

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (DCA)

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INTERNAL MIGRATION IN INDIA

Context

- In India, **internal migration** plays a crucial role in shaping **both urban and rural economies**.

Migration in India

- Close to **85%** of the migration has been within the state.
- According to NSSO surveys, rural-urban migration is the most dominant form of migration and comprises 25.2% of all internal migration in India, followed by urban-urban (22.9%), urban-rural (17.5%), and rural-rural (4.4%).
- According to the Migration in India (2020-21) survey, **29% of Indians are migrants, which is nearly 400 million**.
- **Slow Urbanisation Rate:** Economists have pointed out that urbanisation rate in India is lower than in most countries.
 - ♦ According to World Bank data, 35% of Indians lived in cities as of 2021 as compared to 63% in China and 43% in lower-middle-income countries.
 - ♦ India's slower urbanisation rate suggests **limited internal mobility, despite urban economic growth**.

Who are Migrants?

- The Census defines two types of migrants in India – **migration by place of birth and migration by last residence**.
 - ♦ A migrant by the last residence is one who resides at a place different from the place of enumeration continuously for at least six months prior to the migration.
- **Between 1991 and 2011**, the share of migrants in rural India **increased from 26.1% to 32.5%**.
 - ♦ while in urban India, the same **increased from 32.3% to 48.4%**.
- **Reasons:**
 - ♦ **Migration for marriage** has been one of the most important reasons for migration and most of these migrants are generally women.
 - ♦ **The trend for migration for work or employment** reflects that such migrants are **mostly youth**, indicating the role of the demographic dividend.
 - ♦ It is also segmented on caste, tribe, religious, and regional identities.

Nature of Internal Migration in India

- **Rural to Urban Movement:** The most common form, driven by the search for better employment, education, and living standards in cities.

- **Economic Factors:** Migration for better job opportunities, particularly in agriculture, industry, and construction.
- **Seasonal and Temporary Migration:** Movement of labor during peak agricultural seasons or temporary employment opportunities.
- **Interstate and Intrastate Migration:** People migrate within and between states, seeking better opportunities or living conditions.
- **Return Migration:** Migration back to the place of origin due to family reasons, economic changes, or better opportunities at home.
- **Natural Disasters and Displacement:** Migration due to calamities like floods, droughts, or earthquakes.
- **Educational and Marital Migration:** Students moving for higher education and individuals migrating for marriage.

Internal Migration in India Faces Several Challenges:

- **Economic Issues:** Migrants often end up in low-paying, unskilled jobs with poor working conditions and are vulnerable to exploitation.
- **Poor Living Conditions:** Many migrants live in overcrowded slums with limited access to basic services like healthcare, water, and sanitation.
- **Social Exclusion:** Migrants face discrimination and cultural barriers, hindering their social integration.
- **Legal Challenges:** Migrants often lack proper identification, which limits their access to social security and government schemes.
- **Strain on Urban Infrastructure:** Rapid urban migration puts pressure on housing, transportation, and resources in cities.
- **Impact on Rural Areas:** Rural areas face depopulation, labor shortages, and economic decline due to out-migration.

Government Initiatives

- **Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY):** This life insurance scheme offers Rs. 2 lakh to the family of a migrant worker in the event of their death.
- **PM SVANidhi Scheme:** It provides street vendors, including migrant workers, with microloans up to Rs. 10,000 to help them restart or expand their businesses.
- **Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan (PM-SYM):** The PM-SYM pension scheme is available to workers aged 18-40, providing a monthly pension of Rs. 3000 once they turn 60.
- **eShram Portal: A One-Stop Solution:** It was launched by Ministry of Labour & Employment

in 2021, and more than 30 crore workers have already registered themselves on eShram in a span of 3 years.

- ♦ It is launched to simplify the registration process for unorganised workers and facilitate their access to government welfare schemes.
- **One Nation, One Ration Card (ONORC) Scheme:** This scheme allows migrants to access food grains and subsidies from the Public Distribution System (PDS) from any ration shop in the country, regardless of their place of origin.
- **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY):** This initiative aims to provide affordable housing for the urban poor, including migrant workers, through subsidies and financial support.

