



Haryana's narrow definition of Aravallis will not be in the interests of the well-being of residents

Haryana's narrow definition of Aravallis ignores the range's ecological role. The state government needs to rethink its plan.



Conserving old mountains

1. A new plan to draw the boundaries of the Aravallis in Haryana could deprive a big chunk of the world's oldest fold mountain system of enjoying the protection accorded to eco-sensitive regions in the NCR.
2. A committee constituted by the state government has asked officials to identify areas under Aravallis on the basis of a 1992 MoEF order that limits the mountain range in Haryana to the erstwhile Gurgaon district — currently Gurugram and Nuh districts.
3. That means more than 9,000 hectares in Faridabad will not come under the National Conservation Zone (NCZ), exposing the area to real estate activities and jeopardising the mountain range's ecological functions.

The ecological role of Aravalli's:

1. Extending for nearly 700 km from eastern Gujarat to south Haryana, through Rajasthan and Delhi, the Aravallis are the green lungs for large parts of the subcontinent.
2. They moderate the velocity of hot winds that blow towards north India and resist the advance of the Thar Desert towards the Indo-Gangetic plains. Their forests are crucial to recharging groundwater.
3. The NCR regional plan 2021, framed in 2005, slotted the Aravalli ecosystem in the area under the NCZ, most of which is out of bounds for construction activity. But the plan has been subject to vigorous stonewalling by successive governments in Haryana, which insisted that there was no clear definition of the Aravallis.
4. In 2017, the state administration told the Union Ministry of Urban Development that there were no Aravallis in Haryana, except in parts of Gurugram and even there, the NCZ strictures on construction activity should

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not apply. Last year, it was pulled up by the Punjab and Haryana High Court for delaying the notification of NCZ.

Apex Court actions:

1. Since 2002, a number of Supreme Court orders have placed strictures on mining in the Aravallis. However, real estate developers — as well as miners — have found ways to flatten the hills and appropriate land.
2. In 2018, the apex court noted that the range had lost a quarter of its hills. In recent times, the apex court has come down heavily on illegal construction in the Aravallis — at times making no distinction between farmhouses of the rich and the dwellings of the poor.
3. It would, however, be salutary to understand that such transgressions are a result of a complex interplay of socioeconomic factors and administrative failures.
4. In Haryana, much of the administrative failure stems from a poor appreciation of the ecological services provided by the Aravallis. The state government would do well to keep in mind the increasing pollution level in Haryana's cities, most of which are also groundwater stressed.
5. A narrow definition of the Aravallis will not be in the interests of the well-being of the state's residents.



Rough contours of proposed 1,400km 'green wall'

- Forest belt likely to run roughly from **Porbandar to Panipat**, covering entire Aravali range and beyond
- 'Green wall' will act as barrier for dust from west and check eastward march of Thar desert
- It will check desertification by **restoring degraded land through massive afforestation**
- Project yet to get formal nod, details to be worked out

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In Manipur, a case for asymmetric federalism

Federal Asymmetry:

1. As a normative idea and an institutional arrangement that supports the recognition and provision of an expansive 'self-rule' for territorially concentrated minority groups, asymmetric federalism has recently received bad press in India.
2. The dissolution of Article 370 in 2019 which gave Jammu and Kashmir a special constitutional status, and intermittent attempts to dilute and dissolve the omnibus Article 371 which, among others, gives expansive constitutional powers to Nagas over land and resources (Article 371A), and to Manipur's Hill Areas Committee (Article 371C) over tribal identity, culture, development and local administration, are exemplars.
3. Driven by the argument that giving distinctive constitutional status to territorially concentrated minorities fosters centrifugal tendencies which over time inhibit national/State integration, development, and peace, antagonists of asymmetric federalism increasingly rallied around the majoritarian idea of a monolith, homogenous nation.



An integrationist approach

1. Indeed, the argument that asymmetric federalism fosters subversive institutions, political instability and breakup of States had also informed the minds of some of the founding fathers of the nation when they participated in India's Constituent Assembly debates.
2. For some, the question of envisioning distinctive rights and asymmetric constitutional provisions is considered inconsequential given that India has become a 'homogenous Hindu nation' after Partition.
3. Such a majoritarian standpoint sits uneasily with the idea of 'autonomous' district councils proposed by the Gopinath Bordoloi Committee, a sub-committee of the Constituent Assembly that sought to accommodate the

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distinctive identity, culture and way of life of tribal groups in the Northeast by envisioning 'self-rule'.

4. While members like Jaipal Singh and B.R. Ambedkar recognised tribal distinctiveness and underscored the need for separate institutional accommodation, Kuladhar Chaliha, a prominent member from Assam, for example, broached an integrationist approach when he openly advocated assimilation of tribal groups.
5. This integrationist approach has been conveniently invoked to delegitimise continuing demand for constitutional asymmetry in Jammu, Kashmir, Ladakh and in various other places in Northeast India.

Can the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation be the regional body that stabilises Afghanistan?

For all the political hype, SCO has failed to deepen regional cooperation in Central Asia.

1. To be sure, the crisis in Afghanistan presents a major opportunity for the SCO to realise its regional ambitions. The SCO's importance for Afghanistan seems self-evident when you look at its sponsors and members.
2. Its founding leaders are the two great powers of the east — Russia and China. Its other initial members were Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan to the north and northeast of Afghanistan. India and Pakistan were inducted as full members in 2017.

Problematic Areas:

1. For an organisation that bears the name of Shanghai, but is focused on Central Asia, its associates look disparate.
2. The SCO is expected to add Egypt, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia as dialogue partners. That diversity affects coherence is a major feature of regional



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institutions. As it broadened its membership, the SCO has, unsurprisingly, struggled to deepen institutional cooperation.

3. Russia's effort to build a regional institution in its Central Asian periphery ran parallel to its plans for the so-called "strategic triangle" with China and India.
4. The Russia-India-China strategic forum, which evolved into the BRICS, was about blunting, at the global level, the American "unipolar" moment that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The SCO was about limiting American reach into Central Asia.
5. The SCO was preceded by the creation of a "Shanghai Five" — Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The three former Soviet republics shared a long frontier with China.
6. The purpose of the Shanghai Five was to stabilise this frontier as well as build on the shared Sino-Russian interest in preventing American meddling in their Central Asian backyard.
7. Moscow and Beijing were also ill at ease with the American military presence in Afghanistan and its impact on Central Asia. The US military retreat from Afghanistan has brought cheer to both Moscow and Beijing, although publicly they criticise President Joe Biden's hasty retreat.

R-C Axis

1. Russia sees itself as the sole protector of the former Soviet Republics and may not be ready to share that role with China — "yes" to coordination, but "no" to a Sino-Russian security dyarchy.
2. Moscow also appears reluctant to back Chinese proposals to promote trade integration under the SCO banner; it prefers the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) under its own leadership.
3. The Central Asian members of the SCO have quarrels of their own, and have struggled to develop collective approaches to their common regional security challenges. It is no surprise then that they are at variance on the Taliban.
4. Turkmenistan, which is not part of SCO, has been quite open to engaging the Taliban in sync with its principles of neutrality. Some Russian analysts see Turkmenistan as the potential weak link in the defence against the Taliban's potential threats to the region. Uzbekistan seems open to a cautious engagement with the Taliban.
5. But Tajikistan, given its kinship with the Afghan Tajiks and direct links to the Panjshir valley across the border, has been sharply critical of Kabul's evolution under the Taliban.

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6. Iran, which has ethnic and linguistic links with the Persian-speaking Tajiks, appears equally worried about the Taliban's policies towards minorities.