

Finance and Banking

India, World Bank ink \$40m loan agreement for UP tourism

- An agreement for the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) credit of USD 40 Million for 'U.P. Pro-Poor Tourism Development Project' was inked on Thursday between the Government of India and the World Bank.
- The IBRD will grant the loan which has a 5-year grace period, and maturity term of 19 years.
- Sameer Kumar Khare, Joint Secretary (MI), Department of Economic Affairs on behalf of the Government of India and John Blomquist, Acting Country Director of the World Bank (India) signed the agreement.
- The Implementing Entity Agreement was signed by the Director General and Principal Secretary, Tourism on behalf of Government of Uttar Pradesh, and the Acting Country Director (India) on behalf of the World Bank.
- The programme size is approximately USD 57.14 million, of which USD 40 million will be financed by the Bank, and the remaining amount will be funded out of State Budget.
- The Uttar Pradesh Pro-Poor Tourism Development Project will support the state government's priority of re-structuring tourism in a way that optimizes the state assets in an inclusive and sustainable manner directly benefiting poor residents and local entrepreneurs, such as rickshaw drivers, local artisans and street vendors.

KKR gets RBI nod to start India's 1st Foreign-owned ARC

- US buyout giant KKR & Co has become the first foreign investor to fully own an asset reconstruction company (ARC) in India as it received approval from the Reserve Bank of India at a time when lenders are fighting with a pile of bad loans that have crippled their businesses.
- KKR, one of the most aggressive investors in financial services, plans to deploy a major chunk from its record Asia fund for buying troubled assets in the country,
- India's banks are weighed down with \$180 billion of stressed assets, acting as a brake on the growth prospects of the world's fastest-expanding major economy.
- The firm — headed by former Citigroup south Asia chief Sanjay Nayar — has invested \$3.2 billion in private equity deals, besides extending more than \$1 billion annually in financing through corporate and real estate-focused NBFCs.

S&P puts Indian banks in 'Group 5' with Italy, Spain, UAE

- The Indian banking sector has been classified under 'Group 5' along with countries such as Italy, Spain, Ireland, the UAE and South Africa by rating agency Standard & Poor's (S&P) on the basis of their economy and industry risk criteria, the American analysts said on Wednesday.
- Noting that the "low-income" Indian economy and the government's limited fiscal flexibility constrain the country's economic resilience, S&P in its "Banking Industry Country Risk Assessment: India", however, said the medium-term outlook for growth remains healthy, which "provide sound development opportunities for Indian banks".
- "We classify the banking sector of India in group '5' under our Banking Industry Country Risk Assessment (BICRA). The other countries in group '5' are Spain, Ireland, Italy, Panama, Bermuda, Poland, Peru, Qatar, South Africa and the UAE.
- "The anchor for banks operating only in India is 'bbb-', " an S&P Global Ratings release said.
- "The medium-term outlook for India's growth remains healthy due to good demographics, public and foreign direct investments, private consumption, and reforms such as the removal of barriers to domestic trade through GST," it said.
- Assessing the risk of rising economic imbalances for banks as "low", the report, however, drew attention to the massive non-performing assets (NPAs), or bad loans, in the Indian banking system that have crossed the staggering level of Rs 8.5 lakh crore.
- "Banks' asset quality is weak and has been deteriorating in the past four years, accentuated by historically weak foreclosure laws," S&P said.

Telangana becomes first Indian state to give farmers 24-hour free electricity from Dec 31

- Farmers in Telangana will get 24-hour free power supply from the midnight of December 31, the state government said today.
- "Telangana is going to create history by becoming the first state in the country offering free power to farmers 24 hours a day," a release from the government said.
- As many as 23 lakh agricultural pump sets will be provided free power boosting the overall power demand to 11,000 MW by March next year, it added.
- The release informed that state power utilities had spent Rs 12610 crore in setting up new power lines, transformers and sub-stations as part of the elaborate arrangements to supply power.

