

Current Affairs related to Finance and Banking

RBI rationalises charges on debit card transactions

The Reserve Bank of India, In order to promote digital payments, came out with differentiated merchant discount rates (MDR) for debit card transactions, prescribing separate caps for small and large traders.

The shift is aimed at giving a boost to the digital transactions in the country, as the government is not seeing any expected result despite giving a major thrust to digital payments.

It is expected that introduction of differentiated MDR will help increase the acceptance of debit card usage and it will also bring down the cost of transactions for small merchants.

MDR is the rate charged to a merchant by a bank for providing debit and credit card services.

According to the latest notification, MDR charges for small merchants with a yearly turnover of up to Rs 20 lakh has been fixed at 0.40 percent with a cap of two hundred rupees per transaction by debit cards through Point of Sale (PoS) machines or online transactions.

However, the charge will be 0.30 percent subject to a cap of two hundred rupees per transaction for accepting payments via QR (quick response) code based transactions.

If the yearly turnover of a merchant is more than Rs 20 lakh, 0.90 percent MDR charges would be applicable with a cap of Rs 1000 per transaction. And the charges will be 0.80% with a similar cap if the transaction is through QR code.

These guidelines will come into effect from 1st January 2018, and it would be the responsibility of the banks to make sure the MDR levied on the merchant does not go beyond the prescribed cap.

Current Affairs related to India

Indian, Italy sign new MoU for cooperation in Agriculture and Phytosanitary issues

India and Italy signed a new Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for cooperation in Agriculture and Phytosanitary issues on 6 December 2018. The agreement will replace the one signed in 2008.

It was signed by Union Agriculture and Farmers Welfare Minister, Radha Mohan Singh and the visiting Italian Minister for Agriculture Food and Forestry Policies, H E Maurizio Martina.

India and Italy enjoy traditionally friendly and cordial relations.

India attaches great importance to the development of bilateral ties between the two countries and aims to further expand and strengthen ties between the two countries in various areas including in the Agriculture sector.

The agreement basically aims to provide a good framework for cooperation in the field of agriculture and phytosanitary issues.

Some potential areas for cooperation include agriculture machinery, training, investment, institutional linkages, precision farming, cattle breeding and fisheries.

India, Cuba sign MoU for enhanced cooperation in health sector

India and Cuba on 6 December 2017 signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for enhanced cooperation in the health sector.

The MoU was signed by Union Health Minister JP Nadda and Public Health Minister of Cuba Dr Roberto Tomas Morales Ojeda in the presence of senior officers from the Health Ministry and the visiting high level delegation from Cuba.

Speaking on the occasion, the Union Minister stated that the relations between the two nations are historical and have been based on the shared values of equality and justice, common aspirations and convergence of interests on global issues.

The pact is significant for exchanges in the health sector and to develop institutional framework for cooperation in the health sector between the two countries.

One potential identified area of cooperation is pharmaceutical and biotechnology, as Cuba has made remarkable strides in the field of bio-technology and pharmaceuticals.

Unesco honours India's Kumbh Mela with 'intangible cultural heritage' tag

India's Kumbh Mela has been recognised by Unesco as an "intangible cultural heritage of humanity", a tweet posted today by the international organisation said.

The Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage under the UN body inscribed Kumbh Mela on the "Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity" at its 12th session in Jeju, South Korea. The meeting, which opened on December 4, will end on December 9.

Kumbh Mela, considered the world's largest congregation of religious pilgrims, joins new elements from Botswana, Colombia, Venezuela, Mongolia, Morocco, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates on the list.

The inscription of Kumbh Mela was recommended by the expert body which examines in detail nominations submitted by the Member States.

The Committee also took note of the fact that knowledge and skills related to Kumbh Mela are transmitted through the Guru-Shishya parampara (teacher-student relationship) by way of saints and sadhus teaching their disciples about traditional rituals and chants.

Current Affairs around the world

International Solar Alliance comes into force

The International Solar Alliance (ISA) on 6 December 2017 became a treaty-based international inter-governmental organisation following the ratification by Guinea on 6 November 2017.

Guinea was the 15th country to ratify the agreement. And as per the rules, ISA would become an international legal body after the ratification by 15 countries.

The other 14 countries were India, Bangladesh, Comoros, Fiji, France, Ghana, Mauritius, Nauru, Niger, Mali, Seychelles, Somalia, South Sudan and Tuvalu.

Headquartered at Gurugram, ISA aims at large scale deployment of solar energy through better harmonization and aggregation of demand from solar rich countries lying between the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn.

Till date, 46 countries have signed and 19 countries have ratified the Framework Agreement of International Solar Alliance:

US President recognises Jerusalem as capital of Israel, promises to move US embassy

The President of United States on 6 December 2017 recognised Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, keeping with his long overdue campaign promise.

Trump has also announced the plan of relocating the US embassy, which is currently based in Tel Aviv, to Jerusalem, a move that is being opposed by many nations across the world including some of America's closest allies.

Trump made the announcement through a live television address from the White House. Citing a 1995 law, the Jerusalem Embassy Act, compelling the president make the move absent national security risks, Trump said the time had come to recognise what everyone already knows to be true. "Jerusalem is the capital the Jewish people established in ancient times," he said. "Today Jerusalem is the seat of Israel's government," he added.

He also directed the State Department to immediately begin the process of construction of US embassy in Jerusalem.

The International community including the Arab world and countries such as France, Germany, Britain feel that Trump's decision may have violent repercussions and that the future of the Israeli-Palestinian issue must be determined through direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians themselves.

Trump stated that US too supports such a negotiated settlement and is very much in favour of a two-state solution, provided that it is agreed to by both the sides.