

ASSAULT ON ARAVALLIS

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

Both my son's kidneys have failed and he desperately needs a liver transplant! Please help me

Last week, the Supreme Court reprimanded the Rajasthan government for its failure to check illegal mining in an over 100-hectare range of the Aravalli mountains. This is not the first time the state government has been called out by the judiciary. Even so, the censure should be sobering — India's oldest mountain range has lost nearly a fourth of its hills. The apex court referred to a report of the Central Empowered Committee (CEC) — the body that advises it on forest-related matters — which pointed out that 31 of the 128 hills in the Aravallis “have vanished”. The two judge-bench averred that the loss of the hills could be a reason for the rising pollution levels in the National Capital Region (NCR). While the Aravallis' role as a green lung for the NCR should, in itself, be a compelling reason to halt its degradation, the other ecosystem services it provides demand the strict application of the principle of sustainable development to regulate activities such as mining and construction.

Extending for nearly 700 km from Banaskantha in Eastern Gujarat to Southern Haryana, through Rajasthan and Delhi, the Aravallis have played a major role in shaping the terrain of large parts of north-western India. For more than three billion years, its hills have moderated the velocity of winds that blow towards North India and resisted the advance of the Thar Desert towards the fertile Indo-Gangetic plain. However, in the past two decades, several studies have pointed out that the denudation of the hills is leading to the drifting of desert sands towards the plains. Last year, a study by the Wildlife Institute of India pointed out that the shrinking green cover in the Aravallis is a major reason for the increase in the intensity of dust storms in the Indo-Gangetic plains.

Last week, the Rajasthan government admitted the incidence of illegal mining. However, it did a volte face on Monday and contested the claim that hills in the Aravallis have disappeared. The state government would do well to take note of a CAG report of March which admonishes it for violating the SC's strictures on mining in the range. In its latest intervention, the Court reprimanded the state government for taking the “issue lightly”. The censure should apply to the Haryana government as well. In September, the apex court pulled up the state government for its failure to check illegal construction in the Aravalli hills. The warning bells rung by the latest CEC report should make the two state governments change their ways.

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