Uttarakhand's First-Ever Tourist Carrying Capacity Assessment | Uttarakhand | 31 Jul 2025

Why in News?

To safeguard **Uttarakhand's ecologically sensitive hill towns** from the growing impact of unregulated tourism, the **state government will undertake its first-ever tourist carrying capacity survey** in Nainital, Kainchi Dham, and Bhowali, aimed at evaluating the strain on infrastructure caused by overcrowding, excessive vehicular traffic, and overburdened public amenities.

- Earlier, in **September 2024,** the **National Green Tribunal directed** the state government to **classify Nainital district into prohibited, regulated, and development zones**, based on its carrying capacity and environmental sensitivity.

Key Points

- **Survey Scope and Expected Outcome:** The **Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board (UTDB) will conduct the survey** during both peak and off-peak seasons, assessing vehicular inflow, tourist footfall, and hospitality capacity, with support from CCTV monitoring.
  - Based on the findings, the state may implement a tourist registration system and develop a sustainable roadmap aimed at ecological conservation, traffic management, and infrastructure enhancement.
- **Need of Survey:** Over **7,500 four-wheelers** enter Nainital city daily during peak tourist seasons, translating to nearly **30,000 tourists per day**, causing severe pressure on the town's limited infrastructure.

Carrying Capacity

- **About:** Carrying capacity refers to the **maximum population or activity level** that a particular **area can sustain without degrading its natural resources** and environment. It is determined by both:
  - **Biotic factors** such as vegetation and hydrology.
  - **Abiotic factors** such as terrain and climate.
- **Approaches to Assessing Carrying Capacity:**
  - **Planetary Boundaries Approach:** This method is used in the context of **global environmental challenges, including climate change,** land degradation, pollution, and water scarcity. It helps identify safe operating limits for human activity on Earth.
  - **Biocapacity Overshoot Approach:** A sustainability metric that **measures the ecological demand humans place** on natural systems. It highlights how we consume a year's worth of ecological resources in just a few months—illustrated by concepts like ***Earth Overshoot Day*****.**
- **Importance:** Assessing carrying capacity is essential for balancing environmental sustainability with development needs. When guided by the **precautionary principle**, it provides a practical framework to resolve conflicts between **developmental governance** and the **long-term sustainability** of natural systems.