

IMPLEMENT THE SC ORDER ON ARAVALLIS IN LETTER AND SPIRIT

Relevant for: World & Indian Geography | Topic: Mountains, changes therein and in Flora & Fauna and the Effects of such changes

The Supreme Court on Tuesday expressed shock that 31 hills in the Aravalli area of Rajasthan have “vanished”, and, in a strongly worded order, directed the state government to stop illegal mining in 115.34-hectare area within 48 hours. The dire state of the three-billion-year-old Aravalli range, which straddles the states of Rajasthan, Haryana, Delhi and Gujarat, because of the plunder of its mineral resources has been documented in detail in many government reports.

Earlier this year, the ‘Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India on Economic Sector for the year ended March 31, 2017 for Rajasthan’ highlighted that 98.87 lakh metric tonnes of minerals were illegally excavated over five years in five districts in the state. It also highlighted violations of green norms in the state, including flouting of earlier Supreme Court orders on the Aravallis. The hill-forest range has also been declared the most “degraded” in India by the Dehra Dun-based Wildlife Institute of India. The study conducted between January and April 2017 found that “most of the indigenous plant species have disappeared... and the most serious threat to wildlife and forests is from developmental activities, which are gradually destroying the remnants of the Aravalli”.

The Aravalli hills face repeated assaults from the mining mafia in Rajasthan because it has a rich reserve of red Badarpur sand, quartz, copper, lead, zinc, rock phosphate, soapstone, silica sand, limestone, marble and gypsum. A CAG scrutiny of the records of nine senior mining officials in five districts of Rajasthan — Alwar, Jaipur, Sikar, Rajsamand and Udaipur — revealed that their offices registered 4,072 cases of illegal mining, transportation and storage of mineral between 2011-12 and 2016-17. Around 98.87 lakh metric tonnes of minerals were found to have been illegally excavated during the same period.

This loot of public resources and state revenue could happen because Rajasthan, like many other Indian states, did not take concrete measures — regulatory supervisions, proper vigilance, modernisation of check posts and restoration and reclamation of mined out pits — to stop illegal mining. It was also noticed that there was inadequate follow up of cases on illegal mining and delay in issuing notices to erring mining companies. The CAG report said the Rajasthan department could recover only Rs 25.57 crore against the recoverable amount of Rs 204.50 crore in financial year that ended March 31, 2017.

While the financial impact of illegal mining are quantifiable, there are many others such as health, that could have intergenerational impacts. They are, therefore, difficult to measure. But they can be damaging for people and set them back in their lives for a very long time. To ensure that people don't pay the price for apathy on the part of the State, the SC order against illegal mining must be implemented in letter and spirit. A business as usual approach will be disastrous.

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