

# Supreme Court Ruling on Aravalli Hills (2025)

## 1. Background

In **November 2025**, the **Supreme Court of India** adopted a **uniform, scientific definition of the Aravalli Hills and Ranges** to regulate mining and protect the fragile ecosystem.

The decision sparked **public protests**, political reactions, and the **#SaveAravalli campaign**, with critics warning that it could weaken long-standing legal protection.

The ruling comes amid decades of judicial and administrative interventions to curb **unregulated mining, deforestation, and urban expansion** in the Aravalli region.

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## 2. What is the Supreme Court's New Definition?

### (A) Definition of Aravalli Hills

The Supreme Court accepted a definition proposed by a **MoEF&CC-appointed expert committee**:

- **Aravalli Hills** are defined as:
  - Any landform rising **100 metres or more above the surrounding local terrain**
  - *Local relief* is calculated using the **lowest contour line encircling the landform**
- Protection applies to:
  - The **entire hill system**
  - Supporting slopes
  - Associated landforms  
(*Irrespective of absolute height*)

### (B) Definition of Aravalli Ranges

- **Aravalli Ranges** are defined as:
  - Clusters of **two or more such hills**
  - Located within **500 metres** of each other

- The **entire intervening area** between these hills — including slopes and smaller hillocks — is considered part of the range

### **Objective:**

- To bring **clarity, uniformity, and objectivity** in regulating activities such as mining across multiple States

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## **3. Supreme Court Directions on Mining**

### **(A) Ban on Mining in Core Areas**

Mining is **completely prohibited** in:

- Protected Areas
- Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZs)
- Tiger Reserves
- Wetlands

### **(B) Limited Exceptions**

Mining may be permitted **only** for:

- Atomic minerals (Part B, First Schedule, MMDR Act, 1957)
- Critical and strategic minerals (Part D)
- Minerals listed in the **Seventh Schedule** of the MMDR Act

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## **4. Temporary Freeze on New Mining Leases**

The Court ordered:

- **No new mining leases** under the new definition
- This ban will continue until a **Management Plan for Sustainable Mining (MPSM)** is prepared

### **Agency Responsible:**

- **Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE)**

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## 5. What is the Management Plan for Sustainable Mining (MPSM)?

The MPSM must:

- Identify **no-mining zones**
- Demarcate **strictly regulated mining areas**
- Protect **sensitive habitats and wildlife corridors**
- Assess:
  - Cumulative ecological impacts
  - Carrying capacity
- Prescribe:
  - Restoration
  - Rehabilitation
  - Mine closure norms

### Judicial Approach:

The SC noted that **blanket bans often promote illegal mining**, hence it adopted a **calibrated approach**:

- Continue existing legal mining under strict regulation
- Pause new leases
- Permanently protect ecologically sensitive areas

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## 6. Government's Stand

The Union Government clarified that:

- The new framework **does not dilute Aravalli protection**
- No fresh mining will be allowed until the MPSM is finalised
- The **main threat is illegal mining**, not regulated mining

- Stronger enforcement is planned using:
    - Drones
    - Satellite imagery
    - Surveillance technologies
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## **7. Criticisms of the New Definition**

### **(A) Exclusion of Large Landscape**

- An internal **Forest Survey of India (FSI)** assessment suggests:
  - The **100-metre threshold excludes over 90%** of the Aravalli system
- This may leave vast areas legally unprotected

### **(B) Threat to Groundwater**

- Lower hills and slopes are critical for:
  - Rainwater percolation
  - Aquifer recharge
- Disturbance could reduce water availability in:
  - Rajasthan
  - Haryana
  - Gujarat
  - Delhi-NCR

### **(C) Ignoring Ecological Continuity**

- The Aravallis function as a **continuous ecological system**
- Peak-centric definition ignores:
  - Foothills
  - Valleys

- Connecting ridges

## **(D) Risk of Desertification**

- Weakening the Aravalli barrier may:
  - Allow **Thar Desert expansion eastward**
  - Increase dust storms and land degradation
- This undermines India's commitments under:
  - **UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD)**

## **(E) Governance and Enforcement Challenges**

- Lack of comprehensive mapping could create:
  - Regulatory loopholes
  - Difficulty in curbing illegal mining

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# **8. Earlier Interventions for Aravalli Protection**

## **(A) MoEF Restrictions (1990s)**

- Mining restricted to sanctioned projects
- Weak enforcement by States led to violations

## **(B) Rajasthan's Definition (2002)**

- Used **Richard Murphy landform classification**
- Defined hills as landforms rising 100 m above local relief
- Mining banned on hills and supporting slopes

## **(C) Supreme Court Ban (2009)**

- Blanket mining ban in:
  - Faridabad

- Gurugram
- Mewat (Haryana)

### **(D) SC Directions (2024)**

- Prohibited fresh mining leases and renewals
- Directed **Central Empowered Committee (CEC)** review

### **(E) CEC Recommendations (2024)**

- Scientific mapping of Aravallis across States
- Macro-level Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)
- No new mining until assessments are complete

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## **9. Aravalli Green Wall Initiative**

### **About:**

- MoEF&CC-led programme
- Inspired by Africa's **Great Green Wall**

### **Key Features:**

- **1,400 km long, 5 km wide** green belt
- Covers Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana, and Delhi
- Aims to restore **1.1 million hectares** by 2027

### **Benefits:**

- Controls sand and dust storms
- Improves air quality (especially Delhi-NCR)
- Reduces desertification
- Strengthens climate resilience

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## 10. Key Facts About the Aravalli Range (Prelims Ready)

### Geography & Geology

- Oldest mountain system in India and among the oldest globally
- Formed ~2,000 million years ago (Precambrian era)
- Highest peak: **Guru Shikhar (1,722 m)**, Mount Abu
- Length: ~800 km (Gujarat to Delhi)

### Ecological Role

- Acts as a **barrier against Thar Desert**
- Major watershed dividing:
  - Arabian Sea
  - Bay of Bengal drainage systems

### Biodiversity

- 22 wildlife sanctuaries
- 3 tiger reserves
- Habitat for tiger, leopard, wolf, sloth bear, GIB

### Economic & Cultural Importance

- Rich in minerals (zinc, lead, marble, granite)
- Hosts major cities and industries
- UNESCO sites: Chittorgarh, Kumbhalgarh
- Sacred centres: Pushkar, Ajmer Sharif, Mount Abu

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## 11. Measures Needed for Stronger Protection

### (A) Scientific Mapping

- Landscape-level mapping of:

- Hills
- Slopes
- Valleys
- Recharge zones
- Wildlife corridors

### **(B) Curb Illegal Mining**

- Use drones, satellites, CCTV, e-challans
- District-level task forces

### **(C) Ecosystem Restoration**

- Restore forests, grasslands, mined areas
- Revive indigenous water systems:
  - Taankas
  - Jhalaras
  - Talab-bandis

### **(D) Sand & Wind Control**

- Vegetation using **Calligonum, Acacia**
- Reduce dust storms and erosion

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## **12. Conclusion (UPSC Mains Tone)**

The Aravalli Range is not merely a geological formation but a **life-support system for north-western India**. While the Supreme Court's attempt to introduce scientific clarity is significant, the concerns over ecological exclusion underline the need for **landscape-level protection, scientific mapping, and community-based restoration**. Strengthening the Aravallis is essential to safeguard **water security, biodiversity, climate resilience, and livelihoods**, and to meet India's global environmental commitments.

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