Way Ahead

- **Improve Skill Development:** Expand skill training programs to enhance the employability of migrants.
- **Social Security and Welfare:** Strengthen social security schemes for migrants, such as healthcare, housing, and insurance, ensuring they are portable across states.
- **Enhanced Legal Protection:** Establish a national registry for migrant workers to ensure they are recognized and have access to legal protections, fair wages, and workplace rights.
- **Promote Rural Development:** Create job opportunities and improve infrastructure in rural areas to reduce the pressure of rural-to-urban migration.

Source: IE

ANNA CHAKRA AND SCAN PORTAL

Context

- The Union government recently launched the **Anna Chakra** and the **Subsidy Claim Application for NFSA (SCAN) portal**, ushering in reforms to modernize the Public Distribution System (PDS) and streamline subsidy claim processes.

What is Anna Chakra?

- It is developed by the Department of Food and Public Distribution in collaboration with the **World Food Programme (WFP)** and IIT Delhi's Foundation for Innovation and Technology Transfer (FITT).
- It employs advanced algorithms to **optimize food grain movement across the supply chain**, involving farmers, transporters, warehouses, and Fair Price Shops (FPS).

Key features of Anna Chakra

- **Route Optimization:** Leveraging algorithms to identify efficient routes, minimizing transportation time and costs.
- **Integration with Railways and Logistics Platforms:** Integrated with the **Freight Operations Information System (FOIS)** of the Railways and the **PM Gati Shakti** platform, which maps geo-locations of FPSs and warehouses.
- **Environmental Benefits:** Reduced transportation-related emissions lower the carbon footprint, contributing to sustainable development.

SCAN Portal

- The Subsidy Claim Application for **NFSA (SCAN) Portal** aims to simplify and expedite the subsidy claim process for states under the NFSA.
- **Key features include:**
 - ♦ **Single-Window Submission:** Ensures streamlined claim submission by states.
 - ♦ **Automated Workflow:** Rule-based automation of claim scrutiny, approval, and settlement.
 - ♦ **Efficiency in Subsidy Settlement:** Enables real-time monitoring and reduces delays in fund disbursal.

Other Initiatives for Food Security

- **Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY):** Beneficiaries receive 5 kg of wheat or rice free every month.
 - ♦ Initially launched during the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, it has been extended for five years from January 2024.
- **Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY):** Entitled households receive 35 kg of grains monthly at highly subsidized rates—₹3/kg for rice and ₹2/kg for wheat—irrespective of family size.
- **Integrated Management of Public Distribution System (IM-PDS):** Facilitates **One Nation One Ration Card (ONORC)**, allowing beneficiaries to access food grains across India, improving migrant workers' access to food security.
- **Decentralized Procurement (DCP) Scheme:** Encourages states to procure and distribute food grains directly, reducing logistics costs and ensuring localized management of food security.

Challenges with the PDS System

- **Diversion of Food Grains:** A significant portion of food grains is leaked during transportation or diverted to the black market.
- **Inclusion and Exclusion Errors:** Non-eligible households receive benefits, burdening the system.

- ◆ Genuine beneficiaries are excluded due to flaws in the identification process.
- **Corruption at Fair Price Shops (FPS)**, such as under-weighting food grains, selling poor-quality goods, or charging higher prices, undermines the system's effectiveness.
- **Inadequate warehousing facilities** lead to spoilage and wastage of food grains.

Way Forward

- **Infrastructure Expansion:** Strengthen storage and transportation facilities to support the growing scale of operations.
- **Technological Integration:** Leverage artificial intelligence and blockchain for real-time tracking and reducing inefficiencies.
- **Sustainable Practices:** Promote green logistics and energy-efficient transportation solutions to reduce the carbon footprint further.

Source: PIB

BITCOIN'S SURGE TO NEW HEIGHTS

Context

- Bitcoin crossed \$100,000 for the first time, post US election rally.

What is Bitcoin?

- Bitcoin was introduced **in 2009** by an anonymous creator known as **Satoshi Nakamoto**.
- It's the **world's first decentralized cryptocurrency**, using **blockchain technology** to secure and verify transactions.
- The Bitcoin network is **public and open-source**, meaning anyone can participate.

