

## **Amendments to Punjab Land Preservation Act**

### **Why in news?**

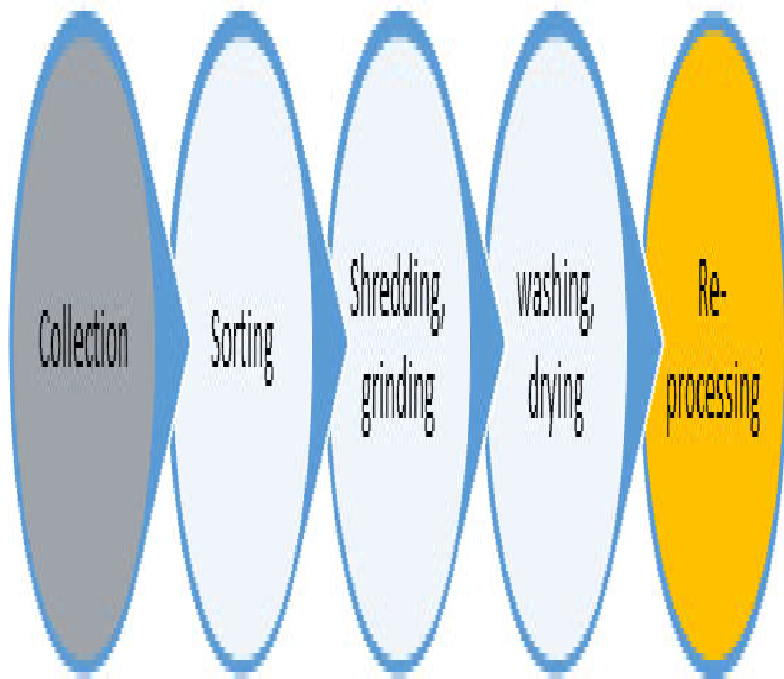
The Supreme Court has ordered the Haryana government to not implement the amendments it made to the Punjab Land Preservation Act (PLPA).

### **What is the PLP Act?**

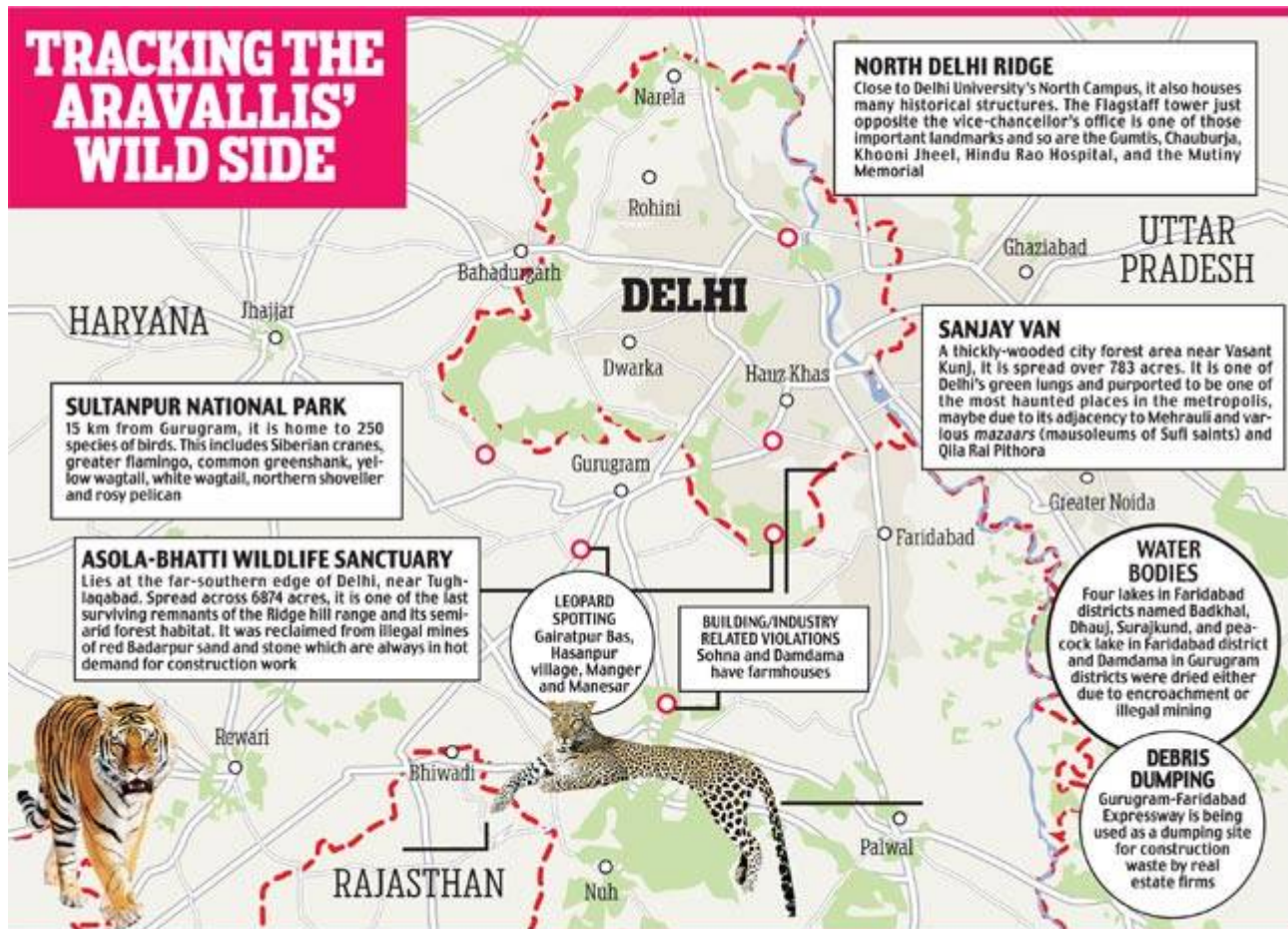
- All non-forest activities in and along the Aravali hills have, for long, been prohibited, to preserve the ecology of these mountains.
- The British had enacted a special law, the Punjab Land Preservation Act (PLPA), for this purpose way back in 1900.
- PLPA has now been diluted by the Haryana government.
- The amendments took away the forest status of large chunks of these hills and threw open them for commercial activities.
- These are areas under master plans of cities such as Gurugram, Faridabad, Nuh, Mahendragarh and Rewari.
- The move would take away the protection offered to them under the PLP Act.

