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**EDITORIAL ANALYSIS**

# How (Not) to Save the Aravalli Range

 **INDIAN EXPRESS**17 June 2026 · **ENVIRONMENT** · **GS3**

CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

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# How (Not) to Save the Aravalli Range

 **The Indian Express**    17 June 2026    **GS3**

Source: [ujyari.com](https://ujyari.com) — researched, fact-checked & UPSC-mapped



## INTERVIEW ANGLE

*"Is target-driven afforestation a genuine ecological strategy or a measurable substitute for harder conservation choices?"*

Source: [Original editorial](#)  [The Indian Express](#)

 **Every fact web-verified against primary sources** (<https://ujyari.com/how-we-verify/>)

## WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

June 17 is the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought, a fitting moment to examine India's Aravalli restoration push. The Green Wall Initiative aims to revive a degraded range, but the approach risks treating a living ecological barrier as plantable wasteland, prioritising sapling counts over the harder work of genuine conservation.

## THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

India's Aravalli restoration drive responds to real degradation, but the method is flawed. Treating the range as plantable wasteland produces afforestation optics while illegal mining continues to breach this living desertification barrier. The Aravallis, India's oldest fold mountains, hold back the Thar desert. Saving them needs **statutory** (<https://ujyari.com/vocab/statutory/>) protection, mining bans and native-habitat restoration, not target-driven plantation.

## THE ISSUE, DECODED

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| ELEMENT               | WHAT IT IS                               | WHY IT MATTERS                                   |
|-----------------------|--|--|
| Aravalli range        | India's oldest fold mountain range       | Acts as a barrier against Thar desert expansion  |
| Green Wall Initiative | Afforestation-led restoration drive      | Risks optics over ecological function            |
| Illegal mining        | Breaches that fragment the range         | Accelerates land degradation and desertification |
| Native restoration    | Reviving indigenous scrub-forest habitat | The real measure of ecological recovery          |

## THE ANALYSIS: PLANTATION IS NOT RESTORATION

- ❶ **The Aravallis are infrastructure, not waste.** As a natural barrier against the Thar, the range performs an ecological service that plantation arithmetic ignores.
- ❷ **Mining is the breach.** Illegal quarrying has fragmented the range, and no amount of planting compensates for a barrier with holes punched through it.
- ❸ **Targets distort method.** When success is counted in saplings, drives favour fast, often non-native species that look good but restore little.
- ❹ **Function is the true metric.** A genuinely restored Aravalli is measured by native habitat, water retention and desert-resistance, not by tree tallies.

## DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

*India's oldest fold mountains, running across Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana and Delhi.*

*Barrier against the eastward spread of the Thar desert.*

*June 17, World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought (UNCCD).*

*Green Wall Initiative for Aravalli restoration.*

*Illegal mining breaching the range.*

## THE DEBATE

**Argument for plantation drives:** Large-scale afforestation is necessary to meet restoration and carbon targets quickly, and visible greening builds public support.

**Argument against:** Plantation without protection is cosmetic (<https://ujiyari.com/vocab/cosmetic/>). Non-native saplings and continued mining mean the underlying ecology keeps degrading behind a green facade.

**Balanced verdict:** Plantation has a role only within a framework of statutory protection, mining bans and native restoration. Without those, it is greenwashing (<https://ujiyari.com/vocab/greenwashing/>).

## HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (TRANSFERABLE SKILL)

*Beware the . Saplings planted is measurable; ecological function restored is not, so policy drifts toward the countable. Always test whether the chosen metric actually captures the outcome you care about.*

## DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

Illegal mining -> Range breached -> Degradation -> Plantation optics -> (gap) Statutory protection + native restoration

## THE WAY FORWARD

- 1 **Grant statutory protection** to the Aravalli range to halt further encroachment (<https://ujiyari.com/vocab/encroachment/>).
- 2 **Stop illegal mining** through strict enforcement, the precondition (<https://ujiyari.com/vocab/precondition/>) for any restoration.
- 3 **Restore native species** suited to the range's scrub-forest ecology.
- 4 **Measure ecological function**, water retention and habitat recovery, not sapling counts.

## THE TAKEAWAY BOX

*Case study for desertification, afforestation policy and the optics-versus-outcomes problem in conservation.*

*"Afforestation optics can coexist with continuing degradation; genuine conservation cannot."*

*Aravalli geography, UNCCD, World Desertification Day (June 17), Green Wall Initiative.*

*When does measurable action become a substitute for genuine responsibility?*

*GS3 questions on desertification, land degradation and conservation strategy.*

*UNCCD, Thar desert, land degradation neutrality, ecological restoration.*

**Sources:** *Indian Express* (<https://indianexpress.com/section/opinion/>), *Down To Earth* (<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/>)

● **KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE**

**Aravalli restoration will fail if it treats the range as plantable wasteland rather than a living desertification barrier breached by illegal mining.**

✓ **SUPPORTING**

- The Aravallis are India's oldest fold mountains and a barrier against Thar desert expansion.
- Illegal mining has breached the range, accelerating land degradation and desertification.
- Target-driven plantation creates afforestation optics without restoring native habitat.

⚠ **COUNTER**

Supporters argue large-scale plantation drives are necessary to meet restoration targets and absorb carbon quickly.

→ **WAY FORWARD**

Grant statutory protection, halt illegal mining, restore native species and measure ecological function, not just sapling counts.


**MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK**

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**QUESTION**

*Critically evaluate India's afforestation-led approach to ecological restoration, using the Aravalli range as a case study. (250 words)*

**INTRODUCTION**

On World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought, India's renewed push to restore the Aravalli range invites scrutiny. The risk is that restoration becomes an afforestation target exercise rather than genuine ecological repair.

**BODY**

The Aravallis are India's oldest fold mountains and a crucial ecological barrier that slows the eastward march of the Thar desert toward the National Capital Region. Decades of illegal mining have breached this barrier, fragmenting the range and accelerating land degradation.

The Green Wall Initiative and related restoration drives respond to a real problem, but the method matters. Treating the range as empty wasteland to be filled with saplings, often non-native and survival-prone, produces impressive plantation numbers while leaving the underlying ecology unrepaired.

A restored Aravalli is not measured by trees planted but by habitat function recovered: native scrub-forest species, water-retention capacity and the ability to hold back the desert. The prerequisites are statutory protection of the range, strict enforcement against mining and ecological restoration rooted in native species.

Afforestation optics can coexist with continuing degradation; genuine conservation cannot. Targets must measure ecological outcomes, not activity.

**CONCLUSION**

Saving the Aravallis demands a shift from plantation arithmetic to ecological restoration. Protect the range in law, stop the mining that breaches it and restore native habitat.

Anything less is greenwashing a desertification frontier.


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