Pluto Exchange launches India's first bitcoin trading app

- At a time when bitcoins are in focus for the wrong reasons, cryptocurrency dealer Pluto Exchange on Thursday announced the launch of India's first mobile application for transacting in virtual currencies.
- At a press conference here, Pluto Exchange founder and Chief Executive Bharat Verma said his company is all set to launch the country's first app-based wallet that enables bitcoin transactions using a mobile number.
- By using a four-digit personal identification number (PIN), users can now buy, sell, store and spend bitcoins via a mobile number, Verma added.

- Elaborating, he said the app would permit a range of transactions, including payments, remittances, business-to-business commerce, supply chain finance, asset management and trading.

Lok Sabha passes Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Bill

- The Lok Sabha on Friday passed the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Bill 2017. The new amendments are part of the ordinance that was brought in earlier last month.
- The Bill prohibits certain persons from submitting a resolution plan in case of defaults. These include wilful defaulters, promoters or management of the company having an outstanding non-performing debt for over a year.
- The Bill also has provisions to bar the sale of property of a defaulter to such persons during liquidation.
- Replying to a debate on the Bill, Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley rejected the claim of the Congress party that the Non-Performing Assets(NPA) of banks have increased during the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) regime.
- He further accused the previous United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government of hiding the real figure of NPA by restructuring the assets.
- Jaitley also said that there was an extreme urgency to bring an ordinance to address the issue of insolvency in the country.

Reliance Jio to buy Reliance Communication's wireless assets in \$3.75 billion deal

- Debt-laden Reliance Communications has signed a deal to sell its wireless assets to Reliance Jio Infocomm, for a total value of nearly 240 billion rupees (\$3.75 billion), two sources familiar with the matter told Reuters on Friday.
- The two companies had announced late on Thursday that Reliance Communications, backed by businessman Anil Ambani, would sell all its spectrum, tower, fibre optic and other telecom infrastructure assets to Jio, which is owned by Reliance Industries and is controlled by Anil Ambani's elder brother Mukesh Ambani, India's richest person. They did not give the value of the deal.
- The sale, if finalised, would mark a big step in Reliance Communication's quest to cut down its debt, which had sent its shares to record lows and led creditors such as China Development Bank (CDB) to start insolvency proceedings over missed payments.
- CDB said earlier on Friday it is in talks with Reliance Communications, or RCom as it is called.
- RCom shares rose as much as 29.9 percent on Friday while Reliance Industries rose as much as 0.9 percent.
- The sale would also mark the return of the telecom operations back into the fold of Reliance Industries, which forayed into telecoms in 2002, spearheaded by the elder Ambani, under the name of Reliance Infocomm Ltd.

India and states

Delhi Govt and Maruti sign MoU to set up 12 automated driving test tracks

- The Delhi government on Wednesday signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Maruti Suzuki for setting up 12 automated driving test tracks across the city.
- The Indian automobile major will invest approximately Rs 15 crore to develop the centres, which will be set up in phases and handed over to the Transport department of Delhi governments, Maruti Suzuki India Ltd (MSIL) said in a statement.
- The MoU was signed in the presence of Lieutenant Governor Anil Bajjal, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot at the LG Secretariat here.
- In the first phase, the centres will come up in Hauz Khas, Shakur Basti, Raja Garden, Hari Nagar, Burari, Loni Road, Sarai Kale Khan, Rohini, Jharoda Kalan, Mayur Vihar Phase I, Surajmal Vihar and Dwarka.
- MSIL has nearly 430 Maruti Driving Schools, operated in partnership with its dealers across India. It also manages six IDTRs (Institute of Driving Training and Research) in partnership with state governments.