Key Features of Bitcoin

- **Decentralization:** Bitcoin operates on a decentralized network of computers (nodes), meaning no single entity controls it.
- **Blockchain Technology:** Bitcoin transactions are stored in a public, immutable ledger called the blockchain. This ensures transparency and security.
- **Limited Supply:** There will only ever be 21 million Bitcoins, which makes it a deflationary asset.
- **Mining:** New Bitcoins are created through a process called mining, where miners use computational power to solve complex mathematical problems and verify transactions. This process also secures the network.
- **Security and Cryptography:** Bitcoin uses strong cryptographic techniques to secure transactions, ensuring that the identity of users and the integrity of the blockchain are protected.

Factors Responsible for the Change in Prices of Bitcoin

- **Limited Supply:** Bitcoin has a fixed supply of 21 million coins, which can lead to price increases if demand grows.
- **Investor Sentiment:** Positive news or developments, such as institutional adoption or favorable regulations, can drive prices up, while negative news, such as government crackdowns or security breaches, can lead to price declines.
- **Tax Policies:** How countries decide to tax Bitcoin transactions or gains can also affect demand and pricing.
- **Security Issues:** Hacks, vulnerabilities, or concerns about Bitcoin's security can negatively impact the price.
- **Price Manipulation:** Large players, like "whales," can manipulate Bitcoin's price by making large buys or sells, affecting its price in the short term.
- **Geopolitical Events:** Events like wars, political instability, or major economic sanctions can lead to price fluctuations, as Bitcoin might be seen as a safe haven.

Indian Government's stand on Cryptocurrency

- **The Reserve Bank of India (RBI)**, has long recommended a complete ban on all crypto, warning that it has the potential to **destabilize the country's monetary and fiscal stability**.
- Despite having no regulatory framework for crypto, the Indian government had introduced a new tax regime, taxing crypto income at 30% and a 1% tax deducted at source (TDS) on crypto transactions.

Emerging Issues of Cryptocurrency Regulations in India:

- **High Taxation Rates:** The government can consider revising these rates to make them more competitive and encourage investment while ensuring compliance.
- **Regulatory Ambiguity:** The absence of a comprehensive regulatory framework creates uncertainty for businesses and investors, affecting long-term planning.
- **Integration with Traditional Financial Systems:** The integration of cryptocurrencies into traditional financial systems remains challenging due to concerns about volatility and systemic risk.
- **Global Regulatory Disparities:** Differences in regulatory approaches across countries create confusion and complicate international operations for crypto businesses.

Way Forward

- Financial institutions can **explore partnerships with crypto firms** to develop hybrid products that mitigate risks while promoting innovation.
- International regulatory bodies can work towards **harmonizing regulations to facilitate smoother cross-border transactions**.
- **The finalization of the Cryptocurrency and Regulation of Official Digital Currency Bill** could be expedited to provide the much-needed clarity and stability that businesses and investors seek.
- India can position itself as a **leader in the crypto space**, contributing to the broader vision of a New India that embraces technological innovation and financial inclusion.

Source: IE

WORLD SOIL DAY 2024

Context

- World Soil Day, celebrated annually on December 5, raises global awareness about the critical role of soil in sustaining life.

World Soil Day

- **Background:** The concept of World Soil Day was introduced by the **International Union of Soil Sciences (IUSS) in 2002**.
 - ♦ The FAO Conference unanimously endorsed World Soil Day in June **2013** and in December 2013, the **UN General Assembly** responded by designating 5 December 2014 as the first official World Soil Day.
- **Theme for 2024:** Caring for Soils: Measure, Monitor, Manage.

Importance of Soil

- **Foundation of Life:** Soil supports plant growth by providing essential nutrients, water, and oxygen, forming the base of terrestrial food chains.
- **Ecosystem Services:** Acts as a natural water filter, removing pollutants and replenishing groundwater.
- **Climate Regulation:** Plays a significant role in carbon sequestration, mitigating climate change by storing atmospheric carbon dioxide.
- **Biodiversity Hotspot:** Soil houses diverse organisms, from microbes to insects, which facilitate nutrient cycling and enhance plant health.

What is Soil Degradation?

- Soil degradation refers to the **decline in soil health** due to factors such as poor land management,

deforestation, overgrazing, urbanization, and overuse of chemical fertilizers and pesticides.

