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Finance and Banking

India a top borrower from China-sponsored AIIB in 2017

- India has emerged as a top borrower from the China-sponsored Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) with USD 1.5 billion worth of loans last year and USD three billion more in the pipeline.
- They also exchanged views on the preparations for the next annual meet of AIIB which will be held in Mumbai in June this year, the Indian Embassy said in a statement.
- The vice president and chief investment officer of the bank, DJ Pandian also took part in the meeting.
- Next to India, Indonesia has emerged as the second largest borrower with about \$600 million loans.
- Significantly in the pipeline for lending for India by the 84-member bank this year included USD 3.5 billion worth of projects including Mumbai Metro, Andhra Pradesh new capital Amaravati's development and irrigation network in West Bengal.
- India is the second largest shared holder in the bank which has an authorised capital of USD 100 billion.
- China is the largest shareholder with 26.06 per cent voting shares in the bank. India is the second largest shareholder with 7.5 per cent followed by Russia 5.93 per cent and Germany with 4.5 per cent.

India gives \$45 mn aid to develop Kankesanthurai harbour in Sri Lanka

- India has extended a fresh financial assistance of \$45.27 million for upgrading Kankesanthurai (KKS) Harbour in northern Sri Lanka into a commercial port and strengthening the country's efforts to become a regional maritime hub.
- Sri Lankas Ministry of Finance and Export-Import Bank of India (Exim Bank) signed an agreement in this regard on January 10, the Indian High Commission said.
- The upgradation project would make KKS Harbour a full-fledged commercial port, further strengthening Sri Lankas efforts to become a regional maritime hub, the statement said.
- It would also assist in reconstruction efforts in northern Sri Lanka.

Airtel ties up with Amazon to offer free Prime subscription

- Bharti Airtel on Friday said it has tied up with e-commerce platform Amazon India to offer one-year subscription of Amazon Prime free of cost to its postpaid subscribers.

- The telecom major said the offer will be available for its new and existing postpaid subscribers with an "Infinity plan" of Rs 499 or above.
- The offer for one year of Amazon Prime is activated exclusively through the Airtel TV app, the company said in a statement.
- The statement added that Airtel V-Fiber broadband customers are also eligible for Amazon Prime membership benefits.

NCLT approves Vodafone India-Idea Cellular merger

- The National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) has approved the proposed merger between Idea Cellular and Vodafone -- a move that brings both the companies closer to culminating the deal.
- On 20 March last year, Vodafone India, the Indian subsidiary of the UK-based Vodafone Group plc, the world's second-largest mobile phone company, announced its merger with the Aditya Birla Group-owned Idea Cellular, India's third-largest telecom operator.
- Together, they are expected to create an entity worth over USD 23 billion, which will become India's largest telecom company with a 35 per cent market share (in terms of customers) and over 400 million customers.
- Both the groups can now go ahead for the final approval for merger from the Department of Telecom after Vodafone's appeal for the scheme also gets NCLT nod.

India

ISRO successfully launches its 100th satellite

- India successfully launched its 100th satellite 'Cartosat-2 Series' from Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Andhra Pradesh's Sriharikota Island on Friday.
- For the mission, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) used PSLV-C40 launch vehicle, which is carrying 31 satellites, including three from India and 28 from six other countries.
- The weather observation 'Cartosat-2 Series' satellite and 29 others will be inserted into a 505-kilometre sun-synchronous orbit after about seventeen and a half minutes since its liftoff.
- Later, the payload Microsat developed by the ISRO will be taken down to a lower orbit at 359-kilometre height and launched using the 'multiple engine switch-on' method.
- This satellite is the seventh remote sensing satellite in its series and has the mission life of five years.

PM Modi ranked among top 3 world leaders in survey

- Ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Switzerland for Davos summit, an international survey has ranked him among the top three leaders of the world.
- An annual survey by Gallup International has put Prime Minister Modi at number three among the global leaders.