Assam CM launches skill development training centres

- The Chief Minister of Assam, Sarbananda Sonowal, launched skill development training centres across the state in a programme organised by the Department of Skill, Employment and Entrepreneurship at Srimanta Sankardev Kalakshetra in Guwahati on 28 December 2017.
- Speaking on the occasion, Sonowal stated that the knowledge and skill is must for socio-economic progress. He said that the state's youth must give a new dimension to the pace of the state's development by acquiring knowledge and enhancing their skills.
- Further, underlining the inherent advantage of Assam as a state brimming with youth power, the Chief Minister said that economic foundation of the state would be bolstered by skilled manpower.
- The Assam's skill development centres aim to carry forward PM Narendra Modi's vision for skilling the youth of the nation through 'Skill India' programme.
- The state government has already signed a MoU with the Government of Singapore under which a skill development centre having international standards would be set up in one of its cities, Mangaldoi.
- The centre would impart training to around 10000 of the state's youth.
- Besides, the state government would also be setting up foreign language learning centres in the state, as a part of its effort to open new job opportunities for the youth abroad.
- The state would also impart training to around 1.5 lakh youth on various trades before 31 March 2018.

Orange Festival of Music and Adventure begins in Dambuk, Arunachal Pradesh

- Excitement, thrill and musical extravaganza gripped Dambuk village, located in the Lower Dibang Valley in Arunachal Pradesh, when a four-day long Orange Festival of Music and Adventure (OFAM) offered tourists the experience of various rendition of Indo-Western music and adventure sports activities.
- Dambuk in Arunachal is known to produce some of the best oranges in the country and hence the name Orange festival evolved.
- Besides the festival, the picturesque lush green landscape, valleys, farmlands, majestic hills and mountains accompanied with tents and huts, offered a plethora of options for adventure seekers to explore more.
- A cold chilling musical night amidst the Dambuk village was also a delightful experience for tourists.
- This year, the festival featured an array of singers, music composers, music bands from every nook and corner of the world.
- Musical bands from northeast and other parts of the country like Rain in Sahara, Humsafar Moscow, Fame the Band, Thermal and a quarter, The F16's etc enthralled the crowd with their scintillating performances.

78th session of Indian History Congress begins in Kolkata

- The three-day long 78th session of the Indian History Congress today began here at the Jadavpur University campus.
- The Indian History Congress will have six sections this time - Ancient India, Medieval India, Modern India, Countries Other than India, Archaeology and Contemporary India.
- Eminent historians like Irfan Habib and Romila Thapar will speak on the occasion.
- West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee will address a session of the Indian History Congress tomorrow.
- The aim of conducting Indian History Congress is for promotion and encouragement of the scientific study of Indian History, holding Congresses and publishing of the proceedings, bulletins, memoirs, journals and other works. PTI PNT RG
- This is unedited, unformatted feed from the Press Trust of India wire.

Modi Kaka Ka Gaon: Movie based on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's development agenda

- Hindi feature film 'Modi Ka Gaon' – now renamed as 'Modi Kaka Ka Gaon' finally released Today, after nearly 11 months it was denied a censor certificate on various grounds.
- The movie is loosely inspired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's development agenda. Vikas Mahante Worked as a lead role as a Indian Prime minister. Apart from him, Film-makers casts Rohit Raj, Chandramani, Swarnim, Zeba Anujam, and Sarvagya for prominent roles. Tushar Amrishi Goel Directed movie is produced by Suresh Jha.
- Modi Kaka Ka Gaon is based on the working style and development agenda of the Narendra Modi. It sheds light on how Prime Minister Modi removes all the obstacles that come in the way of India's development.

- It also showcases the how he workes on Swachh Bharat mission and how they face the issues like Uri Attack, Surgical Strike, and Demonetisation. We can say that the story of this Movie is not a biopic on Modi, but it has been inspired by the Prime Minister’s vision for the country’s progress.

