

December 19th news:

International:

Austria Swears In a New Government

A new coalition government was sworn in on 18th December in Austria, and for the first time in more than 10 years it includes the far-right Freedom Party, a watershed for the populist movements that unsettled European politics this year.

The return to power of the Freedom Party, which was founded by neo-Nazis after World War II, was concerning enough that Austria's president, Alexander Van der Bellen, took the exceptional step of eliciting several promises from the new government before he would administer the oath of office.

Those included acknowledging Austria's commitment to European Union and its responsibility to a Nazi past that tore apart the Continent last century.

National:

BJP retains Gujarat, tramples Congress in Himachal

The BJP has scored sixth straight time in Assembly elections on 18th December. Also BJP wrested power from the Congress in Himachal Pradesh with a close to two-thirds majority. The twin victories tightened BJP's grip over India's politics that saw Congress lose one more state with general elections only 18 months away.

Still, the euphoria in the BJP camp was tempered by the lower-than-expected margin of victory in Gujarat—it took 99 seats in the 182-member assembly, down from 115 it won in 2012, and far lower than the 150-plus seats it had hoped for.

The Congress won 77, up by 16 seats at the end of counting of votes in the Gujarat polls tonight that was marked by acrimonious exchanges and rhetoric during the high octane campaign.

Bilateral:

ASEAN free trade pact: House panel calls for better access to Indian goods

The Department of Commerce should furnish a note on the assessment of the working of India-ASEAN trade in goods agreement and seek better market access for goods in order to have more balanced trade, a Parliamentary Standing Committee on Commerce on 'Trade with ASEAN countries' has recommended.

The report, presented to the Rajya Sabha on 18th December, by the Parliamentary Committee headed by Naresh Gujral, points out that a number of items including farm products, textiles, leather and steel have been adversely affected due to the provisions of the agreement. The India-ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement came into force on January 1, 2010.

The report pointed out that better market access in terms of higher export has not materialised for India and this was a matter of concern.

The Commerce Department may look into the cause of huge trade deficit with Indonesia and review the existing trade policy framework in respect of the country, the report said. Trade with CLMV countries (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam) is also not at desired level

On the decline in exports of agriculture commodities to the ASEAN, the Committee said that it was a matter of concern and should be dealt with strictly.

Stating that it finds disconcerting that the steel industry has been put to a disadvantage by the India ASEAN pact, report proposed that reciprocity in tariff reduction/elimination by ASEAN countries on Indian steel products should be ensured on account of broad and sweeping market access given by India.

The Committee also recommended that the Commerce Department should be vigilant over the safeguard measures imposed by the ASEAN countries on textile exports since it directly affected the country's exports.

Economy:

India reaches 2nd position on horticultural crops, fruits production list leaving others behind

According to Union Agriculture Minister Radha Mohan Singh, research and development projects in horticulture crops have yielded encouraging results, as a result, the production of horticulture crops have been more than food grains irrespective of adverse climatic conditions. After China, India is the second largest producer of horticultural crops and fruits.

The Agriculture Minister said more than 9 crore metric ton of fruits on 63 lakhs hectare land were produced during 2015-16.

According to an estimate, a production of 30 crore metric ton horticulture crops on 2.5 crore hectare land is expected during 2016-17 in which contribution of fruit is significant.

The record achievement includes 42 million ton of fruit production on 65 lakh hectare land. In terms of area in India, the citrus fruits hold second position (10.37 lakh hectare) and third (12 million tonnes) in production.

Environment

Dharmendra Pradhan Inaugurates Eastern Indias First CNG Stations

Oil minister Dharmendra Pradhan inaugurated eastern India's first compressed natural gas (CNG) stations for scooters in Bhubaneswar, Odisha. Pradhan inaugurated two CNG stations for scooters and three-wheelers at Chandrasekharpur and Patia area in Bhubaneswar. The minister also launched CNG-

run scooters. The CNG stations were part of GAIL's Pradhan Mantri Urja Ganga and City Gas Distribution (CGD) projects in Bhubaneswar and Cuttack.

Sports:

Sushil Kumar victory

Double Olympic medalist Sushil Kumar clinched a gold medal at the Commonwealth Wrestling Championships in South Africa, on 17th December. In Johannesburg, Sushil defeated New Zealand's Akash Khullar via a pinfall in the final of the 74kg freestyle category to clinch the medal.

Parveen Rana also won a bronze medal in the same category. Another Olympic medalist, Sakshi Malik also clinched a gold medal in the championships. Sakshi defeated New Zealand's Tayla Tuahine Ford in the final of the 62kg women's freestyle category.

Awards:

Satheesh Reddy: The Scientific adviser to Defence Minister and Director General, Missiles and Strategic Systems has been conferred with the prestigious National Design Award. He bags this award for his contributions towards indigenous design and development of diversified missile systems, guided weapons, avionics technologies, and for his sustained efforts leading to the advancement of aerospace technologies and industries in India. Satheesh spearheads Dr APJ Abdul Kalam Missile Complex, 'the Missiles hub of India,' steering the design and development of wide variety of tactical and strategic missile systems. He will receive the award on December 21 in Chennai.