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Aravallis Under Threat — India's Ancient Climate Shield Is Weakening

1 June 2026 ·

ENVIRONMENT

GEOGRAPHY

GS1

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Aravallis Under Threat — India's Ancient Climate Shield Is Weakening

1 June 2026 · 4 min read ·

✓ Every fact web-verified against primary sources

*Pre-monsoon dust storms swept through Churu and several Rajasthan districts in late May 2026, highlighting a deeper crisis: a **Wildlife Institute of India (WII)** study found that the **Aravalli range** — India's oldest mountain range and a critical ecological barrier — has lost **31 entire hillocks** to illegal mining, with **12 widening operational gaps** appearing across its length. This degradation is being directly linked to the intensifying dust storms that batter **northwest India and the Indo-Gangetic Plain (IGP)**.*

THE ARAVALLIS — INDIA'S ANCIENT CLIMATE SHIELD

PARAMETER	DETAIL
Age	Among the oldest fold mountains on Earth (~1.5–2.5 billion years old — Pre-Cambrian)
Extent	~ 692 km from Gujarat (Palanpur) through Rajasthan and Haryana to Delhi
Highest peak	Guru Shikhar (1,722 m) , Rajasthan (in the Abu Hills)
States covered	Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana, Delhi
Ecological role	Barrier against desert (Thar) encroachment; watershed divide; wind and dust buffer for the IGP

WHAT THE WII STUDY FOUND

- **31 entire hillocks have vanished** — literally mined out of existence.
- **12 widening gaps** across the range, forming openings through which **Thar desert dust** now penetrates unimpeded toward the **Indo-Gangetic Plain**.
- The primary cause: **decades of illegal mining** (stone, marble, lime) that continued despite court orders and official bans.

THE DUST STORM CONNECTION

The Aravallis **historically interrupted and slowed** the **north-westerly winds** that carry Thar desert dust toward Delhi and the IGP. With gaps in the range:

- Desert **aerosols and particulate matter** (PM10, PM2.5) travel further and in higher concentrations into **Rajasthan, Haryana, and the NCR**.
- **Dust storms** (as in Churu, May 30, 2026) with wind speeds of 35–40 kmph now escalate into wider weather events.
- The **air quality impact** falls most heavily on the **NCR / Delhi** — which already has severe air pollution challenges.

BROADER ECOLOGICAL VALUE OF ARAVALLIS

- ❶ **Watershed divide** — rivers originating on the western flank drain into the **Arabian Sea**; those on the eastern flank drain into the **Yamuna/Ganga** system.
- ❷ **Wildlife corridor** — the Aravallis form a critical corridor connecting the **Delhi Ridge** (protected forest) through Haryana to the **Sariska Tiger Reserve (Rajasthan)**; Leopards and several species depend on this continuity.
- ❸ **Groundwater recharge** — hillocks act as recharge zones for aquifers in Rajasthan, Haryana, and Delhi.

LEGAL AND CONSERVATION FRAMEWORK

INSTRUMENT	STATUS
Supreme Court orders	Multiple orders restricting mining in and around Aravallis; the range is partly under SC-monitored moratoriums
Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980	Forest land within the Aravallis requires central clearance for diversion
Delhi Ridge	Protected forest under Delhi Forest Act; treated as part of the larger Aravalli ecosystem
State-level protection	Patchy; Haryana and Rajasthan have been slow to demarcate eco-sensitive zones
Gadgil/Kasturirangan analogy	Aravallis need a similar comprehensive ecological mapping and legal protection as the Western Ghats

WHY IT MATTERS FOR UPSC

- **Climate resilience infrastructure** — natural barriers like mountain ranges provide ecosystem services (clean air, recharge, dust reduction) worth billions. Their loss is an **economic and climate cost**, not just an ecological one.
- **Urbanisation pressure** — Delhi's expansion has encroached into the Delhi Ridge (Aravalli extension); political economy of illegal mining continues to resist legal protection.
- **Policy gap** — no dedicated Aravalli Protection Authority exists; enforcement is fragmented across four states.

UPSC RELEVANCE

PAPER	RELEVANCE
GS1	Physical geography — Aravallis (age, location, formation); IGP; desert encroachment; watershed
GS3	Environment — mountain ecosystem services; mining impact; air quality (PM2.5/PM10); NCAP
Mains	“The Aravallis are as much a climate-resilience asset as a biodiversity zone. Examine the consequences of their degradation and suggest a protection framework.”
Prelims	Aravallis (Pre-Cambrian, ~692 km, Gujarat to Delhi); Guru Shikhar (1,722 m); WII study — 31 hillocks lost, 12 gaps; Sariska TR (Rajasthan)

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ARAVALLIS:

One of the world's oldest mountain ranges — Pre-Cambrian (~1.5-2.5 billion years)

Extent: ~692 km, Gujarat to Delhi (via Rajasthan, Haryana)

Highest peak: Guru Shikhar (1,722 m) in Abu Hills, Rajasthan

States: Gujarat, Rajasthan, Haryana, Delhi

Role: Thar desert barrier; watershed divide; wildlife corridor (Sariska ↔ Delhi Ridge)

WII STUDY (2026):

31 hillocks gone to illegal mining

12 widening gaps through which desert dust penetrates the IGP

DUST STORMS (MAY 30, 2026): CHURU, RAJASTHAN; 35-40 KMPH WINDS

LEGAL STATUS:

Multiple SC orders restricting mining

No dedicated Aravalli Authority; enforcement fragmented across 4 states

WILDLIFE VALUE: CORRIDOR LINKING DELHI RIDGE ↔ HARYANA ↔ SARISKA TIGER RESERVE (RAJASTHAN)

Sources: The Hindu, Indian Express, Wildlife Institute of India

Source: Aravallis Under Threat — India's Ancient Climate Shield Is Weakening — Ujyari.com | Free UPSC & State
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