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4th Resilient Cities Asia-Pacific (RCAP) Congress 2019

- The 4th Resilient Cities Asia-Pacific (RCAP) Congress 2019 organized by the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) in association with South Delhi Municipal Corporation witnessed the presence of more than 200 delegates from around 30 countries.
- It will offer cities and regions from Asia-Pacific a variety of innovative solutions that build resilience to climate change at the subnational level.
- The event will offer a combination of high-level plenaries and technical sessions on the implementation and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and the New Urban Agenda of 2016. CDKN will explore new approaches on Water Energy Food Nexus, climate finance and understanding the knowledge brokering concept.
- The 4th Resilient Cities Asia-Pacific 2019 Congress is being organised by ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability and hosted by South Delhi Municipal Corporation on 15th to 17th of April 2019 in New Delhi, India.
- It will offer cities & regions from Asia-Pacific a variety of innovative solutions that build resilience to climate change at the subnational level.
- The event will offer a combination of high-level plenaries and technical sessions on the implementation and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and the New Urban Agenda of 2016, while at the same time bringing together experts and practitioners who will share their experiences and encourage cities to take actions on

resilience.

- With the SDGs developed in 2015, most nations are preparing targets to contribute to the SDGs and local governments are key players in this process.
- They are also major implementing partners for the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) as per the Paris Agreement of November 2016, in which climate adaptation is an important and integral part. The upcoming revision of the NDCs in 2020 provides an opportune moment to take stock of resilience activities being carried out by the local governments in the region.
- The RCAP 2019 will bring together national and local governments to discuss the opportunities and mechanisms of implementing the SDGs and NDCs. The outcomes of the RCAP 2019 will be presented in the NDC Conference to be held in Berlin in June this year.
- The main target of the event would be local governments in the Asia Pacific region. We are expecting about 200 participants, including at least 50 mayors from different cities in the region. Besides, representatives of international organisations such as the UNEP, UNDP, UN-HABITAT, UNESCAP, UNISDR, UNIDO will join the event. Bilateral and multilateral funding agencies such as SDC, EU, IDRC, World Bank, ADB, GIZ, Rockefeller Foundation, OECD, and others would join the event.

Conference Objectives

The proposed objectives of the conference are:

- To share and learn about good urban resilience practices and showcase innovative ideas, solutions and initiatives
- To provide local governments with exposure and access to tools and processes that help mainstream resilience considerations into policy and practice
- To provide a networking platform to promote concerted and coordinated action in Asia among the main players in the field of urban resilience
- To explore tangible opportunities for creating partnerships between local governments and the private sector
- To bring together funders and cities and facilitate the match-making between available financial resources and current cities' needs.

Proposed Themes

The proposed themes that have been identified for RCAP 2019 are:

- Good governance and resilience
 - Integrated climate resilience planning to manage risks and vulnerabilities
 - Climate knowledge brokering
 - Nature based solutions to adaptation
 - Sustainable infrastructure development and green growth
 - Urban nexus
 - Opportunities for regional networking and collaboration
 - Financing mechanisms for Asian cities.
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Government E Marketplace

- Government e Marketplace (GeM), the national public procurement portal offering end to end solution for all procurement needs of Central and State govt. departments and PSUs has closed the FY 2018-19 on a high note.
- The year witnessed a four-fold increase in total value of transactions on the portal and doubling of number of sellers in the marketplace. There has also been an overall growth in other dimensions like number of categories, products and buyers. Despite such phenomenal growth in transactions, average rejection rate of supplies remained below one percent, which is proof of high quality of products/services offered on the portal.

Significant Milestones achieved in FY 2018-19:

- Grossed over Rs. 23,000 crores in Gross Merchandise Value (GMV) through more than 17 lakh transactions on the platform.
- Made over 8.8 lakh products available on its platform through a network of over 2 lakh sellers and service providers.
- These products and services are being bought by over 34,000 government organisations
- (Central, State Governments and PSUs) registered on the platform.
- 42% of transactions by volume are done with MSMEs registered on

the platform.