- The **FAO** estimates that **33%** of global soils are moderately to severely degraded.
 - ♦ **In India** 90% of topsoil lacks nitrogen and phosphorus, while 50% is deficient in potassium.

Challenges to Soil Health

- **Nutrient Loss:** Unchecked erosion has led to the depletion of fertile topsoil, affecting crop yields.
- **Excessive Chemical Use:** Overuse of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides has degraded soil quality, disrupted microbial activity, and reduced organic carbon levels.
- **Urbanization:** Rapid urban expansion has encroached upon arable land, further reducing soil availability for agriculture.
- **Climate Change:** Erratic rainfall patterns and rising temperatures exacerbate soil degradation.

Government Initiatives for Soil Conservation

- **Soil Health Card Scheme:** It provides farmers with soil nutrient status reports to encourage balanced fertilizer use and improve productivity.
- **Promotion of Organic Farming:** Initiatives like Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) encourage organic farming practices to maintain soil health.
- **National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA):** It focuses on enhancing soil health through integrated farming systems and agroforestry practices.

Global Initiatives

- **Global Soil Partnership (GSP):** It is an FAO-led initiative to improve global soil governance and promote sustainable soil management.
- **United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD):** It works to prevent land degradation and promote sustainable land management globally.
 - ♦ It has a pledge for **land degradation neutrality (LDN) by 2030**.
- **4 per 1000 Initiative:** It aims to increase soil carbon stocks by 0.4% annually to combat climate change and enhance soil health.

Way Ahead

- **Integrated Soil Management:** Combine organic and chemical fertilizers to restore soil nutrients sustainably.
- **Enhanced Monitoring:** Use modern technologies such as satellite imagery and AI-based tools to monitor soil health and degradation trends.

- **Community Engagement:** Encourage local communities to adopt soil conservation techniques like contour plowing and crop rotation.

Source: DTE

OVERTOURISM: IMPACTS AND STEPS FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

In Context

- The Ministry of Tourism has approved 40 projects worth 3,295.76 crore to develop lesser-known tourism sites across 23 states in India for **preventing overtourism and sustainable tourism practices**.

What is Overtourism?

- Overtourism occurs when the number of tourists in a destination exceeds its capacity to manage them sustainably, leading to environmental degradation, cultural dilution, and poor visitor experiences.

Reasons Overtourism

- **Budget Travel:** Affordable airlines and low-cost accommodations make travel more accessible.
- **Social Media:** Influencers popularize destinations, creating a surge in visitors seeking “Instagrammable” spots.
- **Middle-Class Tourism:** Rising incomes in countries like India and China have increased international travel.
- **Seasonal Crowding:** Poor management during peak seasons exacerbates overcrowding.

Impact of Overtourism

- **Environmental Damage:**
 - ♦ **Bali:** Iconic attractions like Ubud’s rice terraces face overcrowding, soil erosion, and ecological strain.
 - ♦ **Joshimath:** Known as the “sinking town” due to land subsidence, highlighting the fragile Himalayan environment.
 - ♦ **Maasai Mara:** Overcrowded safaris disrupt wildlife behavior and damage habitats.
- **Cultural Erosion:**
 - ♦ Traditional rituals in places like Bali are often interrupted by unaware tourists.
 - ♦ Overcrowding in Goa has reduced the appeal of its authentic culture, affecting foreign tourist numbers.
- **Economic Strain:**
 - ♦ Although tourism brings revenue, the long-term costs to local infrastructure, environment, and communities often outweigh benefits.

Man Made Disasters:

- ♦ Overcrowding and improper crowd management could lead to a Stampede like situation.

Way Ahead

- **Promote Alternative Destinations:** Divert travelers to lesser-known places to reduce pressure on popular spots.
- **Implement Visitor Caps:** Introduce limits on daily or seasonal tourist numbers.
- **Spread Tourism Year-Round:** Encourage off-season travel to balance crowds.
- **Raise Awareness**

Source: IT

ISRO LAUNCHES PSLV-C59 ROCKET WITH ESA’S PROBA-3 SATELLITE

In Context

- The **PSLV-C59** carried the **Proba-3** spacecraft into a highly elliptical orbit as a dedicated commercial mission by **NewSpace India Limited (NSIL)**.
 - ♦ The **PSLV-C59/Proba-3** mission is a testament to India’s growing prowess in space technology and its increasing prominence in the global space arena.

