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ASEAN FTA IS INTACT

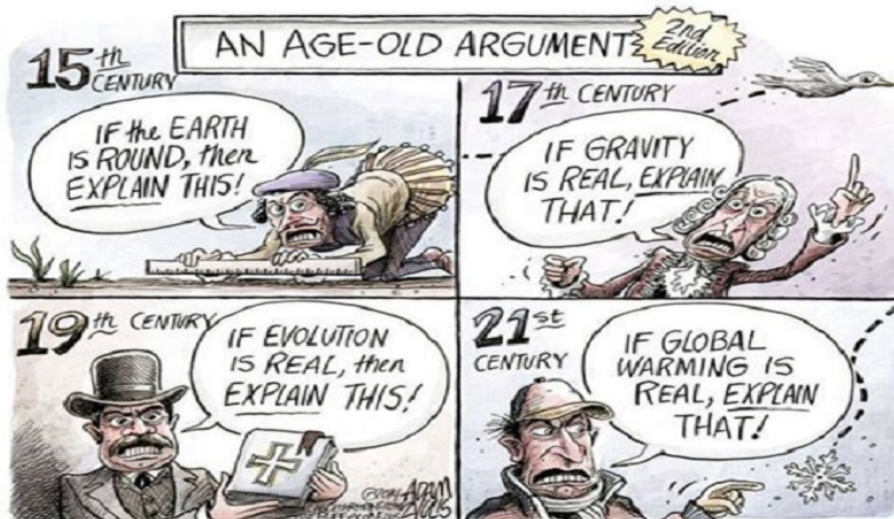
A day after cancelling her visit to Myanmar for the India-Asean economic ministers' meet, minister Nirmala Sitaraman said "We worked (45 days) for it and we will be signing it and... we will honour our commitment to the region."

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2014 - Its Democracy v. Authoritorean Aspirations

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Courtesy: <http://lobotero.com/>

World Water Week to Focus on Energy-Water Nexus: The WB

STOCKHOLM: This year's World Water Week, Aug 30-Sept 5th, will focus on the inextricable connections between water and energy – and how best to manage them for the benefit of the poor says World Bank Group and its Thirsty Energy initiative. Water is needed in almost all energy generation processes, from hydropower production and energy extraction, to cooling in thermal power plants. At the same time, the water sector needs energy to extract, treat and transport water.

WB identifies more than 748 million people lack access to potable water, 2.5 billion lack access to sanitation, and over 1.2 billion people lack access to electricity. Geographically, most of those living in water poverty are the same people who live in energy poverty. Despite these

concerns, current energy planning and production is often made without taking into account existing and future water constraints. In the United States and Europe, power plants have had to temporarily shut down or reduce electricity generation due to low water flows or high water temperatures.

Meanwhile, it is understood that city of Stockholm takes pride in its Water Aid works and it would prove the policy makers, UN agencies, government representatives that they just need to replicate its water-reforms to provide access to water, sanitation and hygiene. With today's understanding, tools and resources at our disposal, what took Stockholm three decades to achieve, could be done globally in half the time - what matters would be political will.

courtesy: theguardian

FREE TRADE AGREEMENT WITH ASEAN SHALL STAY INTACT: NIRMALA SITARAMAN

NEW DELHI: India will honour its commitment to Asean, commerce and industry minister Nirmala Sitharaman has said, clarifying that the country is ready to sign services and investment pacts with the 10-member bloc. A day after cancelling her visit to Myanmar for the India-Asean economic ministers' meet, the minister said "We worked one and a half months for it and we will be signing it. It is not possible to say whether it will be next week or next month, but we will honour our commitment to the region."

It was informed that the commerce secretary wrote a letter to the Asean secretary general Le Luong Minh saying that the minister could not make it on account of an unexpected situation that came up. It will not have a bearing on the India-Asean relationship whatsoever and India would honour its commitment, the letter said. Economic Times reported that an official said on the condition

of anonymity - efforts were on to sign the pact in Delhi well before India- Asean summit, this year. Newspaper Calcutta Telgraph had a hard hit on the move slamming it as out of sync with Ministry of external affairs. It reported Foreign minister Sushma Swaraj said yesterday she wanted India to "Act East", not just 'Look East'. Within hours, her ministerial colleague Nirmala Sitharaman decided she would just skip the East for now.

It is surprising that Sitharaman took till the last moment to realise that her presence for the launch of this scheme was essential - despite the fact that both events had been scheduled much in advance. Earlier, the former Commerce Minister Anand Sharma remarked - "I find it very strange that the Indian minister cancelled participation to such an important international engagement. Asean is an important region and we are already engaging with them in

RCEP." Apparently this could be one reason Nirmala Sitharaman didn't keep her schedules perfect, mainly because

RCEP means not only a mega trade deal among partners but also a Free Trade Agreement with China, meaning giving them zero- duty access.

Indian industry and exporters had been against RCEP, as it does not have the wherewithal to face the Chinese onslaught.

Meanwhile the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) on Wednesday expressed concern over delay in implementing the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) that seeks to smoothen global customs rules, as was agreed during the during the Bali Ministerial last year. Members also agreed to expedite talks on the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement(RCEP). India did not want TFA to be mentioned in the statement.

Courtesy: Business standard, financial express, eurasianreview.com, economic times, and telegraph.

