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News: Draft Geo-heritage Sites and Geo-relics (Preservation and Maintenance) Bill, 2022

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

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.

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.

Concerns about the bill and its stipulations

- 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.



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CULTURAL AND NATURAL SITES

NATURAL SITES ●
CULTURAL SITES ●
MODERN CITIES ●

