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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

A Perfect Storm: Wayanad's Slopes and the Cost of Ignoring Warnings

THE HINDU

10 July 2026

ENVIRONMENT

GS1

GS3

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A Perfect Storm: Wayanad's Slopes and the Cost of Ignoring Warnings

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THE LIFT LINE

A landslide is rarely a single accident; it is the sum of a fragile slope, a heavy rain and a human decision to build where warnings said not to.

WHY THIS EDITORIAL MATTERS FOR YOUR EXAM

A debris and mud slip at a tunnel-construction site in Wayanad, which killed workers during heavy rain, is a compact lesson in physical geography and disaster management. Coming so soon after the catastrophic 2024 Wayanad landslides, it forces the question India keeps deferring: how much construction can the fragile Western Ghats bear. For GS1 it is about slope stability and landslides; for GS3 it is about disaster preparedness and environmental regulation.

GS Paper 1: important geophysical phenomena; the geography of the Indian subcontinent, including the Western Ghats.

GS Paper 3: disaster and disaster management; conservation and environmental degradation.

For **Prelims**, hold the specifics: the Western Ghats as a UNESCO World Heritage site and a biodiversity hotspot; the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (the Gadgil Committee) and the High Level Working Group (the Kasturirangan Committee) with its Ecologically Sensitive Area proposal; the National Disaster Management Authority's landslide guidelines; and the July 2024 Wayanad landslides as recent context. For **Mains**, argue that landslides in the Ghats are compound disasters where fragile geology, extreme rainfall and unsafe construction combine, and that prevention lies in land-use restraint.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

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The Western Ghats are among the world's oldest and most fragile mountain systems, steep, heavily forested, and drenched by the southwest monsoon. Their slopes are naturally prone to failure when saturated, and climate change is loading the dice further by delivering rain in shorter, more intense bursts that overwhelm slopes faster than they can drain.

Into this setting India keeps pushing construction: roads, tunnels, buildings and quarries carved into hillsides. The latest tragedy struck at a tunnel-construction site in Wayanad, where a debris and mud slip during heavy rain killed workers. It is a different phenomenon from urban flooding: here the killer is the slope itself giving way. The context is unavoidable, because in July 2024 Wayanad suffered devastating landslides that killed hundreds. The warnings are older still. The Gadgil Committee in 2011 urged strict ecological protection across much of the Ghats, and when that was judged too restrictive, the Kasturirangan Committee proposed protecting a smaller Ecologically Sensitive Area. Successive dilutions and delays have left large stretches of fragile terrain open to precisely the activity that destabilises them.

THE CORE ARGUMENT / ISSUE

A compound, not a simple, disaster

A landslide in the Ghats is never one cause. It is fragile geology, plus extreme rainfall, plus human interference with the slope, cutting, loading, deforesting or draining it wrongly. Each factor alone might be survivable; together they produce collapse. Treating such an event as a freak accident misses that it is an engineered outcome of ignoring all three factors at once.

Construction on ground that cannot hold

Tunnelling, road-cutting and building on steep, saturated Ghat slopes removes the toe support and vegetation that hold soil in place, and adds weight and vibration. When heavy rain then saturates the disturbed slope, failure follows. Construction-safety lapses, inadequate slope stabilisation, poor drainage and work continuing through intense rain convert a hazard into a fatality.

FACTOR	ROLE IN THE SLIP	WHAT IT DEMANDS
Fragile Ghat geology	Ujiyari Current Affairs · ujiyari.com · Free Daily Current Affairs for UPSC & State PCS Slopes prone to failure when wet	Land-use restraint, ESA protection
Extreme rainfall	Rapid saturation (https://ujiyari.com/vocab/saturation/), higher pore pressure	Early warning, rain-triggered work halts
Slope disturbance	Cutting, loading, deforestation	Slope stabilisation, EIA enforcement
Weak preparedness	Late response, exposed workers	NDMA guidelines, evacuation drills

The warnings India shelved

The Gadgil and Kasturirangan reports were not fringe opinions; they were expert warnings that large parts of the Western Ghats are too fragile for unrestrained development. Their partial rejection and repeated dilution mean the country keeps rediscovering, through fatal slips, what those panels said years ago. Preparedness cannot substitute for prevention when the underlying land-use decision is wrong.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (ANALYTICAL FRAME)

Read every Ghat landslide as a feedback signal that a land-use decision exceeded the terrain's tolerance. The transferable rule: in fragile mountain ecologies, disaster management must begin upstream, at the zoning and permission stage, because engineering fixes and rescue teams cannot compensate for building on ground that should have been left alone. Prevention through restraint beats response after collapse.

THE DIAGRAM IN WORDS

Fragile Western Ghats slope + intense monsoon burst + tunnel-cutting and slope disturbance -> saturated, unsupported slope fails -> debris and mud slip kills workers -> echoes 2024 Wayanad landslides -> Gadgil/Kasturirangan warnings recalled -> fix: ESA land-use restraint + slope stabilisation + rain-triggered work halts + NDMA preparedness

WAY FORWARD

- 1 Restrain land use in the fragile zones.** Act on the Ecologically Sensitive Area logic of the expert committees, keeping unstable Ghat slopes off-limits to heavy construction and quarrying.
- 2 Enforce slope-safety engineering.** **Mandate** (<https://ujiyari.com/vocab/mandate/>) proper geotechnical assessment, slope stabilisation and drainage for any permitted works, and halt construction during intense-rainfall alerts.

- 3 Strengthen early warning and preparedness.** Expand rainfall-triggered landslide warning systems and NDMA-guided evacuation drills so exposed workers and residents are moved before slopes fail.
- 4 Make environmental clearance real.** Ensure environmental impact assessment (<https://ujiyari.com/terms/environmental-impact-assessment/>) for hill projects is rigorous and honest, not a formality, so fragility is priced into every permission.

PYQ LINKAGE AND PRACTICE

UPSC has asked about the conservation of the Western Ghats, about landslides and their causes, and about disaster management frameworks. This editorial links those themes to a specific 2026 slope failure in Wayanad.

Practice question: “Landslides in the Western Ghats are compound disasters born of fragile geology, extreme rainfall and unsafe land use.” Examine, and suggest a prevention-first strategy. (250 words, 15 marks)

Sources: The Hindu (<https://www.thehindu.com/>)

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