

What India did to protect its forests and hills in 2025: from Kancha Gachibowli to Aravalli

Citizens' protest to protect environment, their ancestral land, judicial orders impacting natural resources: what Indians are doing to protect their environment

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Students of the University of Hyderabad stage a protest against the Telangana government's plan to auction 400 acres of forested land in Hyderabad's Kancha Gachibowli area for the development of IT parks, on April 1, 2025. | Photo Credit: PTI

From Kancha Gachibowli to Aravalli to Hasdeo, the year 2025 saw people coming in large numbers to protest against the threats of mining and deforestation. While the Supreme Court's order on retrospective environmental clearances triggered debate on fundamentals of environmental jurisprudence, government's policy on atomic mineral

mining was also found to be in conflict with interest of ecologically fragile and highly vulnerable coastal lands.

Protest over centre's new definition of Aravalli hills

The **Supreme Court's acceptance of the new uniform definition of the Aravali Hills and Ranges** triggered a massive protest starting from December, in Rajasthan, Delhi, and Haryana.

According to the new definition, "Aravali Hill" will be defined as any landform in designated Aravali districts with an elevation of 100 metres or above its local relief and an "Aravali Range" will be a collection of two or more such hills within 500 metres of each other. The Bench accepted the recommendations for sustainable mining and the steps to be taken for preventing illegal mining in Aravali Hills and Ranges.

Protesters fear this new definition only protects hills higher than 100 metres from mining, and would leave the remaining hills — the 700 km range spanning from Haryana to Gujarat, with the bulk of it in Rajasthan —unprotected from threat of mining.

Also read: Government fails to define Aravallis despite over a year's effort

The Supreme Court on December 29, **kept in abeyance** its November 20 judgment upholding a government expert panel definition on Aravalli.



Students display banners during a protest for the protection of the Aravalli Hills at Jawaharlal Nehru University, in New Delhi, Son aturday, Dec. 27, 2025. | Photo Credit: PTI

Students protest to save Kancha Gachibowli forest in Hyderabad

In March 2025, **students of University of Hyderabad (UoH) started protesting** against the auction of 400 acres of land of Kancha Gachibowli forest. Students stated that the land is part of the university, a claim which has been vehemently denied by the government.

Environmentalists said the land is home to a rich variety of native flora and fauna. They pointed out lack of required permissions for felling greenery, and the absence of an Environmental Impact Assessment which is mandatory for such projects.

In April, the Supreme Court stalled cleaning of the forest area and directed the Telangana Wildlife Warden to take immediate steps to protect the wildlife affected by the destruction of 100 acres of the Kancha Gachibowli “forest” area, telling the State government that it could not have “high-rises in the company of deer”.

BJP and Congress veterans join environmentalists to protect the Himalayas

In September 2025, veteran BJP leader and former Union Minister for Human Resource Development Murli Manohar Joshi and Congress veteran and Rajya Sabha member

Karan Singh, along with several environmentalists and scientists **appealed to the Supreme Court** to review its 2021 judgment permitting widening of Himalayan roads, part of the Chardham project, beyond 5.5 metres.

Overseen by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways, the project involves widening mountain roads, including those in the Bhagirathi Eco Sensitive Zone, and those leading up to India's border with China.

However, environmentalists have argued that cutting hill slopes and the resulting debris are damaging to the eco-system and worsen the impact of landslides and torrential rains as well as cause massive roadblocks and pile-up on these mountain roads.



Rampant cutting of the hills near Rudraprayag for the Char Dham project, a proposed two-lane expressway of National Highway with a minimum width of 10 metres. Char Dham project consists of widening and repairing 889-kilometres of national highways leading to revered shrines of Kedarnath, Badrinath, Gangotri and Yamunotri in Uttarakhand. | Photo Credit: KRISHNAN VV

Supreme Court recalling verdict on retrospective environmental clearances

The Supreme Court, in a majority judgment on November 18, 2025, **recalled its May 16 judgment** which declared that the grant of *ex post facto* or retrospective Environmental

Clearances by the Centre to building projects and constructions was a “gross illegality” and an “anathema”.

Justice Ujjal Bhuyan recorded a sharp dissent in his 97-page opinion. He termed the review judgment an “innocent expression of opinion” which overlooked the “very fundamentals of environmental jurisprudence”.

The May judgment had held that granting retrospective clearances in any form to regularise illegal constructions was clearly illegal.

In an editorial *The Hindu* states that post-facto clearances can only impose penalties, prescribe mitigation or order closure or demolition.

Also read: [Wildlife First writes to Karnataka government to reject Kudremukh Iron Ore Company Limited’s proposal for ex-post facto forest clearance](#)

Exemption of atomic mineral mining from public consultation

The Impact Assessment Division of the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change announced in September 2025 through an office memorandum that public consultation is not required for the projects for mining of atomic minerals, notified in Part B, and critical and strategic minerals, notified in Part D, of the First Schedule of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to withdraw the office memorandum, expressing his concern for Rare Earth Elements embedded in the ecologically-fragile and highly vulnerable beach sand systems in coastal Tamil Nadu.

