19, 2003 in respect of which payments were/are received in foreign exchange would not be covered by the exemption. The service providers would need to prove that such services were consumed outside India to be eligible for the exemption under the April 2003 circular.
- The notification states that this exemption would not be available if the "payment received in India in convertible foreign exchange for taxable services rendered is repatriated from or sent outside India". This again brings in confusion as to the extent of the exemption. Whether mere dividend distributions by the service provider to its foreign parent would lead to loss of exemption and such other issues are sure to crop up in days to come.

Source: Notification No. 21/2003, dated November 20, 2003

DISCLAIMER

The contents of this hotline should not be construed as legal opinion. View detailed disclaimer.

This Hotline provides general information existing at the time of preparation. The Hotline is intended as a news update and Nishith Desai Associates neither assumes nor accepts any responsibility for any loss arising to any person acting or refraining from acting as a result of any material contained in this Hotline. It is recommended that professional advice be taken based on the specific facts and circumstances. This Hotline does not substitute the need to refer to the original pronouncements.

This is not a Spam mail. You have received this mail because you have either requested for it or someone must have suggested your name. Since India has no anti-spamming law, we refer to the US directive, which states that a mail cannot be considered Spam if it contains the sender's contact information, which this mail does. In case this mail doesn't concern you, please unsubscribe from mailing list.

Research Papers

Mergers & Acquisitions

July 11, 2025

New Age of Franchising

June 20, 2025

Life Sciences 2025

June 11, 2025

Research Articles

2025 Watchlist: Life Sciences Sector India

April 04, 2025

Re-Evaluating Press Note 3 Of 2020: Should India's Land Borders Still Define Foreign Investment Boundaries?

February 04, 2025

INDIA 2025: The Emerging Powerhouse for Private Equity and M&A Deals

January 15, 2025

Audio

CCI's Deal Value Test

February 22, 2025

Securities Market Regulator's Continued Quest Against "Unfiltered" Financial Advice

December 18, 2024

Digital Lending - Part 1 - What's New with NBFC P2Ps

November 19, 2024

NDA Connect

Connect with us at events, conferences and seminars.

NDA Hotline

Click here to view Hotline archives.

Video

Reimagining CSR: From Grant Giving to Blended Finance & Outcome Based Funding

June 16, 2025

Courts vs Bankruptcy code: The