MP CM flags off mobile museum 'Adi Shankara Sandesh Vahini' in

- As part of the 'Ekam Yatra', Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan today flagged off a mobile museum, showcasing various aspects of the life of Adi Shankaracharya, from the home of the saint's mother near here.
- The journey of the mobile museum 'Adi Shankara Sandesh Vahini', is being organised to propagate the philosophy and teachings of Adi Shankaracharya among the youth.
- It will cover various places including Kalady, Udupi, Dharmasthala and Sringeri before concluding at Omkareshwar in Madhya Pradesh on January 22, where a 108-feet high Ashtadhatu statue of the saint would be installed.
- The Madhya Pradesh government had on December 19 launched 'Ekam Yatra' with an aim of collecting metal pieces for the statue.
- The yatra would culminate at Omkareshwar on January 22 after traversing through Indore, Dewas, Rajgarh, Guna, Ashok Nagar, Shivpuri, Sheopur, Morena, Bhind, Gwalior and Datia in Madhya Pradesh.

India successfully test-fires AAD Supersonic Interceptor Missile

- India on 28 December 2017 successfully test-fired indigenously developed Advanced Air Defence (AAD) supersonic interceptor missile from a test range in Dr Abdul Kalam Island off the coast of Odisha.
- This Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) System of Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) directly hit the target at an altitude of about 15 kilometre and destroyed it into fragments.

AAD Supersonic Interceptor Missile

- The supersonic interceptor missile is a 7.5-meter long single stage solid rocket propelled guided missile.
- It is capable of destroying any incoming ballistic missile at low altitude.
- It is equipped with a navigation system, a hi-tech computer and an electro-mechanical activator.
- It has its own mobile launcher, secure data link for interception, independent tracking and homing capabilities and sophisticated radars.

Lok Sabha passes bill criminalising Instant Triple Talaq

- Lok Sabha on 28 December 2017 passed the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2017. The Bill criminalises the practice of instant triple talaq among Muslims.
- The bill was introduced by Union Law Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad in the lower house on 28 December 2017 in the wake of the August 2017 ruling of Supreme Court declaring instant triple talaq practice as "null and void", unconstitutional and arbitrary.

Provisions of the Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Marriage) Bill, 2017

- The bill was prepared by an inter-ministerial group headed by Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh.
- It makes instant triple talaq or talaq-e-biddat illegal and void, be it in any form- spoken form, in writing or by electronic means such as email, SMS and WhatsApp or in any other manner whatsoever.
- It defines 'talaq' as 'talaq-e-biddat' pronounced by a Muslim man resulting in instant and irrevocable divorce. Talaq-e-biddat refers to the practice under Muslim personal laws where pronouncement of the word 'talaq' thrice in one sitting by a Muslim man to his wife results in an instant and irrevocable divorce.
- It makes declaration of talaq a cognizable and non-bailable offence. A husband declaring talaq can be imprisoned for up to three years along with a fine.
- Any offence committed under the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 will be treated as cognizable and non-bailable.
- It envisages entitling divorcee Muslim women for maintenance. It gives power to wife, upon whom talaq is pronounced, to approach a magistrate seeking subsistence allowance for herself and her minor children.

Union Government launches Mobile Application on Livestock Disease Forewarning

- The Union Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Minister Radha Mohan Singh on 27 December 2017 launched Livestock Disease Forewarning - Mobile Application (LDF - Mobile App).
- During the launch, Union Agriculture Ministry also informed that dreaded Rinderpest disease has been eradicated from India and stressed the need to control and eradicate diseases like FMD, PPR, Brucellosis, CSF, BT, HS etc., which cause huge economic loss annually to the livestock industry.

Mobile Application on Livestock Disease Forewarning

- The LDF - Mobile App was developed by ICAR- National Institute of Veterinary Epidemiology and Disease Informatics (ICAR - NIVEDI), Bengaluru.
- ICAR-NIVEDI identified 13 priority diseases based on their past incidence patterns and built a strong database of these diseases on the app.

