

***Read the following case-based passage carefully:***

The Aravalli Hills, one of the oldest mountain ranges in the world, stretch roughly 700 km from Delhi through Haryana and Rajasthan into Gujarat. This ancient landscape is far more than a geographical feature: it functions as a natural ecological buffer-moderating climate extremes, checking the westward advance of the Thar Desert, recharging groundwater, and acting as a green shield against dust and pollution for the densely populated Delhi-NCR region. Despite its importance, decades of illegal mining, deforestation, and unregulated development have already degraded large portions of the range. Some environmental assessments suggest that 35 % of the Aravalli ecosystem has suffered damage over the past two decades due to mining and related activities.

On 20 November 2025, the Supreme Court of India adopted a new legal definition of what constitutes an “Aravalli Hill” and “Aravalli Range,” based on recommendations from a committee under the Union Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change. Under this definition, a landform must have a relative elevation of at least 100 metres above surrounding terrain to qualify as part of the Aravalli system, and two or more such hills within 500 metres qualify as a range. Areas failing to meet this criterion may no longer receive the legal protection previously afforded to the landscape.

Critically, this technical redefinition could have far-reaching ecological consequences. According to data derived from Forest Survey of India assessments and expert analyses, only about 8.7 % of existing hillocks in the Aravalli region exceed the 100-metre threshold. That implies that more than 90 % of the hills-many of which are ecologically vital despite their modest height-could effectively be stripped of legal safeguards. These smaller hills, often ranging 20-30 metres high, play a significant role in wind barrier formation, dust trapping, groundwater recharge (estimated at up to 2 million litres per hectare annually), and biodiversity support.

Official defenders of the judgement argue that it will provide clarity and scientific rigour to the legal framework and enable a sustainable mining management plan to be developed before new leases are issued. They maintain that a substantial portion of the Aravalli zone will remain protected under the revised definition, countering claims that protections have been broadly loosened.

However, environmental scientists, activists, and local communities contest this interpretation. They warn that the new definition creates a loophole for renewed mining and commercial exploitation, especially in regions of Haryana and southern Rajasthan where many critical ecological areas lie below 100 metres. Protesters argue that this could not only

accelerate desertification and habitat loss, but also worsen air pollution and water scarcity in the broader north-western plains, undermining decades of conservation efforts.

The ruling has sparked widespread protests from Gurugram to Udaipur, with civil society groups, lawyers, tribal communities, and environmental organisations rallying under slogans such as “Save Aravalli, Save the Future”. Many demand that the government declare the entire Aravalli ecosystem a fully protected critical ecological zone and urge an immediate judicial review of the new definition.

From a critical perspective, this case highlights a fundamental tension in environmental governance: the challenge of reconciling legal technicalities, developmental pressures, and ecological science. While the Supreme Court’s attempt to standardise definitions might appear administratively rational, critics argue that context-blind criteria risk undermining the very protections they are meant to enforce. The Aravalli dispute thus underscores an urgent need for holistic environmental policy, rooted in ecological reality and long-term sustainability, rather than narrow interpretative thresholds that may inadvertently open the door to further ecological harm.

***On the basis of your understanding answer the following questions:***

**1. The Aravalli ecosystem functions as a natural regulator of environmental stability.**

**This conclusion is best supported by the inference that the hills**

- A. primarily preserve cultural heritage
- B. influence atmospheric and water systems beyond their immediate area
- C. remain ecologically inactive due to age
- D. contribute mainly to mineral extraction

**2. The adoption of a strict elevation threshold by the judiciary alters conservation outcomes because it**

- A. extends protection to all landforms scientifically
- B. introduces a uniform yet restrictive qualification
- C. removes administrative ambiguity completely
- D. replaces ecological science with legal precedent

**3. The passage highlights the importance of smaller landforms to demonstrate that**

- A. ecological value is independent of visual prominence
- B. taller hills are environmentally insignificant
- C. landform height directly determines biodiversity
- D. only forested regions affect climate

**4. The data indicating that most hillocks fall below the prescribed height implies that the judgement may**

- A. unintentionally weaken existing environmental safeguards
- B. ensure stricter enforcement of mining laws
- C. enhance conservation through classification
- D. support balanced economic growth

**5. Public resistance to the ruling reflects concern that the judgement could**

- A. invalidate constitutional authority
- B. compromise ecosystem-wide protection
- C. obstruct industrial growth
- D. decentralise governance structures

**6. The government's rationale for the revised definition is based on the belief that**

- A. scientific precision guarantees ecological security
- B. public dissent lacks empirical grounding
- C. development precedes conservation
- D. judicial clarity discourages activism

**7. Limiting environmental protection to elevation-based standards risks overlooking**

- A. administrative feasibility
- B. ecological interdependence
- C. legal enforceability
- D. political accountability

**8. The geographical spread of protests indicates that environmental degradation is perceived as**

- A. a region-specific problem
- B. an isolated judicial issue
- C. a collective ecological threat
- D. a temporary policy challenge

**9. Assertion (A): The revised definition of the Aravalli Hills may facilitate increased ecological damage.**

**Reason (R): Several environmentally critical formations do not meet the new classification benchmark.**

- A. Both A and R are correct, and R logically explains A
- B. Both A and R are correct, but R does not explain A
- C. A is correct, but R is incorrect
- D. A is incorrect, but R is correct

**10. In the given context, the term "denude" conveys the idea of**

- A. legally redefining land
- B. removing protective natural cover
- C. strengthening ecological zones
- D. mapping terrain digitally

**11. The phrase "context-blind criteria" refers to standards that are**

- A. technically advanced
- B. socially inclusive
- C. applied without situational awareness
- D. scientifically comprehensive

**12. The author's approach towards the judicial ruling reflects**

- A. unqualified endorsement
- B. emotional opposition
- C. reasoned scrutiny of consequences
- D. neutral documentation