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Aravallis Protect the Gangetic Plains from Dust — But the Shield Is Weakening

INDIAN EXPRESS

1 June 2026

ENVIRONMENT

GEOGRAPHY

GS3

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CURATED & WRITTEN BY

**Bharat Choudhary**

UPSC Educator & Content Creator

[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)

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Aravallis Protect the Gangetic Plains from Dust — But the Shield Is Weakening

 **The Indian Express** 1 June 2026 **GS3** **GS1**

Source: ujjyari.com — Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs



INTERVIEW ANGLE

"The Aravallis span four states and face fragmented enforcement; no single authority protects them. Should India create an Aravalli Range Authority similar to a river basin authority?"

The Aravalli range buffers the IGP from Thar desert dust, but illegal mining has created 31 vanished hillocks and 12 widening gaps. The range needs legal protection as climate-resilience infrastructure, not just a biodiversity zone.

THE ARGUMENT IN ONE LINE

The Aravallis are **climate infrastructure** — and the institutional response (fragmented SC orders across four states) is **not proportionate** to the scale of loss.

THE ECOLOGICAL SERVICE

- **Dust barrier:** Thar desert aerosols (PM₁₀/PM_{2.5}) now penetrate the IGP through mining-created gaps, intensifying pre-monsoon dust storms.
- **Watershed recharge:** aquifers across Rajasthan, Haryana, Delhi depend on Aravalli hillocks.
- **Wildlife corridor:** Delhi Ridge ↔ Sariska TR.

THE GOVERNANCE GAP

Four states, multiple SC orders, no single Aravalli authority → fragmented, inconsistent enforcement.

WAY FORWARD

- **Aravalli Range Authority** — multi-state jurisdiction, like river basin authorities.
- **Eco-Sensitive Zone** notifications for the entire range.

- **Satellite monitoring** of mining (ISRO + MoEFCC).
- **Alternative livelihoods** for quarry workers.

UPSC RELEVANCE

| PAPER | RELEVANCE |
|----------------|---|
| GS1 | Aravalli geography; IGP; Pre-Cambrian geology |
| GS3 | Ecosystem services; mining regulation; climate resilience |
| Prelims | Guru Shikhar (1,722 m); WII study; 31 hillocks; 4 states; eco-sensitive zones |

Sources: *Indian Express*, *Wildlife Institute of India*

Source: Aravallis Protect the Gangetic Plains from Dust — But the Shield Is Weakening — Ujyari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

● KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

The Aravalli range has historically buffered the Indo-Gangetic plains from northwest desert dust storms, but encroachment, mining and deforestation have critically degraded this ecological barrier, and the range needs immediate legal protection as a climate-resilience infrastructure asset, not merely a biodiversity zone.

✓ SUPPORTING

- A WII study documented 31 hillocks lost to illegal mining and 12 widening gaps through which Thar desert dust now penetrates unimpeded — directly linked to intensifying pre-monsoon dust storms in Rajasthan, Haryana and the NCR.
- The Aravallis provide services beyond dust-buffering: watershed recharge for river systems and aquifers, wildlife corridors (Delhi Ridge to Sariska), and a biodiversity repository for arid-zone species.

- Enforcement is fragmented across four states and multiple SC orders restricting mining have not been uniformly implemented, pointing to an institutional gap — no dedicated Aravalli protection authority exists.

COUNTER

Some argue the economic cost of a strict Aravalli protection regime falls on local quarry workers and stone-based industries, and that calibrated, regulated mining (not a blanket ban) can be reconciled with ecological safeguards.

WAY FORWARD

Create a dedicated Aravalli Range Authority (analogous to river basin/national park authorities) with jurisdiction across all four states; eco-sensitive zone notifications for the entire range; SC-monitored satellite-based mining surveillance; and alternative livelihood support for displaced quarry workers.

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MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

QUESTION

"Natural ecological barriers provide climate resilience services whose loss is irreversible and economically enormous." Examine with reference to the Aravalli range. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

Natural infrastructure — mountains, wetlands, forests — provides climate-resilience services that are costly to engineer but free to preserve. The Aravallis' role as a dust barrier for the Indo-Gangetic Plain illustrates what is at stake when such barriers are degraded by short-term extractive interests.

BODY

The Aravalli range, among the world's oldest mountain systems (Pre-Cambrian, ~1.5-2.5 billion years), forms a geological and ecological barrier between the Thar Desert and the Indo-Gangetic Plain. A WII study's finding that 31 entire hillocks have been mined away and 12 gaps have formed along the range

explains the intensifying north-west dust storms: without the natural barrier, desert aerosols travel further, faster, and in higher concentrations into Haryana, Delhi and the upper Gangetic plains, worsening air quality (PM10, PM2.5) during pre-monsoon months.

The watershed and groundwater-recharge function — sustaining aquifers in Rajasthan, Haryana and Delhi — is equally threatened. The governance failure is stark: multiple Supreme Court orders restricting mining have not been enforced uniformly, enforcement is fragmented across four state governments, and there is no dedicated authority with range-wide jurisdiction and enforcement powers.

The range urgently needs the kind of protected-area architecture that the Western Ghats are slowly receiving.

CONCLUSION

The Aravallis are not just a biodiversity asset — they are climate infrastructure. Their degradation costs India in air quality, groundwater, and resilience to desertification.

A dedicated Aravalli Range Authority, satellite-based enforcement, and eco-sensitive zone notifications across all four states would be a proportionate institutional response to an irreversible ecological loss.

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[linkedin.com/in/epicbharat](https://www.linkedin.com/in/epicbharat)[Read Full Article on Ujiyari →](#)<https://ujiyari.com/editorials/2026/06/ie-aravalli-climate-shield-legal-protection-2026/>

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