- The organisation has been providing monthly livestock disease alerts to the state and central animal husbandry departments.
- ICAR-NIVEDI used this Monthly Bulletin system to send out early warning.
- The app considers both climatic and non-climatic factors and categorizes districts into Very High Risk, High Risk, Moderate Risk, Low Risk, Very Low Risk and No Risk for a particular disease so that stakeholders can effectively plan and utilize the available resources.

President inaugurates Andhra Pradesh Fiber Grid Project

- The Andhra Pradesh Fiber Grid Project was inaugurated by the President of India, Ram Nath Kovind at Velagapudi, Amaravathy on 27 December 2017.
- The project, initiated by Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu, aims to expand high-speed internet facility in the state. It aims to cover over 1.45 crore households, more than 12,000 panchayats and 60,000 schools. It will also provide internet facilities to 10,000 government offices, 96 municipalities, 14 Corporations and 6,000 Public Health Centres in the state.
- Speaking on the occasion, the President stated that from an expensive luxury even a decade ago, data and Internet access is today seen as a utility – as much a basic need as water, electricity and cooking gas. He stated that the world is moving towards a plug-and-play system where it will be the norm for houses and office spaces to come pre-configured with broadband connectivity. Andhra Pradesh is attempting to realise that potential.
- The project is being implemented by the Andhra Pradesh State Fibernet Limited (APSFL), which has now become the largest state government-owned telecommunication company in the country. Under the project, the APSFL has already laid over 23,000 km of the total 55,000 km long Optical Fibre Cable in the 13 districts of Andhra Pradesh.
- The first phase targets the households, while in the second phase, the project aims to roll out the services for all the 9000-gram panchayats from mandal headquarters, which are already connected through the BSNL network.

Lists and Indexes

India ranks 5th in list of countries with highest NPA levels: CARE Ratings

- India has the highest level of non-performing assets (NPA) among BRICS countries and is ranked fifth on a list of countries with the highest levels of NPAs, a report by CARE Ratings revealed.
- The only countries ranked higher than India on the list are Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Ireland. All these countries, along with Spain, are commonly referred to as PIIGS, and have been victims of sovereign debt crises in recent years.

- Spain is the only PIIGS country ranked lower than India on the list, with an NPA ratio of 5.28 percent. At 9.85 percent, India's NPA ratio is over 400 basis points higher.
- In its report, CARE Ratings said that 'the seriousness of the NPA problem can be gauged by the absolute level of impaired assets in the system. Ever since the RBI had spoken of asset quality recognition (AQR) in 2015, there was an increase in the pace of recognizing these assets'.

Here are highlights from the Report

- The four major economic drivers in the developed world, UK, US, Japan and Germany had NPA ratios less than 2%.
- Within the emerging market economies (EMEs), China, Argentina and Chile had low ratios of between 1-2%.
- Within the developed countries, France had a higher NPA ratio of 3.41%.
- Brazil and South Africa, which are part of the BRICS Group of nations, had moderately high ratios of 3.69% and 2.83%, respectively.
- India's NPA ratio (which excludes the restructured assets which are around 2% higher than NPA) is one of the highest in the group.
- The countries with higher NPA ratios than India are part of the PIIGS group- Portugal, Greece, Italy, Ireland.
- Spain had a lower number at 5.28%.

Appointments

Yamaha India appoints Motofumi Shitara as chairman

- Leading manufacturer of motorcycles, Yamaha Motor India group on Thursday announced the completion of tenure and departure of Hiroaki Fujita, chairman, Yamaha Motor India group of Companies and Masaki Asano, MD, Yamaha Motor India Sales Pvt. Ltd.
- In order to strengthen Yamaha Motor's business in India, effective from January 1, Motofumi Shitara will be taking over as the chairman of Yamaha Motor India Group of Companies.
- He will also hold the position of Managing Director of Yamaha Motor India Pvt. Ltd. and Managing Director of Yamaha Motor India Sales Pvt. Ltd.
- Moreover, Hirokazu Yoshimitsu moved up the charts in Yamaha Motor India Sales Pvt. Ltd. from the current role of executive vice president to the director.

