

EDITORIALS – 22ND JUN 2026

1. End the free rein of junk food advertising in India (GS Paper I Society, GS Paper II Governance)

This editorial 'End the free rein of junk food advertising in India' was published in The Hindu on 22nd Jun 2026, highlights the need to regulate misleading junk food advertising targeting children as a public health imperative.

Misleading Food Advertising

- Junk food promotion remains rampant despite planned curbs on HFSS foods, sustaining children's exposure to unhealthy products.
- Ads use selective claims like "baked," "multigrain" and "no maida" while hiding salt-fat-sugar and refined carbohydrates.
- Celebrity and family endorsements create false health perceptions, weakening informed choice among children and parents.
- Product ads often omit UPF ingredients, additives and health risks, making unhealthy foods appear harmless or nutritious.
- Advertising does not merely reflect demand; child actors and emotional appeals help create food desire for unhealthy products.

Evidence of Harm and Regulatory Gaps

- UPFs are linked with poor diet quality, displacement of real foods, obesity, hypertension, cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes.
- Three transnational firms spent \$13.2 billion on advertising in 2024, showing the scale of food marketing power.
- India saw over two lakh junk food ads in one month, backed by nearly ₹170 crore in advertising expenditure.
- The NMAP 2017-22 envisaged restrictions on HFSS advertising, but existing safeguards remain inadequate.
- The Supreme Court in 2026 backed front-of-pack labelling, while Economic Survey 2025-26 flagged unhealthy diets.
- The San Francisco lawsuit against UPF manufacturers shows concerns over child-targeted marketing and inadequate risk disclosure.

Public Health and Legal Regulation

- Children face daily exposure across television, digital platforms, sports broadcasts, influencers, schools, cinemas and homes, shaping their food environment.

- Nutrition education alone cannot succeed when aggressive marketing normalises unhealthy products across children’s daily spaces.
- The state has a duty to regulate foreseeable harm to vulnerable groups, making junk food ads a right to health issue.
- Voluntary industry self-regulation is inadequate; examples from Chile and Mexico show stronger results from legal measures.
- Advertising curbs need not be anti-industry; they can reduce promotional spending and support healthier local markets.

Beyond Editorial

Commercial Determinants of Child Nutrition

- Marketing capture: Food choices are shaped by ads, pricing and celebrity culture, as seen in noodles, chips and sugary cereal promotions.
- Platform regulation: YouTube Shorts, Instagram Reels and gaming ads need oversight because children increasingly consume marketing outside television rules.
- School ecosystem: FSSAI’s 2020 school-food regulations need stronger enforcement so campuses and nearby shops do not normalise HFSS foods.
- Label literacy: Chile-style warning labels work better when parents and children can decode sugar, salt and fat claims easily.
- Product reformulation: UK’s sugar levy showed regulation can push companies to cut sugar, not merely reduce advertising exposure.
- Affordability gap: PM-POSHAN and Anganwadi meals must remain nutritious because cheap packaged snacks often outcompete healthy options.
- Inter-ministerial action: Nutrition governance needs convergence among FSSAI, Health, Education, WCD, Consumer Affairs and Information ministries.

2. Just truths

(GS Paper I Society, GS Paper II Polity)

This editorial ‘Just truths’ was published in The Hindu on 22nd June 2026, highlights that DNA tests in paternity disputes must remain a last resort, balancing scientific truth with legitimacy, privacy and bodily autonomy.

Paternity, Legitimacy and Scientific Evidence

- Indian evidence law places the burden on the party denying paternity, protecting children from the stigma of illegitimacy.

- In Goutam Kundu (1993), the Supreme Court held that DNA tests cannot be routine and require a strong prima facie case.
- Shri Banarsi Dass (2005) reinforced legitimacy over forensic curiosity, limiting DNA testing where paternity disputes lack sufficient basis.
- In the Rohit Shekhar case, courts allowed DNA testing despite N.D. Tiwari's privacy claim, showing truth may outweigh resistance.
- Nandlal Badwaik (2014) held that reliable scientific proof can prevail over legal fiction when required by justice.
- Dipanwita Roy (2014) accepted adverse inference from refusal, confirming DNA testing's legitimacy when based on necessity.