- Buyers from across 36 States and Union Territories (UTs) are buying on the platform. 24 States and UTs have signed a formal MoU with GeM to adopt it as the core procurement portal in their respective territories.
- Average savings of more than 25% achieved across transactions on the platform.
- Integration with Aadhaar, UdyogAadhaar, Ministry of Corporate Affairs21 (MCA21), Public Financial Management System (PFMS), PAN, GSTN, Controller General of Defence Accounts (CGDA), Railways, and Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) empanelled rating agencies for robust registration process.
- Training of over 1.3 lakh buyers and sellers has been conducted across 28 States and UTs to enable them to seamlessly operate the platform.
- MoUs have been signed with 12 banks for payment integration (State GeM Pool Account-SGPA, Electronic Performance Bank Guarantee-ePBG, Electronic Earnest Money Deposit-eEMD) to facilitate a cashless, contactless and paperless paymentsystem on the platform.
- MoU signed with MSME Ministry, Common Service Centers (CSC) and industrial associations (CII, FICCI, AIMA, MAIT, FICCI, PHD Chamber of Commerce & Industry, IIA and ASSOCHAM. for facilitating training, capacity building and on boarding of manufactures and vendors across the country.
- Integration with Quality Council of India (QCI) for ensuring quality compliances of the
- products and services offered through GeM.
- Traffic on GeM website has increased by 50% in FY 2018-19 Vs. 2017-18.

Key Highlights:

- Apart from the States, UT, Central Ministries and CPSU events, 18 dedicated theme-based events, which included technology architecture, services, credit facilities, legal framework, localization etc. were held to steer the future roadmap for GeM and strategize exponential growth.
- As a part of inclusive agenda, another special initiative was launched to enable Women Entrepreneurs and Women led Self Help Groups to

showcase and sell their products on GeM. The initiative is aptly named as 'Womaniya'.

- Another programme like SWAYATT- an initiative to promote Start-ups, Women and Youth Advantage Through e-Transactions, was launched in February 2019.
 - In association with Start -up India, GeM Start-up Runway has been initiated to facilitate Start-ups in selling innovative products and services to government buyers.
 - Since its inception on 9th August 2016, GeM has transformed public procurement in the country by leveraging technology and making procurement contactless, paperless, and cashless.
 - GeM facilitates procurement at the right price, right quality and right quantity in a transparent and efficient manner. The platform reduces manual process inefficiencies and human interventions in procurement and enables increased coverage, access, and efficiency of faceless standardised public procurement.
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Himachal Governor orders officials to act

Why in news?

Himachal Pradesh Governor Acharya Devvrat directed officials to take necessary action after a Dalit family cremated an elderly woman in a jungle in Kullu after upper caste people allegedly did not let them use the village crematorium.

Social Discrimination:

- The Governor took cognisance of the matter after a delegation of Sri Ravidas Dharma Sabha, led by its president Karam Chand Bhatia, brought the matter to his attention, he added.
- The alleged incident had taken place in **Fozal valley** of Kullu district. An elderly woman, a resident of Dhara village, died after prolonged illness.

- Her grandson, Tape Ram, has alleged that when the funeral procession reached the public crematorium of the village, some upper caste men stopped them.
 - A video is making the rounds on social media in which Tape Ram is seen recording his statement while his grandmother is being cremated in the backdrop.
 - Mr. Ram can be heard saying, "They (upper caste men) said we shall be responsible if anything bad happens due to wrath of the deity. So, we brought the body to nearby nullah and cremated it."
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C-295 plane deal

Why in news?

The Indian Air Force (IAF) has several proposals to be put up before the **Defence Acquisition Council (DAC)** when it meets in June after the Lok Sabha elections. Among them is the long-delayed deal for **C-295 transport aircraft** which are meant to replace the ageing Avro fleet.

Deal under Process:

- Negotiations for the C-295 deal have been completed. However, the deal needs clearance from the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) as there is a change from earlier parameters.
- However, there is no DAC meeting scheduled due to the ongoing elections. The next DAC meeting will be held in June. So, we will push the deal at that time," the official added.
- The other major IAF deals pending approval are **the Acceptance of Necessity (AoN)** for 114 fighter jets and the fresh proposal for six mid-air refuellers cancelled earlier.
- The IAF has **56 Avro transport aircraft** which are in urgent need of replacement. Under the present deal, 16 will be built by a foreign Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM) and the remaining 40 to be built in the country by an Indian manufacturer under transfer of technology.
- The sole bid by **Airbus and Tata with the C-295 aircraft** was

approved by the DAC in May 2015, but the contractual negotiations have been repeatedly delayed. The Request For Proposal (RFP) was issued to global firms in May 2013.

- This deal has become even more critical as a separate project to jointly co-develop and produce a **Medium Transport Aircraft** (MTA) of 20 tonnes **with Russia** to replace the An-32s in service was scrapped after initial design discussions.
 - The An-32s which are the workhorse of the IAF are currently being upgraded under a \$400 mn deal finalised with Antonov state corporation of Ukraine in 2009.
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Canada removes Khalistani extremism from terror report

Why in news?

Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh said that Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau administration's decision to remove all references to Khalistani extremism in its 2018 report on terrorist threats was a threat to Indian and global security.

Against India's Interests:

- Capt. Amarinder said that ruling Canadian Liberal Party's knee-jerk decision was clearly aimed at protecting its political interests in an election year, which he said could have serious consequences for Indo-Canadian relations in the long run.
- Capt. Amarinder pointed out that he himself had given proof to the Canadian Prime Minister, during the latter's India visit, of his country's soil being used to spread the separatist Khalistani ideology against a friendly country.
- Mr. Trudeau had been informed of Khalistani activists being involved in financing terror activities in India from Canada, said the Chief Minister.
- Pointing to the well-known fact that Mr. Trudeau's party was

inundated by such activists and separatists, the Chief Minister dubbed the erasure of the various references to Khalistan and Khalistani organisations from the latest threat report as an unpardonable act in the eyes of the peace-loving global community.

- Capt. Amarinder as he cautioned the Canadian government against encouraging hardliners through such actions, which he said were detrimental to the interests of both India and Canada.
 - Sikh radical group Dal Khalsa has meanwhile welcomed the removal of the reference to “Khalistani Extremism” from the **Canada Public Safety Report 2018**.
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India short of 6 lakh doctors, 2 million nurses

Why in news?

India has a shortage of an estimated 600,000 doctors and 2 million nurses, say scientists who found that the lack of staff who are properly trained in administering antibiotics is preventing patients from accessing live-saving drugs.

High out-of-pocket expenditure:

- Even when antibiotics are available, patients are often unable to afford them. High out-of-pocket medical costs to the patient are compounded by limited government spending for health services, according to the report by the U.S.-based Center for Disease Dynamics, Economics & Policy (CDDEP).
- In India, **65% of health expenditure is out-of-pocket**, and such expenditures push some 57 million people into poverty each year.

Mortality burden:

- The majority of the world’s annual **5.7 million antibiotic-treatable deaths** occur in low- and middle-income countries, where the mortality burden from treatable bacterial infections far exceeds the

estimated annual 700,000 deaths from antibiotic-resistant infections.

- Researchers at CDDEP in the U.S. conducted stakeholder interviews in Uganda, India, and Germany, and literature reviews to identify **key access barriers to antibiotics** in low-, middle-, and high-income countries. Health facilities in many of these countries are substandard.

High Shortages:

- In India, there is one government doctor for every 10,189 people (the World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends a ratio of 1:1,000), or there is a deficit of 600,000 doctors, and the nurse:patient ratio is 1:483, implying a shortage of two million nurses.
- Lack of access to antibiotics kills more people currently than does antibiotic resistance, but we have not had a good handle on why these barriers are created.
- The findings of the report show that even after the discovery of a new antibiotic, regulatory hurdles and substandard health facilities delay or altogether prevent widespread market entry and drug availability.

Drugs not available:

- The research shows that of 21 new antibiotics entering markets between 1999 and 2014, less than five were registered in most countries in sub-Saharan Africa.
 - Just the mere existence of an effective antibiotic does not mean that they are available in countries where they are most needed.
 - Worldwide, the irrational use of antibiotics and poor antimicrobial stewardship lead to treatment failure and propagate the spread of drug resistance which, in turn, further narrows the available array of effective antibiotics.
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UPI sets searing pace while e-wallets wobble

Why in news?

While digital payments overall have been growing strongly, people are changing the way they transact, choosing bank-to-bank methods such as the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) over other instruments such as e-wallets.

What RBI data says:

- An analysis of data from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) and some industry players from April 2018 to March 2019 shows that not only is the **UPI platform outperforming e-wallets** in terms of the value of transactions done, but it is also eating away at e-wallets' market share in specific areas such as person-to-merchant (P2M) transactions.
- Payments made on the UPI platform saw a remarkable growth of over 400% in the April to March period, from a little more than ₹27,000 crore in April 2018 to ₹1.35 lakh crore in March 2019.