- The respondents in the survey, which was conducted among the people across 50 countries, had rated Prime Minister Modi ahead of China's Xi Jinping, Russian President Vladimir Putin, British Prime Minister Theresa May, Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu amongst others.
- The top ranking in the survey went to German Chancellor Angela Merkel, followed by French president Emmanuel Macron.
- Prime Minister Modi will be on a two-day visit to Davos, Switzerland, to attend the World Economic Forum (WEF) meeting between January 22 and 23.

PM Modi inaugurates National Youth Festival 2018 in Uttar Pradesh

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday addressed the public at five-day National Youth Festival (NYF) via video conferencing.
- The festival, being held at the Gautam Buddha University in Greater Noida, commenced on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda on Friday.
- The inaugural function was co-chaired by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, and Union Minister for State (Independent Charge) of Youth Affairs and Sports Col. Rajyavardhan Rathore. The guest of honour on the occasion was Union Minister for Culture (Independent Charge) Mahesh Sharma.
- The festival is organised by the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports in collaboration with the Uttar Pradesh government.
- The theme of the festival is 'Sankalp Se Siddhi', to capitalise on the demographic dividend of young India, to capture the vibrancy and fresh perspective of youth and to pledge to accomplish the Goal of New India.
- The festival also provides an arena, by creating a Mini-India, where youth interact in formal and informal settings and exchange their social and cultural uniqueness. This blend of diverse socio-cultural milieu creates 'Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat'.
- This is the first time that the NYF is being organised in NCR.

Himachal Pradesh health worker Geeta Verma featured in WHO Calendar

- Geeta Verma, a health worker from Sapnot village in Mandi district, has figured in the World Health Organization (WHO) calendar for 2018 for ensuring 100 per cent coverage in her area of operation under the measles and rubella programme.
- Chief Minister Jai Ram Thakur today congratulated Geeta on making the state proud. He exhorted all employees to work with dedication.
- Geeta Verma is deployed at the Health Sub-Centre, Shakardehra, Mandi district. She undertook a campaign of inoculating children in the remote areas of Mandi. She covered long distances, on foot as well as on her two-wheeler, to immunise children in the remote areas of Raygarh.
- The Chief Minister said it was a matter of pride that a woman health worker had found mention in the WHO.

Kerala to use robots to clean sewers, end manual scavenging

- Robots will soon replace men in cleaning up sewer holes in Kerala, ending the age-old practice of manual scavenging in the southern state. ‘Bandicoot’, the robot developed by the startup firm Genrobotics, will be used for cleaning sewer holes.
- The Kerala Water Authority (KWA) and Kerala Startup Mission (KSUM) on Thursday signed an MoU for transfer of technology and products, including use of the robots for the purpose. The MoU was signed between Kerala Water Innovation Zone under KWA and KSUM at the Chief Minister’s office in Thiruvananthapuram, a statement said here.
- ‘Bandicoot’ will start its work, so far mostly done manually, by cleaning sewer holes in the city during the coming famed Attukal Pongala festival in Thiruvananthapuram in March, it said.
- The robot has four limbs and a bucket system attached to a spider web looking extension, which can go inside the manhole.
- After shoveling the heap of garbage at the bottom of the manhole, it will be collected by using the bucket system before lifting it upward. It also has Wi-Fi and bluetooth modules, it said.

MEA discontinues last page of passport

- The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Friday decided to discontinue the last page of the passport, containing information about parents, address, Emigration Check Required (ECR) and old passport details.
- The Ministry decided that the last page of the passport and other travel documents issued under the Passports Act, 1967 and Passport Rules, 1980 would no longer be printed.
- The decision was taken after the Ministry examined the recommendation of the Committee in consultation with the various stakeholders, examined the guidelines of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) regarding Machine Readable Travel Documents.
- The last page contains information such the name of the Father, Mother, Spouse, Address, ECR and old passport number with date and place of issue of the holder of the passport.

Election Commission constitutes Umesh Sinha Committee to suggest changes to RP Act, 1951

- The Election Commission of India on 11 January 2018 constituted a 14 member committee to suggest changes to Section 126 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (RP Act) in view of social media expansion.
- The Committee will be chaired by Senior Deputy Election Commissioner Umesh Sinha.

