

Aravalli Hills and Environmental Protection - Explained

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Aravalli Hills Latest News

- The Supreme Court has paused its earlier judgment accepting a restrictive definition of the Aravalli Hills and has proposed a re-examination through a high-powered expert committee.

About the Aravalli Mountain Range

- The Aravalli Mountain Range is one of the oldest surviving fold mountain systems in the world, with geological origins dating back nearly 1.5 billion years.
- Stretching over **690 km**, the range runs from **Gujarat through Rajasthan and Haryana to Delhi**, forming a crucial natural barrier in north-western India.
- Ecologically, the Aravallis play a vital role in:
 - Preventing the eastward expansion of the Thar Desert
 - Regulating regional climate and rainfall patterns
 - Recharging groundwater aquifers
 - Acting as a green buffer against air pollution, particularly for the Delhi-NCR region

- The hills host **tropical dry deciduous forests**, support diverse flora and fauna, and sustain rural livelihoods.
- Despite their importance, the Aravallis have faced severe degradation due to mining, urbanisation, and infrastructure expansion, making legal and policy protection critical.
- Over the years, multiple court orders and expert committees have attempted to define and protect the Aravallis, but **ambiguities in their legal definition** have remained a major challenge.

Legal Background to the Aravalli Definition Issue

- Environmental protection of the Aravallis has largely evolved through judicial interventions rather than a single comprehensive statute. Courts have relied on:
 - The **Environment (Protection) Act, 1986**
 - Forest conservation principles
 - Earlier Supreme Court rulings restricting mining activities
- However, the absence of a scientifically precise and uniform definition of what constitutes the Aravalli range has led to disputes over which areas qualify for environmental protection.
- In November 2025, the Supreme Court upheld a government expert panel's definition that restricted the Aravallis to:
 - Hills with an elevation of **100 metres or more**
 - Hill clusters, slopes, and hillocks located **within 500 metres of each other**
 - This definition significantly narrowed the geographical scope of the protected area.

News Summary

- In December 2025, the Supreme Court kept its own November judgment in abeyance, citing serious environmental and regulatory concerns. Key developments include:
 - The Court directed that no irreversible administrative or ecological actions should be taken based on the restrictive definition until further review.
 - Fresh or renewed mining leases in the Aravalli region were prohibited without prior approval of the apex court.
 - Widespread public concern was noted that the 100-metre elevation rule could exclude a large number of ecologically significant hills, particularly in Rajasthan, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Delhi.
 - The Court observed that if lower hill ranges were excluded, it could create a "significant regulatory lacuna", enabling unregulated mining and environmental degradation.
- The Bench proposed constituting a **high-powered expert committee** to:
 - Reassess whether "regulated" or "sustainable" mining in newly excluded areas could still harm ecological integrity
 - Evaluate the short-term and long-term environmental impacts of the restrictive definition
 - Examine whether the 500-metre clustering rule creates a structural paradox, where ecologically contiguous hills remain unprotected due to technical gaps
- The Court emphasised that any final definition must be based on exhaustive scientific and geological assessment, ensuring holistic protection of the entire mountain system rather than fragmented pockets.

Environmental and Policy Implications

- Over-reliance on technical definitions can undermine ecological objectives
- Mining regulation must balance economic activity with inter-generational environmental equity
- Judicial oversight remains critical in the absence of comprehensive legislative clarity
- For policymakers, the issue underscores the need for scientifically grounded, ecosystem-based approaches rather than narrow physical thresholds.

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