Completely interoperable:

- UPI is completely interoperable and as such, it is unique in the world, where you have an interoperable system on the 'send' and 'receive' side.
- That is, one can **send money from different accounts in different banks and receive it in different accounts in different banks**. It was a solution designed to be mobile-first, and it shaped that ecosystem because customer adoption of mobile was growing very strongly.
- The rapid growth of UPI is accompanied by a reasonably strong growth in the value of transactions done using e-wallets, but the latter's growth has not taken off much following the fillip it received in the aftermath of demonetisation in November 2016.
- E-wallets saw total transaction value grow 210% in the November 2016 to March 2017 period, but this has since slowed to 123% in the April 2018 to February 2019 period.
- In absolute terms as well, transactions done using e-wallets in February 2019 (₹16,497 crore) are only 15% of the size of the total transaction value on the UPI platform.

Diverse use cases:

- India is a diverse country in terms of customers and use cases. UPI has certainly grown tremendously, but every instrument has its own space because of the diverse uses.
 - There would be millions of customers who would want to start their digital payments journey using a wallet.
 - UPI is a great solution, but it has some hurdles to adoption such as linking phone numbers, linking bank account, entering debit card number, etc. Many people might want to start with simpler instruments and then transition to more complex ones.
 - While some of the growth can be attributed to the low base, the astronomical increase in transactions has meant that UPI is now competing seriously with the incumbent forms of digital payments such as credit cards and debit cards.
 - For example, while credit card transactions in April 2018 (₹45,174 crore) stood at about 1.5 times the UPI transactions by value in that month, by February 2019 the value of credit card transactions (₹48,859 crore) was less than half of those done on the UPI platform.
 - Debit cards are far more popular than credit cards as can be seen from the fact that the value of debit card transactions stood at ₹3.05 lakh crore in February 2019.
 - Here too, UPI is fast catching up. The value of UPI transactions was only 8.7% the quantum of debit card transactions in April 2018. This proportion climbed to 35% by February 2019.
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World's largest plane makes first test flight

Why in news?

The world's largest aircraft took off over the **Mojave Desert in California**, the first flight for the carbon-composite plane built by **Stratolaunch Systems Corp**, started by late Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen, as the company enters the lucrative private space market.

The Roc:

- The **white airplane called Roc**, which has a wingspan the length of an American football field and is powered by six engines on a twin fuselage, took to the air shortly before 7 a.m. Pacific time (1400 GMT) and stayed aloft for more than two hours before landing safely back at the Mojave Air and Space Port as a crowd of hundreds of people cheered.
- Today's flight furthers our mission to provide a flexible alternative to ground launched systems, the company said.
- The plane is designed to drop rockets and other space vehicles weighing up to 500,000 pounds at an altitude of 35,000 feet and has been billed by the company as making satellite deployment as easy as booking an airline flight
- Allen, who co-founded Microsoft with Bill Gates in 1975, announced in 2011 that he had formed the privately funded Stratolaunch.

Next Projects:

- The company seeks to cash in on higher demand in coming years for vessels that can put satellites in orbit, competing in the United States with other space entrepreneurs and industry stalwarts such as Elon Musk's **SpaceX and United Launch Alliance** - a partnership between Boeing and Lockheed Martin.
- Stratolaunch has said that it intends to launch its first rockets from the Roc in 2020 at the earliest.
- Allen died in October 2018 while suffering from non-Hodgkins' lymphoma, just months after the plane's development was unveiled.

Yangtze giant softshell turtle

Why in news?

The last known female Yangtze giant softshell turtle has died in **China**, according to Chinese state media, potentially dooming the species to extinction.

Towards extinction:

- The female turtle, believed to be more than 90 years old, died more than 24 hours after local staff, together with international experts, attempted to artificially inseminate her.
 - There were no complications from the attempted artificial insemination, but that a research team comprised of domestic and international experts would conduct an autopsy to determine the cause of death
 - The Wildlife Conservations Society (WCS) calls the Yangtze giant softshell turtle the **world's most critically endangered turtle species**, killed off due to **hunting as well as habitat destruction**.
 - Now, there are only three left in the world, according to the Suzhou Daily.
 - The Suzhou Zoo houses a male Yangtze giant softshell turtle. The other two live in Vietnam, but their genders are unknown. Both live in the wild, according to a report published by The New Yorker in December.
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Oil consuming bacteria found at sea bottom

Why in news?

Scientists have discovered a unique oil eating bacterium in the **Mariana Trench, the deepest part of the earth's oceans**, a finding that may pave way for sustainable ways to clean up oil spills.

In an expedition, organised by marine explorer and film director James Cameron, researchers collected samples from the trench. In the samples, they found microorganisms that eat compounds similar to those in oil and then use it for fuel.



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