



Draft Geo-heritage Sites and Geo-relics Bill, 2022

Prelims: GSI, UNESCO, Right to Fair Compensation, RFCTLARR Act.

Mains: Draft Geo-heritage Sites and Geo-relics Bill.

Why in News?

Recently, the Ministry of Mines has notified **Draft Geo-heritage Sites and Geo-relics (Preservation and Maintenance) Bill, 2022**.

- The Bill is aimed at providing for the **declaration, preservation, protection and maintenance of geo-heritage sites and geo-relics** of national importance, for geological studies, education, research and awareness purposes.
- The GSI has declared **32 geo-heritage sites**, including the Siwalik Fossil Park, Himachal Pradesh; Stromatolite Fossil Park, Jharmarkotra Rock Phosphate deposit, Udaipur district, Akal Fossil Wood Park, Jaisalmer, but **several are in stages of disrepair**.

What are the Key Features of the Bill?

- **Defines Geoheritage Sites:**
 - Geoheritage sites are “sites containing geo-relics and phenomena, stratigraphic type sections, geological structures and geomorphic landforms including caves, natural rock-sculptures of national and international interest; and includes such portion of land adjoining the site,” that may be required for their conservation or to access to such sites.
- **Georelics:**
 - A Geo-relic is defined as “**any relic or material of a geological significance or interest like sediments, rocks, minerals, meteorite or fossils**”.
 - The **GSI (geological Survey of India)** will have the power to **acquire geo-relics** “for its preservation and maintenance”.
- **Authority to Central Government:**
 - It would authorize the Central Government to declare a geoheritage site to be of national importance.
 - This would be under the provisions of the **Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013 (RFCTLARR Act)**.
- **Compensation to the Occupier of Land:**
 - Provision is made for compensation to the owner or occupier of land who **incurs loss or damage from the land** due to the exercise of any power under this Act.
 - The market value of any property will be **ascertained in accordance with the principles set out in the RFCTLARR Act**.
- **Prohibition on Construction:**
 - The Bill imposes a prohibition on construction, reconstruction, repair or renovation of any building within the geoheritage site area or utilization of such area in any other manner, except for construction for preservation and maintenance of geoheritage site or any public

work essential to the public.

▪ **Penalty:**

- Penalties for destruction, removal, defacement or contravention of any direction issued by the Director General, GSI in the geo-heritage site are mentioned.
- There is a **penalty of imprisonment which may extend to six months or fine which may extend to Rs.5 lakh, or both.** In the case of a continuing contravention, an additional fine of upto Rs.50,000 for every day of continuing contravention may be imposed.

What are the Concerns?

- There are concerns over the distribution of power as mentioned in the Bill.
- It points to **how the GSI has the authority to acquire any material of geological significance**, including sediments, rocks, minerals, meteorites, and fossils, as well as sites of **geological importance**.
- The issue of land acquisition for the purpose of safeguarding these sites **could also lead to issues with local communities**.

What is the Geological Survey of India?

- It was set up in **1851 primarily to find coal deposits for the Railways**.
- Over the years, it has not only grown into a repository of **geo-science information required in various fields** in the country but has also attained the status of a geo-scientific organisation of international repute.
- The main functions of the GSI relate to creation and **update of national geo-scientific information** and mineral resource assessment.
- It is headquartered in Kolkata and has six regional offices located at Lucknow, Jaipur, Nagpur, Hyderabad, Shillong and Kolkata. Every state has a state unit.
- Presently, **GSI is an attached office to the Ministry of Mines**.

Way Forward

- Other than protecting places of geological interest, the need for a law that specifically protects sites of geo-heritage value follows from India being a signatory to the [UNESCO Convention](#) concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, since 1972.

[Source: TH](#)

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