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Supreme Court's Stance on Aravalli Definition Stalls Haryana's Jungle Safari Project

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The Supreme Court of India has put the Government of Haryana's ambitious Jungle Safari Project on hold because of continuing uncertainty over the legal definition of the "Aravalli Range" — one of India's most ecologically sensitive regions. The project was proposed in the foothills of the Aravalli Range in Gurugram and Nuh districts of Haryana.

What is the Jungle Safari Project?

Conceptualised in 2021–22, the Jungle Safari (also known as the Aravalli Zoo Safari) aimed to create one of the world's largest safari parks on the Aravalli foothills, covering about 3,000–3,500 acres after revision from the original 10,000 acres.

It was promoted by the Haryana government as an eco-tourism, biodiversity conservation and ecological restoration initiative rather than a commercial venture.

Why Did the Supreme Court Intervene?

The Supreme Court clarified that no activity affecting the Aravallis — including the Jungle Safari project — can proceed until a clear, expert-backed definition of the "Aravalli Range" is determined.

In hearings on 12 February 2026, the Court refused Haryana's request to even submit a detailed project report (DPR) for expert consideration, saying it will decide the case only after an authoritative definition is available.

The Bench underscored: "We will not allow anyone to touch the Aravallis" until an independent expert body defines the range scientifically.

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Why Definition of Aravalli Matters

The Aravalli Range is among the oldest fold mountains in India, stretching across Haryana, Rajasthan, Gujarat, and Delhi, and is critical for ecological stability, groundwater recharge, and air quality regulation in the Delhi-NCR region.

In November 2025, the Supreme Court accepted a new operational definition that considers a landform with a 100-metre elevation above local relief as an Aravalli Hill, but that criterion has been contested by scientists and environmentalists for potentially excluding ecologically vital lower ridges.

The Court has taken suo motu cognisance of the definition issue, due to extensive public protests and expert concerns about weakening environmental safeguards.

Environmental Concerns Surrounding the Project

Fragmentation of Wildlife Corridors: Environmentalists argue that even eco-tourism projects can fragment habitats of native species such as leopards and deer, and disrupt biodiversity.

Hydrological Impact: Disturbing the Aravalli landscape could affect the groundwater recharge zone, increasing water stress in surrounding districts.

Legal Safeguards: The controversy intersects multiple laws including the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980, and regulatory oversight by bodies like the Central Zoo Authority and the Central Empowered Committee (CEC).

Exam-Relevant Themes

Judicial Activism and Environmental Protection: The case illustrates judicial activism by the Supreme Court in interpreting ecological and environmental protection norms, balancing developmental aspirations and ecological conservation.

Aravalli Range — Ecological Significance: The Aravalli hills act as a natural barrier against desertification, aid in groundwater recharge, and support rich biodiversity — making them critical to environmental governance and sustainable development policies.

Eco-Tourism vs Environmental Conservation: The dispute highlights tensions between eco-tourism development and environmental preservation, relevant to public policy, environmental law, and sustainable development goals.