About Proba-3 Mission (Project for Onboard Autonomy)

- **Objective:** Observe the Sun’s corona using precision formation flying—a world first.
- **Spacecraft:** The mission uses two spacecraft:
 - ♦ **Coronagraph:** Studies the Sun’s corona.
 - ♦ **Oculter:** Blocks the Sun to create artificial eclipses for better observation.

Benefits for India

- **Global Market Presence:** India holds 2-3% of the global space economy, with scope for exponential growth.
- **Economic Growth:** Increased commercial launches and the development of space-related technologies can contribute to economic growth and job creation. Over \$279 million earned from foreign satellite launches (2022).
- **Technological Advancement:** Participating in international collaborations like Proba-3 fosters technological advancement and strengthens India’s position in the global space industry.
- **Strategic Importance:** India’s growing space capabilities enhance its strategic autonomy and its role in international space exploration.

Key Initiatives

- **IN-SPACE:** This regulatory body plays a vital role in promoting private sector participation in the Indian space sector.
- **Indian Space Policy 2023:** The updated policy aims to further liberalize the space sector and encourage private investment and innovation.
- **Startups and SSLV:** The rise of private space startups and the development of the SSLV demonstrate India's commitment to fostering a vibrant and competitive space ecosystem.

Source: TH

NEWS IN SHORT

HORNBILL FESTIVAL**In News**

- The Hornbill Festival has completed 25 years.

Hornbill Festival

- **About:** Organized annually since 2000 by Nagaland state. Named after the Hornbill, a symbol of boldness and grandeur in Naga folklore.
- **Location:** Held at Kisama Heritage Village, a cultural hub preserving Naga heritage through 17 indigenous houses (Morungs) representing each tribe.
- **Significance:** Nagaland, known as the “**Land of Festivals,**” is home to 17 major tribes, each with unique festivals and traditions.
 - ♦ The festival promotes inter-tribal interaction and preserves the state's heritage.
 - ♦ Reflects India's unity in diversity, where various cultural practices coexist harmoniously to form a strong, resilient national identity.

Source: TH

69TH MAHAPARINIRVAN DIWAS**Context**

- Mahaparinirvan Diwas is observed on **December 6** annually, commemorating the **death anniversary of Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar**. He passed away in **1956**.

Contributions of Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar

- **Champion of Dalit Rights:** Ambedkar fought against the caste system and untouchability, and his efforts led to the **abolition of untouchability** in the Indian Constitution.

- ♦ He led movements like the **Mahad Satyagraha (1927)**, fighting for Dalits' right to access public water tanks and temples.
- ♦ He also organized the **Kalaram Temple Entry Satyagraha in 1930**, pushing for Dalits to enter temples from which they were previously barred.
- **Indian Constitution:** As the Chairman of the Drafting Committee, Ambedkar played a crucial role in framing India's Constitution, ensuring that it enshrined principles of equality, justice, and human rights.
- **Social Reforms:** He advocated for women's rights, education, and social justice.
 - ♦ He was instrumental in the passage of laws that promoted social equality, including the Hindu Code Bill, which aimed to provide women with rights in marriage and property.
- **Labour Rights:** He was one of the founding members of the Indian Labour Party and worked to secure labour rights for industrial workers.
 - ♦ He advocated for minimum wages, working hours, and social security for workers.

Source: HT

PARLIAMENT PASSES BHARATIYA VAYUYAN VIDHEYAK**Context**

- The Rajya Sabha passed the Bharatiya Vayuyan Vidheyak 2024, which replaced the **Aircraft Act, 1934**.
 - ♦ The Lok Sabha had already passed the Bill.

About

- The Bill retains the foundational structure of the Aircraft Act while introducing key reforms.
- BVV aims to **regulate and control the design, manufacture, maintenance, possession, use, operation, sale, export and import** of aircraft and incidental matters.

Key Changes

- **Shift in Certification Authority:** Testing for the Radiotelephone Operator's Restricted certificate, earlier under the Department of Telecom, is now assigned to the **Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA)**.
 - ♦ This streamlines the process for aviation personnel by creating a **single-window clearance system**.
- **Expanded Regulatory Scope:** The DGCA now has additional powers to oversee aircraft design and the facilities involved.