Ex-soccer star George Weah elected Liberia president by wide margin

- Former FIFA World Player of the Year George Weah has been elected Liberia's new president by a wide margin as the West African nation faces its first democratic transfer of power in more than 70 years.

- Vice President Joseph Boakai conceded on Friday, congratulating the ex-soccer star. With more than 98 percent of votes counted, Weah received 61.5 percent of the ballots while Boakai received 38.5 percent.
- Africa's first female president, Nobel Peace Prize winner Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, is stepping aside after two terms at the head of the nation founded by freed American slaves. She led the country from back-to-back civil wars and saw it through a deadly Ebola outbreak that killed nearly 5,000 Liberians but was criticized for not better tackling corruption.

Sports

Indian Grandmaster Viswanathan Anand Wins World Rapid Chess Championship

- Indian Grandmaster Viswanathan Anand has regained the World Rapid Chess Championship after defeating Russia's Vladimir Fedoseev in the tie-break play-off.
- Anand, a former world champion, outclassed World No. 1 Magnus Carlsen in the ninth round of tournament and was placed joint second at the start of the final five rounds.
- He then defeated Fedoseev 2-0 in a two-game tie-break after a three-way tie with the Russian and Ian Nepomniachtchi at 10.5 points each from a possible 15.
- The Indian has claimed the title by remaining unbeaten in the championship with six wins and nine draws.
- The win for Anand has come after a tough year. The 48-year-old had earlier failed to qualify for the Candidates Tournament to decide the challenger for the World Championship match against Carlsen and then finished last in the London Chess Classic.

World

Turkey, Russia signs loan agreement for S-400 missile system purchase

- Turkey and Russia on Friday signed a loan agreement for the purchase of S-400 Triumf anti-aircraft weapon systems.
- According to the Tass news agency, the loan deal came after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on September 12 said Ankara had signed an agreement with Moscow on the acquisition of S-400 systems and also made a deposit for them.
- On November 2, the General Director of state corporation of Russian firm Rostec, Sergey Chemezov said the contract exceeds USD 2 billion.
- The S-400 Triumf long-range anti-aircraft missile system is used to destroy aircraft, winged and ballistic missiles, including medium-range missiles, and may be used to destroy surface facilities.

China successfully tests country's first photovoltaic highway

- China has successfully tested the roads with solar panels with the presence of built-in wireless charging systems for electric vehicles and other sensors for drones.
- The photovoltaic highway is something of next level which incorporates technologies into roads for generating solar energy, for lighting, for improving the operation of autonomous cars, and for monitoring the condition of the road.
- China achieved this feat of having first photovoltaic highway based on home-grown technology, in the country's eastern Shandong province.
- The photovoltaic highway is built using solar panels which have a thin sheet of clear concrete on top of them, protecting the surface.
- The solar panels were designed and constructed to transfer energy to electric vehicles passing on top of them.
- The one-kilometer segment of photovoltaic highway covers up a surface area of 5,875 square meters (about 63,238 square feet).

Awards and Honors

Chola MS honoured with Golden Peacock Award for risk management

- Cholamandalam MS General Insurance Company Limited has been awarded the prestigious "Golden Peacock Award for Risk Management" for the year 2017.
- The Golden Peacock Awards were instituted in 1991 by the Institute of Directors (IOD), now regarded as a benchmark of Corporate Excellence worldwide, are presented annually to recognise the best corporates through competition.
- Chola MS has been awarded the Winner under the Sector - "Insurance (General)", at the Awards presentation ceremony as part of the "Global Convention on Corporate Ethics and Risk Management" held recently at Hotel InterContinental, Singapore. The other winners in this category include State Bank of India, ONGC Videsh and L&T Finance Holdings.