In a written reply in Lok Sabha, Union Minister of State for Environment, Kirti Vardhan Singh, in December 2025, informed the State government that the exemption was issued under an already existing provision of the EIA Notification, Clause 7(III)(i)(f), which allows projects relating to national defence, security or other strategic considerations to be exempted from public consultation.

Forest clearance for mining project in Hasdeo

In August 2025, the **Chhattisgarh government approved forest clearance for a mining project** in ecologically sensitive Hasdeo Aranya. The project potentially paves the way for the felling of 4.5 lakh trees, drawing criticism from Opposition parties and environmentalists.

Demanding its cancellation, the Opposition have accused the ruling BJP of sacrificing the interests of the people of the State as well as ecological concerns “for the benefit of their capitalist friends”.

Local residents submitted as many as 1,623 individual objection letters during a public hearing for environmental clearance.

In 2022, the Chhattisgarh Legislative Assembly unanimously passed a private member resolution urging the Centre to cancel allocation of all coal mining blocks in the ecologically sensitive area of Hasdeo Aranya.

Protest against mining in Hasdeo forest and the resultant deforestation dates back to 2011 when the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change granted clearance for the mining for a coal block. According to People’s Union for Civil Liberties, the Indian government has identified 23 coal blocks within the forest area.



The sit-in protest site at the entrance to Hariharpur village, where the Hasdeo Arand Bachao Sangharsh Samiti has gathered every day since March 2, 2022. In white shirt, Muneshwar Singh Porte, a member of Samiti and resident of Fattepur village. | Photo Credit: A.M.Faruqui

Cancellation and 'disappearance' of forest rights of villagers in Chhattisgarh

While talking about forest conservation, the role of forest dwellers and adivasi communities are often ignored.

In October 2025, the Chhattisgarh High Court has dismissed a petition challenging the cancellation of community **forest rights granted to villagers of Ghatbarra in the Hasdeo Aranya forest**, where Adani Enterprises-owned entity is operating the Parsa East and Kete Basen coal mines.

In 2016, the District-Level Committee (DLC) in Surguja district cancelled community forest rights titles granted in 2013, noting that this was erroneously granted as the patch of land fell under mining areas, for which diversion of forest was already approved in 2012.

Forest Rights Act, 2006 recognises and vests rights to use forests to Scheduled Tribe and other forest-dwelling communities.

In August, *The Hindu* reported that thousands of forest rights titles distributed across at least three districts in Chhattisgarh seem to have disappeared from the records of the State government's Tribal Welfare Department at various points over the preceding 17 months. As per the FRA, once titles are granted, they are neither transferable nor alienable but can only be inherited.

Protest against Siang Upper Multi-Purpose Project (SUMP) in Arunachal Pradesh

Villagers from three districts of central Arunachal Pradesh in May 2025, launched an indefinite sit-in against the 11,000-megawatt Siang Upper Multi-Purpose Project. Villagers stopped a pre-feasibility report and survey work for the hydroelectric project. The protesting women said the project will rob them of their ancestral land and livelihood. The villagers said they, under the banner of the Siang Indigenous Farmers Forum, have been opposing dams since the early 1980s.

Protest against coal mining turns violent in Chhattisgarh's Surguja

A violence broke out as villagers protested against mining in Chhattisgarh's Surguja in December 2025. The protesters, residents of Parsodi Kala village, were opposing the

Amera extension coal project of the South Eastern Coalfields Limited, a subsidiary of Coal India Limited. The protesters alleged land grabbing.

Land for agriculture was their only source of livelihood and it was being taken away, which they opposed, some protesters said. Leelavati, a protester, said she would not give up her land. “We love our land and do not want to give it away. SECL will get coal, but what will happen to us?”

The fear of ‘irreversible’ impact on Great Nicobar Island project

In October 2025, more than 70 scholars, former bureaucrats, activists, lawyers, and environmentalists wrote an [open letter responding to Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav’s defence](#) of the proposed ₹92,000-crore Great Nicobar Island mega-infrastructure project, urging the Minister to “set aside political considerations” and focus on the project’s “grave and irreversible negative implications”.

Great Nicobar project involves the construction of a trans-shipment port, an international airport, a township, and a power plant on more than 160 sq. km of land.

Also read: [Great Nicobar Island project: map ready for denotification of tribal reserve](#)

The signatories alleged that the Environmental Appraisal Committee ignored anthropological and ecological objections.

The Hindu reported that the Tribal Council of Little Nicobar and Great Nicobar has said in a complaint to the Minister of Tribal Affairs in August 2025, that forest clearance was granted for the project through a false representation to the Centre by Andaman and Nicobar Islands administration, claiming that rights of the tribal people under the Forest Rights Act, 2006, had been “identified and settled”.

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