- **Enhanced Appeals Mechanism:** The Bill introduces a second level of appeal for adjudications on penalties, ensuring more comprehensive grievance redressal.

Significance

- The BVV modernizes India's aviation regulations, aligns with international standards, and ensures better efficiency in the sector.
- These changes aim to promote safety, innovation, and streamlined governance in India's growing aviation industry.

Source: TH

INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY BODY FOR SUBMARINE CABLE RESILIENCE

Context

- The **International Telecommunication Union (ITU)** and the **International Cable Protection Committee (ICPC)** have jointly launched the International Advisory Body for Submarine Cable Resilience.

What are Submarine Cables?

- **Definition:** Submarine cables are fiber optic cables laid on the ocean floor, connecting two or more landing points across countries and continents.
- **India's Role:** India is a significant player in the global submarine cable network, with 17 international cables and 14 landing stations in cities like Mumbai and Chennai.
 - ♦ As of the end of **2022**, the total lit capacity and activated capacity of these cables stood at **138.606 Tbps** and **111.111 Tbps**, respectively.
- **Significance:** Submarine cables form the backbone of the global digital economy, carrying over 99% of international data exchange.
 - ♦ They support critical services like e-commerce, financial transactions, and global communications.

Importance of the Advisory Body

- **Enhanced Resilience:** Safeguards the infrastructure critical for global connectivity.
- **Economic Stability:** Ensures uninterrupted flow of data, vital for commerce and financial systems.
- **Future Preparedness:** Addresses issues like increasing data traffic, climate risks, and infrastructure aging. The body will **meet at least twice a year** to consult on international policies.

International Cable Protection Committee (ICPC)

- The ICPC, **founded in 1958**, is a global forum for governments and commercial entities involved in the submarine cable industry.
- **Its primary mission** is to enhance the security of undersea cables by providing a platform for exchanging technical, legal, and environmental information.

Source: PIB

INDIA AND SLOVENIA ANNOUNCE FIVE-YEAR COLLABORATION PLAN

Context

- India and Slovenia have announced the finalization of a Programme of Co-operation (PoC) for the period **2024–2029**.

About

- The India-Slovenia partnership, rooted in a **1995 agreement**, has grown through programs such as the **Joint Working Group on Scientific and Technological Cooperation**.
- The PoC will open up opportunities for joint research in transformative fields such as **hydrogen technologies and sustainable innovation**, while also facilitating greater academic exchange.

What is the Programme of Cooperation (PoC)?

- It is a **formal agreement between two countries** designed to **enhance collaboration in specific sectors**, such as science, technology, and innovation.
- The PoC serves as a structured framework for long-term cooperation, enabling nations to develop networks among scientists and researchers while addressing global challenges through collaborative innovation.

Source: PIB

UGC RELEASED DRAFT GUIDELINES FOR UG AND PG DEGREES

Context

- The University Grants Commission (UGC) has released draft regulations outlining minimum standards for higher education institutions (HEIs).

About

- **Applicability:** These regulations apply to all universities established by Central, State, or Provincial Acts, deemed universities, and institutions affiliated with such universities.

- **Biannual Admissions:** Allowing students to enroll twice a year in July/August and January/February.
- **Multiple entry-exit:** Students can leave and rejoin courses without losing progress, making education more accessible.
- **Flexible degrees:** Aims to encourage multidisciplinary education, letting students design their academic pathways according to their interests.
- **A student is eligible for admission in any discipline** of UG programme or PG programme if the student qualifies the national level or university level entrance examination in the discipline of UG/PG programme.
- **The duration of an undergraduate degree** shall be either three or four years, and a postgraduate degree shall normally be either one year or two years.
- **Other proposals include** flexible attendance policies, recognition of prior learning, and skill-based assessment.

The University Grants Commission (UGC)

- Established in **1956**, it provides funding to universities and colleges, sets guidelines for academic programs, and promotes research in institutions of higher learning.
- **Key functions of the UGC include:**
 - ♦ **Accrediting universities:** It grants recognition to universities in India.
 - ♦ **Funding:** Provides financial assistance to universities and colleges for development, research, and other academic purposes.
 - ♦ **Regulating standards:** Sets quality standards in teaching, research, and infrastructure in higher education institutions.
 - ♦ **Promoting academic growth:** Encourages research, innovation, and the development of new courses in various fields.

