SC ruling on Aravalli Illegal Mining

Why in news?

\n\n

The Supreme Court Tuesday recently directed the Rajasthan government to stop illegal mining in Aravalli hills within 48 hours.

\n\n

What does the ruling say?

\n\n

- The court was hearing a matter related to illegal mining activities in Aravalli hills.
- The court said it was compelled to pass the order because Rajasthan has taken the issue "very lightly".
- It has referred to a central empowered committee report that 31 hills or hillocks have vanished in the state's Aravalli area.
- The Rajasthan government also told the court that out of 138 hills in Aravalli, 28 hills near the Delhi border have disappeared.
- Though Rajasthan was earning a royalty of around Rs 5,000 crore from mining activities in the region, it cannot endanger the lives of lakhs of people in the National Capital Region as the disappearance of the hills may lead to an increase in pollution levels.
- Hence the bench directed the chief secretary of Rajasthan to file an affidavit regarding compliance of its order.
- These remarks made by the Supreme Court are startling enough to merit serious consideration and appropriate remedial action.

\n\n

What are the other issues surrounding Aravalli?

\n\n

\n
- The Forest Survey of India (FSI) reported continued illegal mining at more than 3,200 sites in Aravalli.
\n
- The linking of disappearance of the hills and the rising pollution levels in Delhi is a telling comment on the state of the environment, which is coming at a time when the National Capital Region (NCR) is reeling from air pollution and is struggling hard to combat it.
\n
- Aravalli arrests the eastward march of the Thar desert, thereby minimising the threat of desertification to the National Capital Region (NCR).
\n
- However, mining is not the only problem of this 692-km-long series of hills spanning parts of Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan and Gujarat.
\n
- Large-scale urbanisation and realty projects are also altering the geography and ecology of these hills, which serve as the natural lung for the thickly populated NCR, including Delhi and Gurugram.
\n
- The degradation of the Aravallis on such a huge scale is also eroding its ability to act as a green barrier against the creep of the Thar desert towards the highly fertile plains of Punjab, Haryana and Delhi.
\n
- The Aravalli range also needs to be conserved because it is a rich biodiversity hotspot, hosting many rare species of flora and fauna.
\n
- Several rivers and rivulets, including the Sabarmati, Luni, Chambal and Krishnavati, originate here.
\n
- Most initiatives undertaken since the early 2000s to save these mountains from exploitation, have largely failed in achieving their objectives.
\n
- The Centre had prohibited mining in this area in 2003 and the Supreme Court had ordered similar action in all the notified areas of the Aravallis in 2004.
\n
- In spite of that, illegal mining and quarrying have continued to wreck these hills, with the Centre and state governments sitting by as silent observers.
\n
- For instance, Haryana has been delaying designating the bulk of the Aravallis as forests on the pretext that there is no clear definition of forests.
\n
- Though there is an ambiguity in this regard, the blame for this lies partly

with the Supreme Court as well.
\n
- In a 1996 judgment, the court had said that the term forest should be understood in its dictionary sense and should include all areas mentioned as forests in government records regardless of their present condition or ownership.
\n
- The latest example of the official agencies' apathy towards forest conservation is the proposal of the NHAI to construct a six-lane road cutting across the Aravalli Biodiversity Park.
\n
- The park has 115,000 important species of trees and shrubs and over 180 species of birds, animals, insects, reptiles and other fauna.
\n
- It was developed jointly by ecologists, volunteers and the Municipal Corporation of Gurugram.
\n
- Nature lovers of Delhi and Gurugram have been protesting the NHAI's move, demanding that the planned road be shifted to the periphery of the park rather than through it.
\n
- The governments of the states having stakes in the Aravallis should forestall further degradation of these hills.
\n
- Only then the ecology of this vital string of mountains and the human and environmental health of the NCR will be protected.
\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: Business standard

\n

