

S U P R E M E C O U R T O F I N D I A
RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS

SUO MOTO WRIT PETITION(CIVIL) No(s).10/2025

IN RE: DEFINITION OF ARAVALLI HILLS AND RANGES AND ANCILLARY ISSUES

Date : 29-12-2025 This petition was called on for hearing today.

CORAM : HON'BLE THE CHIEF JUSTICE
HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE J.K. MAHESHWARI
HON'BLE MR. JUSTICE AUGUSTINE GEORGE MASIH
(VACATION BENCH)

For Parties

By Courts Motion, AOR

Mr. Tushar Mehta, SG
Ms. Aishwarya Bhati, ASG
Mr. G.S. Makker, AOR
Ms. Shreya Jain, Adv.
Ms. Shagun Thakur, Adv.
Mr. Rohan Gupta, Adv.
Mr. M.K. Maroria, Adv.
Ms. Manisha Chava, Adv.

Ms. Anitha Shenoy, Sr. Adv.
Mr. Ritwick Dutta, Adv.
Mr. Rahul Chowdhary, Adv.
Ms. Shishti Agnihotri, Adv.
Ms. Ayushma Awasthi, AOR

UPON hearing the counsel the Court made the following
O R D E R

1. The Aravalli Hills and Range (**Aravallis**), frequently characterised as the 'green lungs' of North Western India, have for centuries sustained diverse ecosystems and underpinned the livelihoods of numerous communities. It serves as the indispensable ecological and socio-economic backbone of the region, functioning as the primary geographical barrier separating the arid North Western desert from the fertile Northern plains.

2. Owing to its ancient geological formation, the Aravallis host some of the nation's most significant mineral deposits. Notwithstanding its historical and environmental significance, it has been alleged time and again that the Aravallis have been subjected to escalating anthropogenic pressures. Decades of unchecked urbanization, systematic deforestation, and intensive resource extraction are said to have exerted immense strain upon this inherently fragile ecosystem.
3. In this regard, this Court since 2002, has been actively seized of the issues concerning mining operations within the Aravallis and the concomitant necessity of protecting its fragile ecology. Historically, a lack of central uniformity led each State, i.e. the NCT of Delhi, Rajasthan, Haryana and Gujarat, to adopt their own interpretative criteria and divergent definitions for demarcating the territorial extent of the range.
4. This issue of definitional inconsistency was reagitated before this Court in the context of unchecked mining activities, once again highlighting the divergence in the criteria adopted by each State and the exigent need for a 'uniform definition'. This Court *vide* the order dated 09.05.2024, acknowledged the necessity for a more precise definition of the 'Aravalli Hills and Ranges' and directed the constitution of a Committee tasked with formulating a uniform definition in pursuance of the same. The relevant portion of the order concerning the Committee's mandate and constitution is as follows:

“7. We, therefore, direct that a Committee be constituted comprising of the following officers/officials to have a uniform definition of the Aravalli hills and ranges:-

- i. Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India.*
- ii. Secretaries of the Department of Forests, Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi and the States of Haryana, Rajasthan and Gujarat.*
- iii. A representative of the Forest Survey of India.*
- iv. A representative of the Central Empowered Committee.*
- v. A representative of the Geological Survey of India.*
- vi. Joint Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Government of India, shall be the convenor of the Committee.”*

5. The Committee submitted its report on 03.10.2025 (**Report**), whereupon it provided the following definition of the ‘Aravalli Hills and Ranges’:

“7. Recommendations and Way Forward

7.1 Definition of Aravali Hills and Ranges in the context of mining

7.1.1 The committee recommends following operational definition of Aravali Hills and Ranges in the context of mining:

Aravali Hills: Any landform located in the Aravali districts, having an elevation of 100 metres or more from the local relief, shall be termed as Aravali Hills. For this purpose, the local relief shall be determined with reference to the lowest contour line encircling the landform, as per Para-5.1.1 above. The entire landform lying within the area enclosed by such lowest contour, whether actual or extended notionally, together with the Hill, its supporting slopes and associated landforms irrespective of their gradient, shall be deemed to constitute part of the Aravali Hills.

Aravali Range: Two or more Aravali Hills, as defined at Para-

5.1.2 above, located within the proximity of 500m from each other, measured from the outermost point on the boundary of the lowest contour line on either side forms Aravali Range. The area between the two Aravali hills is determined by first creating buffers with a width.”

6. This definition served as the primary foundation for the Committee’s recommendation that ‘**no new mining leases**’ be granted within the newly demarcated ‘Aravalli Hills and Ranges’. Subsequently, and upon a comprehensive examination of the Committee’s Report, this Court, in its judgment dated 20.11.2025, formally accepted its findings, including the aforementioned definition. Consequently, the following directions were issued:

“50. In the result, we pass the following order:

(i) We accept the recommendations made by the Committee with regard to the definition of Aravali Hills and Ranges given by MoEF&CC;

(ii) We further accept the recommendations with regard to the prohibition of mining in core/inviolate areas with exception as carved out in paragraph 7.3.1 of the Committee’s Report;

(iii) We also accept the recommendations for sustainable mining in Aravali Hills and Ranges and the steps to be taken for preventing illegal mining in Aravali Hills and Ranges;

(iv) We, however, direct the MoEF&CC to prepare a MPSM through ICFRE for the entire Aravalis, i.e., understood as the continuous geological ridge extending from Gujarat to Delhi on the lines of the MPSM for Saranda and the MPSM must:

a. Identify permissible areas for mining, ecologically sensitive, conservation-critical and restoration priority areas within the Aravali landscape where mining shall be strictly prohibited or permitted only under exceptional and scientifically justified

circumstances;

b. Incorporate a thorough analysis of cumulative environmental impacts and the ecological carrying capacity of the region; and

c. Include detailed post-mining restoration and rehabilitation measures.