Source: IE

MARBURG VIRUS DISEASE (MVD)

In News

- A deadly outbreak of **Marburg Virus Disease (MVD)**, often called the 'bleeding eye disease', has emerged in Rwanda, Africa.

About MVD (also known as Marburg Haemorrhagic Fever)

- **Ebola's Twin:** MVD belongs to the filovirus family, like Ebola.
 - ♦ Both cause rare but severe outbreaks with high fatality rates.

- **Origin:** First outbreak occurred in Marburg, Germany (1967).
 - ♦ Subsequent outbreaks reported across Africa, including Tanzania, Ghana, and now Rwanda.
- **Transmission: Rousettus aegyptiacus**, a fruit bat species, is the natural reservoir.
 - ♦ Virus spreads to humans from infected fruit bats.
 - ♦ Human-to-human transmission occurs through contact with infected bodily fluids
- **Symptoms:** Severe headache, Pain, Bleeding from eyes, gums, nose
- **Diagnosis and Treatment:** Diagnosed using ELISA or RT-PCR tests.
 - ♦ No approved vaccines or specific antivirals, only supportive care.

Source: IE

NHAI CONTRACTOR RATING SYSTEM

In News

- The NHAI has introduced a new rating mechanism for contractors maintaining highways, in response to criticism over poor road conditions caused by potholes and cracks.

NHAI Contractor Rating System

- Ratings will be published on the NHAI website and social media to encourage performance improvement.
- **Mechanism:** Contractors will be assessed on **five parameters:** roughness, potholes, rut depth, surface cracking, patchwork, and ravelling.
 - ♦ Contractors scoring below 60 out of 100 will be labeled "non-performers," reducing their chances for future contracts.
- **Assessment and Data Collection:** NHAI will deploy Network Survey Vehicles (NSVs) with cameras and sensors to assess highway conditions, capturing data every 100 meters. This data will be processed within 48 hours.
- **Automation:** The new system will operate without manual intervention, using 3D data captured by sensors. Notices will be automatically generated for contractors to take corrective actions, with color codes for faster response.
- **Non-Compliance Consequences:** If contractors do not improve the roads in time, NHAI will carry out repairs and recover the costs from them.

Significance of the Initiative

- It will ensure the smoother and better road quality
- Increased Transparency and Accountability

- Encourages the use of advanced tools like NSVs for accurate evaluations.

Source: TOI

NATIONAL LEGAL METROLOGY PORTAL (EMAAP)

Context

- The Department of Consumer Affairs, is developing the National Legal Metrology Portal (eMaap).

About

- **Aim:** To integrate State Legal Metrology Departments and their portals into a **unified National System**.
 - ♦ To streamline processes for issuing licenses, conducting verifications and managing enforcement and compliance.
- **Need:**
 - ♦ eMaap eliminates the need for stakeholders to register on multiple State Portals, fostering ease of doing business and transparency in trade practices.
 - ♦ Presently, State Governments are using their own portals for registration of packaged commodities, issue of licenses and verification/stamping of weighing & measuring instruments.

Source: PIB

BUSINESS 4 LAND INITIATIVE

In Context

- At the **Business for Land Forum**, global business leaders, policymakers and experts convene to discuss sustainable land solutions and resilience-building.
 - ♦ It was the part of sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties (COP16) of the **United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)** that took place in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Business 4 Land Initiative (B4L)

- **Launched by:** UNCCD (United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification) [**Legally binding international agreement**]
- **Aim:** To engage private sector actors in sustainable land management strategies.
- **Supported by:** World Economic Forum, World Business Council for Sustainable Development Sustainable Fibre Alliance, etc
- **Importance of B4L:** Raising awareness about the importance of sustainable land management within the private sector.
 - ♦ Encouraging businesses to commit to sustainable practices & invest in land restoration
 - ♦ Fostering collaboration between businesses, governments, and civil society to accelerate progress towards land degradation neutrality.

Source: UN

