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# A Banned Poison in Kota's River: When Old Chemicals Kill

 **DOWN TO EARTH**

9 July 2026

**ENVIRONMENT****GS3**

CURATED &amp; WRITTEN BY

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# A Banned Poison in Kota's River: When Old Chemicals Kill

Down to Earth 9 July 2026 **GS3**

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## THE LIFT LINE

A pesticide banned in the 1990s has been confirmed as the poison behind a river's dead crocodiles, a reminder that some poisons do not leave when the law tells them to; they wait in the mud.

## WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

The death of mugger crocodiles in Kota's Chandraloi river, linked by a National Green Tribunal committee to the banned pesticide Aldrin, is a textbook case in GS3 environmental pollution: persistent organic pollutants, the international treaty that governs them, and the enforcement gap that lets prohibited chemicals keep circulating. It also touches wildlife protection law and the health of river ecosystems.

**GS Paper 3:** conservation, environmental pollution and degradation; [environmental impact assessment](https://ujjyari.com/terms/environmental-impact-assessment/) (<https://ujjyari.com/terms/environmental-impact-assessment/>).

For **Prelims**, hold the specifics: Aldrin as an organochlorine persistent organic pollutant; the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants; the mugger crocodile (*Crocodylus palustris*), listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List and in Schedule I of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972; and the role of the National Green Tribunal. For **Mains**, argue that banning a chemical is only the first step, and that persistence and [bioaccumulation](https://ujjyari.com/terms/bioaccumulation/) (<https://ujjyari.com/terms/bioaccumulation/>) demand long-term monitoring and enforcement.

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Chandraloi river near Kota in Rajasthan is home to mugger crocodiles, a species protected at the highest level under Indian law. When crocodiles were found dead in the river, a joint committee constituted under the National Green Tribunal investigated and reported traces of **Aldrin** in the river water. Aldrin is an

organochlorine insecticide whose manufacture, import and use India banned in the 1990s, precisely because it persists in soil and water for years and accumulates up the food chain, harming the nervous systems of wildlife and humans alike.

Aldrin belongs to a class known as persistent organic pollutants, or POPs, chemicals so long-lived and mobile that they are regulated internationally under the **Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants**, which India has ratified. The convention seeks to eliminate or restrict a defined list of such chemicals worldwide. The Kota deaths show what the convention is up against: a substance banned at the national level and targeted internationally, still present in a river decades later, and still lethal.

## THE CORE ARGUMENT / ISSUE

### Persistence is the whole problem

The defining trait of a persistent organic pollutant is that it does not break down. Aldrin can linger in sediment and soil for years, and it bioaccumulates, concentrating in the fatty tissue of organisms and biomagnifying as it moves up the food chain. A predator at the top of a river food web, such as a crocodile, absorbs the accumulated load of everything below it, which is why **apex** (<https://ujjayanti.com/vocab/apex/>) species are often the first to die and the clearest sentinels of contamination.

### A ban is not an end

That a chemical outlawed in the 1990s could still be turning up in a river and killing wildlife decades later exposes the limits of prohibition without enforcement and monitoring. A ban stops new legal use; it does not remove existing stocks, clean contaminated sediment, or prevent illegal application. Without sustained water and sediment testing, contamination stays invisible until wildlife starts dying.

| FEATURE OF ALDRIN               | CONSEQUENCE                      | GOVERNANCE RESPONSE NEEDED                                                                                                               |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Organochlorine POP              | Persists years in soil and water | Long-term monitoring, not one-time ban                                                                                                   |
| Bioaccumulates and biomagnifies | Apex species poisoned first      | Sentinel-species surveillance                                                                                                            |
| Banned but present              | Ban alone insufficient           | Enforcement, stock disposal, source tracing                                                                                              |
| River-borne                     | Whole aquatic ecosystem at risk  | <b>Catchment</b> ( <a href="https://ujjayanti.com/vocab/catchment/">https://ujjayanti.com/vocab/catchment/</a> )-level pollution control |

## The accountability gap

The Rajasthan Forest Department, responding to the tribunal, accepted the finding of Aldrin but declined responsibility for the contamination, and it remains unclear which agency will trace the source or prevent a recurrence. That vacuum is itself a governance failure: a confirmed poison in a protected species' habitat with no owner of the problem.

### HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (ANALYTICAL FRAME)

Distinguish a hazard from an exposure, and a ban from an outcome. Banning a chemical addresses future hazard; it does nothing about the exposure already lodged in the environment. Persistent pollutants collapse the comforting assumption that a legal prohibition ends the risk. The transferable rule: for substances that persist and bioaccumulate, environmental governance must shift from a one-time regulatory act to continuous monitoring, source-tracing and remediation (<https://ujjayanti.com/vocab/remediation/>), with clear institutional ownership of contamination when it appears.

### THE DIAGRAM IN WORDS

Aldrin (banned 1990s POP) persists in soil/water -> enters Chandraloi river -> bioaccumulates up food chain -> apex mugger crocodiles absorb concentrated load -> crocodile deaths -> NGT committee confirms Aldrin -> forest dept denies responsibility -> fix: source-tracing + sediment monitoring + Stockholm Convention enforcement + clear institutional ownership

### WAY FORWARD

- ❶ **Trace and stop the source.** Identify how a banned pesticide entered the Chandraloi river, whether from old stocks, illegal use or industrial discharge, and shut it off.
- ❷ **Institute long-term monitoring.** Establish routine water and sediment testing in mugger habitats and other sensitive rivers, using apex species as sentinels of contamination.
- ❸ **Fix accountability.** Designate a clear lead agency for POP contamination so that confirmed poisoning does not fall into an inter-departmental gap.
- ❹ **Honour Stockholm Convention obligations.** Strengthen the disposal of banned-pesticide stockpiles and enforcement against illegal use, in line with India's commitments on persistent organic pollutants.

## PYO LINKAGE AND PRACTICE

Ujjayari Current Affairs - ujjayari.com · Free Daily Current Affairs for UPSC & State PCS

UPSC has asked about persistent organic pollutants, about the Stockholm Convention, and about the protection of wildlife under Indian law. This editorial connects those themes to a specific 2026 pollution event.

**Practice question:** “A ban on a persistent organic pollutant is only the beginning of environmental protection, not its guarantee.” Examine with reference to the Aldrin-linked mugger crocodile deaths in Kota. (250 words, 15 marks)

**Sources:** *Down To Earth* (<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/wildlife-biodiversity/wildlife-biodiversitykota-mugger-crocodile-deaths-banned-pesticide-aldrin-found-in-chandraloi-river-forest-department-denies-responsibility>)

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