PM PLANS DIGITAL CLOUD FOR INDIANS: US WARNS 'OPERATION ARCHANOPHOBIA'

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's next big push to free up service delivery from the hold of the lower bureaucracy will be in the form of a 'digital cloud' for every Indian. Certificates issued by the government — education, residential, medical records, birth certificates etc — are to be stored in individual 'digital lockers' and a communication protocol established for government departments to access them without physically having to see the hard copy. Ram Sewak Sharma,

secretary(I&T), who is overseeing MyGov.in programme, told "MyGov.in as on its way to being the world's largest platform in citizen engagement in policy making. Suggestions for the communication protocol or applications programming interface will be solicited"

Meanwhile US based researchers have uncovered an Islamabad based cyber espionage group that targets India and is suspected to have direct links with the Pakistani

government. The report details "Operation Arachnophobia consists of an apparent targeted exploitation campaign, dating back to early 2013, using the BITTERBUG malware family". Once in the system, the BITTERBUG scans for files with extensions like .doc, .ppt, .xls, .pdf, .docx, .pptx, .pps, .xlsx . A file list containing all documents is then generated. After this a message is sent to the attacker that the computer is compromised. The files are then exported to Islamabad.

Courtesy: Times of India, India Today

2014 - AN YEAR OF CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS: Whether the people know or not

(courtesy: thediplomat, Japan times)

Five million people in Myanmar signed a petition asking Parliament to remove the undemocratic provisions in the 2008 Constitution - Thai military authorities enacted an interim constitution that gives sweeping powers to the army - Philippine President Benigno Aquino III hinted that he is open to the idea of amending the Constitution amid declining popularity ratings - In July 2014, the Japanese government approved a reinterpretation of Article 9 of its Constitution, which gave more powers to its Self-Defence forces, allowing them to defend other allies in case of war being declared upon them.

Myanmar's opposition party the National League for Democracy and activist network 88 Generation Peace and Open Society were able to gather 4,953,093 signatures in more than 300 townships in support of amending numerous Articles, but mainly Art. 436 and Art.59F. The first perpetuates Military dictatorship as this provision for Constitutional amendment requires 95 percent votes of the parliament which reserves 25 percent seats for Military. Whilst Art.59F is stopping opposition leader and global democracy icon Aung San Suu Kyi from running for president in 2015, since she was married to a foreigner.

To the contrary, the Thai military government (known as the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO)) has enacted an interim constitution without popular approval. Looking on the 48 articles of the Constitution issued by the NCPO, it seems the military will retain considerable power



Image courtesy: anticap.wordpress.com

in the new government on a move to civilian rule regime. Meanwhile Philippines President Benigno Aquino III, last month, said that he is now amenable to a proposed amendment to the 1987 Constitution so that he can run for a second term, by removing term-limits for elected officials. This is in quite contrary to his mother's will - the former President Corazon Aquino.

The act of Japanese government is quite different in the sense it show cased a different mode of attack on the existng constitutional principles.

The failed attempt to amend the provisions for constitutional amendment inorderto recoup its military, induced the Japan Prime Minster to make a political appointment of an outsider to the position of director of the Cabinet Legislation Bureau (CLB), the government agency that advises the executive on the constitutionality of laws. The CLB then paved way for this amendment. Apparently,

from the perspective of Rule of law, this is fundamentally an ill because the process is placing the Executive outside of and above the supreme law, and is acting through arbitrary discretion rather than valid legal authority.

With all these Charter reforms lining up, unrest in Paksithan, judicial reforms in India, Chinese making it clear that 2017 Hong Kong Elections will be rigged, 2014 becomes an year too important for the political scientists to watchover. It is an year of Constitutional reforms - the goal is often to strenghten the democracy or to subvert it. Indeed people, at many parts of the world, sometimes think of themselves in terms of decisionism and active government and sometimes favour dominant ruler. It is important to understand the reforms can also be manipulated to serve the interests of the ruling clique. In the end, it is the citizens who must decide whether or not charter amendments are genuinely needed.

India, China Ignore Land Fiery: Politics of Trade and Commerce

New Delhi (abcnews): As Beijing confronts countries across the South China and East China seas, displaying its diplomatic and strategic strength in a series of increasingly dangerous territorial disputes, the India-China standoff results in almost nothing beyond regular diplomatic talks and professions of international friendship.

"The territorial issues and the sovereignty issues have not gone away," said Sujit Dutta, a China scholar at New Delhi's Jamia Millia Islamia University. "But the Chinese are not pushing further (into the disputed regions) and neither are the Indians." "Today, India and China have a new context for their relationship," he said.

That context comes down to two key components: An understanding that the disputed land has lost its strategic luster. And money. India's new prime minister, Narendra Modi, spoke repeatedly to top Chinese officials in the first weeks of his administration. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi recently called the potential for India-China ties "the emerging tip of a massive buried treasure."

While experts believe diplomatic infrastructure has

helped keep things calm - China's military presence along the border with India has been growing for years, and India has recently rushed to catch up: refurbishing air strips, deploying more armored units and frantically constructing new roads high in the Himalayas. Nevertheless T.C.A. Rangachari, a former Indian ambassador and longtime China expert says "If politics and trade mean they're getting along now, that will almost certainly not last forever. The land that doesn't matter today could very well matter tomorrow. In 20 years, maybe 30 years, things could all be very different."

The arms race, hunt for maritime resources, new geo political avenues, and the aspirations to be a global power of both nations are going on despite the obvious improvement of economic and financial relations between the two countries. Anytime tensions can become obvious.

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