Terms of Reference of the Committee

- The committee will comprise of nine officers of Election Commission, one nominated member each from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (I&B), Law Ministry, IT Ministry, National Broadcasters Association and Press Council of India.
- It will study the impact of new media and social media during the “silence period”, the 48 hours period prior to elections and its implication in view of Section 126 of the RP Act.
- After a thorough study, it will suggest modifications to the election law and model code of conduct.

Awards & Honors

Shah Rukh Khan wins 2018 Crystal Award by World Economic Forum

- The King of Bollywood Shah Rukh Khan has won the 2018 Crystal Award from India.
- The superstar was honored with this award for his leadership in championing children's and women's rights in India.
- Shah Rukh has been running his NGO— Meer Foundation— which works for providing justice to female victims of acid attack.
- The two others who received the award are Actor Cate Blanchett and musician Elton John. Blanchett, Australian actress and theatre director, has received the award for her leadership in raising awareness of the refugee crisis which John got it for his leadership in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Appointments

Indu Malhotra, first woman lawyer to be directly promoted as Supreme Court judge

- The senior advocate Indu Malhotra has been recommended as a judge of the Supreme Court by the collegium of Supreme Court.
- Indu Malhotra would become the first woman lawyer to be directly appointed as a judge of the highest court.
- Along with Indu Malhotra, Justice K M Joseph has also been cleared for elevation to the apex court. Justice K M Joseph is presently chief justice of Uttarakhand High Court.
- In 2004, Justice Joseph was appointed as Permanent Judge in the Kerala High Court and later transferred to Uttarakhand High Court as a Chief Justice in 2014.
- The SC collegium also recommended the name of Justice Sheo Kumar Singh-I, presently an Additional Judge, for appointment as a Permanent Judge of the Allahabad High Court.
- The Collegium led by Chief Justice Dipak Misra has four senior-most judges of the apex court -- Justices J Chelameswar, Madan B Lokur, Ranjan Gogoi, and Kurian Joseph.

Resignation

Infosys President Rajesh Murthy steps down

- IT major Infosys's President Rajesh Murthy, one of the company's most highly paid executives resigned from his post.

- Murthy, who was President of the company since October 2016, has resigned citing personal reasons. The same was reiterated by Infosys COO UB Pravin Rao while addressing a press conference post the release of the company's third quarter results.
- An employee of the company for 26 years, Murthy was responsible for the global Energy, Utilities, Telecommunications and Services business unit, including setting the vision, creating and implementing strategy, and driving growth.

World

Danish wind energy sets new record in 2017

- Wind power accounted for a record high of 43.4 per cent of the total electricity consumption in Denmark in 2017, according to official data released on Thursday.
- The new record surpasses the previous 2015 record of 42 per cent, keeping Denmark on track to reach its target of having 50 per cent of all electricity produced by wind power by 2020, figures from Danish Ministry of Energy, Utilities and Climate showed.
- In the coming years, higher records are expected as new offshore wind farms are developed in the Baltic sea and the North Sea to further increase the Danish wind production.
- Denmark is part of the major European electricity market, with strong electricity connections to neighboring countries.
- Excess electricity produced by Danish windmills is traded across borders, while Denmark can also purchase electricity from other countries that have a surplus of electricity.
- The wind energy share of Denmark's electric energy system has more than doubled since 2008, previously accounting for 19.3 per cent.

Ecuador grants WikiLeaks Founder Julian Assange citizenship

- Ecuador on Thursday announced that it has granted citizenship to Julian Assange, the founder of the whistleblowing website WikiLeaks who has been holed up in the country's embassy in London for the past five and a half years, The Guardian reported. The country's Foreign Ministry said Assange was granted citizenship on December 12.
- Ecuador's Foreign Minister Maria Fernanda Espinosa said at a press conference in Capital city Quito that the government was concerned about potential threats to Assange's life from unspecified nations, The Washington Post reported. She added that Ecuador was looking to resolve the impasse in a "dignified" way.
- The UK Foreign Office on Wednesday said it had turned down a request from the Ecuadorian government to grant Assange diplomatic status.