### **How significant are the Aravallis?**

- The Aravallis is one of the world's oldest mountain chains, and its ecological worth is immense.
- The 692-km Aravali range spans parts of Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan and Gujarat.



- The Aravallis serve as the lungs for the highly polluted National Capital Region (NCR).
- It hinders the dust-laden winds from Rajasthan to enter the NCR where the air quality is already fatally poor.
- It also plays a critical role in recharging the groundwater of the region around it.
- The mountains also act as a natural shield against the spread of the Thar Desert.
- Moreover, it is the source of origin of several rivers and rivulets, including Sabarmati, Luni, Chambal and Krishnavati.
- Besides, it is the catchment of lakes like Damdama, Dhauj, Badkhal and Surajkund.
- More importantly, it harbours rich biodiversity, hosting numerous species of plants, birds and animals.
- It is the corridor between Asola Bhatti sanctuary in Delhi and Sariska in Rajasthan for leopards, hyenas, jackals, mongoose and most other animals.



## What are the concerns in the use?

- Large scale illegal encroachments and misuse of the Aravalli forests for realty, mining and other commercial purposes are going on since the 1970s.
- The urbanisation has gradually encroached agricultural and forest lands as newer living and working spaces were developed.
- Lakhs of dwelling units, commercial buildings and industries have already come up in this fragile mountainous track.
- Around 30% of the Aravalli area falling in the Faridabad and Gurugram districts which are notified as protected forests under the PLPA now stands privatised.
- The Haryana portion of the Aravalli range remains the country's most degraded forest, as per a Wildlife Institute of India study.
- The rapid and unabated deforestation and development activities are further damaging this unique landscape.
- As many as 31 out of the 128 hills in the Rajasthan portion of the Aravallis have totally disappeared, flattened by the land and mining mafias.

## What lies ahead?

- The obvious motive behind the amendment of the statute is to legitimise the illegal encroachments and misuse of the Aravalli forests.

- Haryana has the lowest forest cover in the country, barely 3.59%.
- So any action that would further curtail the forested land is inadvisable.
- Haryana government should comply with the apex court's order and withdraw the amendment to the PLPA.
- It would go a long way if it takes positive action to protect and rejuvenate the forest cover of the Aravalli hills.

**Source: Business Standard, DownToEarth**

