



Soapstone Mining in Uttarakhand

Why in News?

- Recently, the **Uttarakhand High Court** took **suo moto cognizance** and criticized the authorities for failing to regulate **soapstone mining** in **Bageshwar district of Uttarakhand**.

Key Points

- **Environmental Concerns:**
 - **Land Subsidence:**
 - **Subsidence** is a critical issue in Uttarakhand, exacerbated by mining activities in **vulnerable areas like Kanda-Kanyal in Bageshwar**.
 - Mining operations, **soil erosion**, removal of resources, and **earthquakes** contribute to the problem.
 - **Slope Instability:**
 - Mining at lower slopes **weakens structural integrity**, affecting villages on upper slopes.
 - **Loamy and loose soil increases susceptibility to erosion**, particularly during **monsoons**.
 - **Deficient Safety Measures:**
 - Lack of green belts, retaining walls, buffer zones, slope monitoring, and protective structures accelerates erosion.
 - **Water and Air Pollution:**
 - Mining activities lead to **water scarcity, contamination, and air pollution** in the region.
- **Cultural Concerns:**
 - **Impact on Traditional Architecture:**
 - Land subsidence has damaged **Kumaoni Bakhli houses**, which historically demonstrated seismic resilience.
 - **Damage to Heritage:**
 - Cracks in the **Kalika Temple floor in Kanda**, a **10th-century site of cultural and religious importance**, signify mining-related degradation.
 - The region's cultural practices, including **folk music, dance, and handicrafts**, are also affected.
- **Administrative Lapses:**
 - The State and Union governments **failed to define "semi-mechanised mining,"** yet granted environmental clearances for such activities.
 - Heavy equipment use without clear policy limits has worsened the situation.

Soapstone

- Soapstone is a **soft metamorphic rock made of talc** with varying amounts of **chlorite, dolomite, and magnesite**.
- **Uses:**
 - Soapstone is widely used in industries for **making sculptures, countertops, sinks, and tiles** due to its **durability and aesthetic appeal**.
 - It is used in **stoves, fireplaces, and laboratory countertops** because of its excellent

heat resistance.

- Ground soapstone serves as a filler in **paper, cosmetics, and paints.**
- It is also used for making **utensils, handicrafts, and idols.**

▪ **Availability in India:**

- As per [the Indian Bureau of Mines](https://www.drishtias.com/printpdf/soapstone-mining-in-uttarakhand), **Rajasthan (57%) and Uttarakhand (25%) hold significant reserves.**
 - **Rajasthan:** The largest producer, particularly in the Udaipur, Dungarpur, and Bhilwara regions.
 - **Uttarakhand:** Notable deposits in Bageshwar, Pithoragarh, and Almora districts.
 - **Tamil Nadu and Karnataka:** Smaller reserves also exist.

PDF Refernece URL: <https://www.drishtias.com/printpdf/soapstone-mining-in-uttarakhand>