Privacy, Proportionality and Judicial Limits

- Puttaswamy (2017) made genetic data part of Article 21 privacy, requiring legality, legitimate aim and proportionality.
- Aparna Firodia (2023) held DNA tests must be necessary and proportionate, not ordered if other evidence can resolve the dispute.
- Ivan Rathinam (2025) clarified that neither privacy nor knowledge is absolute, requiring courts to balance stigma and necessity.
- CP vs AP (2026) upheld DNA testing because paternity could not be settled from existing records and needed scientific determination.
- Post-Puttaswamy jurisprudence protects bodily autonomy while allowing compelled genetic disclosure only when paternity is directly in issue.
- DNA tests must serve the interest of justice, with no other available evidence capable of resolving the question.

Beyond Editorial

Bioethical Limits of Scientific Truth

- Genetic dignity: DNA tests reveal intimate biological data, as Puttaswamy linked genetic privacy to Article 21 dignity.
- Child welfare: Paternity truth must not create stigma, inheritance conflict or exclusion, as legitimacy protection under evidence law recognises.
- Consent safeguards: Courts should seek consent where possible, especially when testing affects minors, mothers or non-party relatives.
- Data protection: Genetic samples need storage and deletion safeguards, as DNA can reveal ancestry, disease risk and kinship.
- Gender sensitivity: DNA testing in matrimonial disputes can intensify coercion, humiliation and surveillance, especially against women.

- Limited compulsion: Aparna Firodia's proportionality logic ensures testing is ordered only when ordinary evidence cannot resolve paternity.
- Counselling support: Family courts need counselling because DNA results can disturb identity, legitimacy, inheritance expectations and family bonds.

3. A 10 per cent rule for sustainable development (GS Paper III Environment)

This editorial 'A 10 per cent rule for sustainable development' was published in The Indian Express on 22nd Jun 2026, highlights the need for an ecological threshold to guide sustainable development in biodiversity-sensitive landscapes.

Development Pressure on Ecological Landscapes

- India's infrastructure expansion, renewable transition and growth increasingly overlap with forested regions supporting biodiversity, tiger habitats and wildlife corridors.
- Existing tools like EIA, forest clearances and compensatory afforestation manage impacts but rarely provide clear local decision thresholds.
- Green GDP adjusts output for environmental loss, yet remains difficult to translate into operational choices for specific landscapes.
- Policymakers need a simple benchmark to identify when economic activity begins eroding its own ecological foundation.

Ecological Threshold as Economic Warning

- Lindeman's 10 per cent law shows how limited energy transfer sustains natural pyramids from plants to predators.
- In forest ecosystems, the tiger's survival depends on prey base, vegetation, water systems and minimal disturbance at lower levels.
- Small disruptions at the ecological base can cascade upward, showing that natural systems absorb only limited stress before degradation.
- Environmental degradation in India costs around 9-11% of GDP, making 10% a precautionary threshold for unsustainable natural-capital depletion.

Tiger Landscapes as Policy Test Case

- Tiger reserves and corridors support agriculture, infrastructure and livelihoods while providing ecosystem services like water regulation and carbon storage.

- Linear infrastructure, mining, extraction and land-use change create cumulative pressures, causing corridor fragmentation, prey stress and human-wildlife conflict.
- A notional 10% threshold should trigger policy pause, reassessment of scale, location and design, not automatic development stoppage.
- More fragile wildlife corridors may require lower 5-8% limits, reflecting their higher vulnerability to ecological disturbance.
- The threshold approach can guide EIA processes, landscape-level planning, green accounting and infrastructure design in notified corridors.

Beyond Editorial

Landscape Carrying Capacity

- **Threshold planning:** Carrying capacity should guide highways, mining, tourism and solar parks in fragile Himalayan and tiger landscapes.
- **Corridor protection:** Projects like roads and railways need safeguards because corridor breaks intensify human-wildlife conflict, as in elephant ranges.
- **Local knowledge:** Gram Sabhas under FRA can identify water sources, grazing routes and seasonal wildlife movement.
- **Livelihood balance:** Conservation must include compensation and eco-tourism sharing, as crop loss and livestock predation drive local resentment.
- **District integration:** District plans should embed ecological limits into land-use, disaster planning and DMF-funded infrastructure approvals.
- **Community monitoring:** Local monitoring can flag prey decline, water stress and corridor disturbance, as Joint Forest Management showed.
- **Just transition:** Ecological limits must protect livelihoods through MGNREGA restoration, forest-produce value chains and community-led conservation.