(v) We further direct that till the MPSM is finalised by the MoEF&CC through ICFRE, no new mining leases should be granted;

(vi) We further direct that upon the MPSM being finalised by MoEF&CC in consultation with the ICFRE, mining would be permitted as per the MPSM only in those areas wherein sustainable mining could be permitted; and

(vii) In the meantime, the mining activities in the mines which are already in operation would be continued in strict compliance with the recommendations made by the Committee in paragraph 8 of its Report.”

7. The above judgment has, however, invited a spate of Interlocutory Applications (**IAs**), Miscellaneous Applications (**MA**s), and petitions before this Court challenging the findings of the Committee and the subsequent approval accorded by this Court, while also seeking clarification on certain directions stipulated in the judgment dated 20.11.2025. While we have no scientific reasons justifying any *ex-facie* acceptance of the same, nor any cogent evidence or expert testimony to substantiate these individual contentions, nevertheless, it seems *prima facie* that both the Committee's Report and the judgment of this Court have omitted to expressly clarify certain critical issues.

8. Furthermore, there has been a significant outcry among

environmentalists, who have expressed profound concern about the potential for misinterpretation and improper implementation of the newly adopted definition and this Court's directions. This public dissent and criticism appear to stem from the perceived ambiguity and lack of clarity in certain terms and directives issued by this Court. Consequently, there is a dire need to further probe and clarify to prevent any regulatory gaps that might undermine the ecological integrity of the Aravalli region.

9. We therefore deem it appropriate that prior to the implementation of the Committee's Report, or the execution of the directions contained in Paragraph 50 of this Court's judgment dated 20.11.2025, a fair, impartial, independent expert opinion must be obtained and considered, after associating all requisite stakeholders. Such a step is essential to resolve critical ambiguities and to provide definitive guidance on issues such as:

- (i) Whether the definition of the 'Aravalli Hills and Ranges', restricted exclusively to the 500-meter area between two or more Aravalli Hills, creates a structural paradox wherein the geographical scope of protected territory is significantly narrowed.
- (ii) Consequently, it should be determined whether this restrictive demarcation has inversely broadened the scope of 'non-Aravalli' areas, thereby facilitating the continuation of unregulated mining and other disruptive activities in terrains that are ecologically

contiguous but technically excluded by this definition?

- (iii) Whether the Aravalli Hills, characterized by an elevation of 100 meters and above, constitute a contiguous ecological formation even when the intervening distance exceeds the stipulated 500-meter threshold. Furthermore, in such instances, it must be clarified whether regulated mining would be permissible in these gaps. If so, what precise spatial parameters or lateral width would be utilized to define the extent of the 'Aravalli Range' to ensure that ecological continuity is not compromised?
- (iv) Whether the widely publicized criticism asserting that only 1,048 hills out of 12,081 in Rajasthan meet the 100-meter elevation threshold, thereby stripping the remaining lower ranges of environmental protection, is factually and scientifically accurate. In the event this assessment correctly identifies a significant regulatory lacuna, it must be determined whether an exhaustive scientific and geological investigation is necessitated. Such an inquiry would involve the precise measurement of all hill and hillock elevations to facilitate a more nuanced and 'measured' assessment of the criteria required to maintain the structural and ecological integrity of the entire range.
- (v) Whether there exist any supplementary issues or systemic vulnerabilities that may emerge during the course of these proceedings that necessitate this Court's intervention.

10. Accordingly, we propose to constitute a High-Powered Expert Committee comprising domain experts to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the Report submitted by the Committee. This study shall constitute an exhaustive and holistic examination of the questions formulated above, and amongst others, the following parameters:
- (i) A definitive enumeration of the specific regions that fall within the scope of the recommended definition;
 - (ii) A detailed identification of the territories that would be excluded from protection under the proposed criteria;
 - (iii) An analysis of whether ‘sustainable mining’ or ‘regulated mining’ within the newly demarcated Aravalli areas, notwithstanding regulatory oversight, would result in any adverse ecological consequences;
 - (iv) An assessment of the areas no longer covered by the definition, specifically whether such exclusion risks their eventual erasure or degradation, thereby compromising the overall ecological integrity of the Aravalli range; and
 - (v) A multi-temporal evaluation of the short-term and long-term environmental impacts resulting from the implementation of the recommended definition and its associated directions.
11. Let notice be therefore issued to the Union of India and the States of NCT of Delhi, Rajasthan, Haryana and Gujarat, returnable on 21.01.2026. The matter is to be listed before the Green Bench on the

date fixed. The Learned Attorney General for India, the Solicitor General of India and Mr. K. Parameshwar, Learned Senior Advocate and *Amicus Curiae* be also requested to assist this Court, along with the Central Empowered Committee (**CEC**).

12. In the interim, to subserve the ends of complete justice and in the broader public interest, we deem it necessary to direct that the recommendations submitted by the Committee, together with the findings and directions stipulated by this Court in its judgment dated 20.11.2025, be kept in abeyance. This stay shall remain in effect until the present proceedings reach a state of logical finality, ensuring that no irreversible administrative or ecological actions are taken based on the current framework.
13. We further find it necessary, as a matter of abundant caution, to direct unequivocally, as set out in the order dated 09.05.2024, that until further orders, no permission shall be granted for mining, whether it is for new mining leases or renewal of old mining leases, in the 'Aravalli Hills and Ranges' as defined in the FSI Report dated 25.08.2010 without prior permission from this Court.
14. Ordered accordingly.

(ARJUN BISHT)
ASTT. REGISTRAR-cum-PS

(PREETHI T.C.)
ASSISTANT REGISTRAR