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DELHI-NCR AIR POLLUTION

Accountability, Technology and Regional Coordination

1. Latest Developments

Amid persistently high air pollution levels in Delhi-NCR, the Union Environment Minister has directed stricter enforcement of pollution-control measures. These include sealing 191 non-compliant industries and fixing administrative accountability for delays.

A review meeting involving Delhi, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan highlighted the need for coordinated regional action, as air pollution transcends state boundaries.

2. Industrial Emissions

Strict Enforcement

- The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has directed that 191 polluting industries be sealed for failing to install Air Pollution Control Devices (APCDs).
- Of the 2,345 targeted industrial units, 2,298 (approximately 98%) have been connected to the Online Continuous Emission Monitoring System (OCEMS). The remaining 47 units have been closed or sealed.
- Strict compliance with the particulate matter emission limit of 50 mg/Nm^3 has been directed.
- Non-compliant industries may face closure, electricity disconnection and sealing.

Administrative Accountability

- Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan have been asked to nominate secretary-level officers to supervise pollution-control measures in 15 cities—seven in Haryana and four each in Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.
- These officers will conduct field inspections and submit weekly progress reports to the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM).
- CAQM has been asked to issue notices and initiate criminal prosecution against officials failing to discharge their responsibilities.

3. Vehicular Pollution and Traffic Decongestion

- Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras: Transport departments have been directed to install ANPR cameras by November 30. Failure may invite criminal prosecution of responsible officials.
- Multi-Lane Free Flow (MLFF): The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) must complete installation of MLFF systems at 154 Delhi border entry points by December 31, 2026, to reduce congestion and vehicle idling.

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- Traffic congestion: Immediate corrective measures have been directed at 233 identified congestion points across NCR, alongside fresh assessments by states.
- PARIVARTAN scheme: The scheme is to be expedited to replace pre-BS-VI trucks and buses with BS-VI-compliant, CNG and electric vehicles by 2028.

4. Road Dust Management and Construction Activities

- Only 3,221 km of the targeted 5,480 km of roads have been redeveloped.
- Road-owning agencies have been directed to prioritise repair of potholes and damaged footpaths, maintenance of central verges, and end-to-end paving of roads.
- Mechanical road-sweeping machines must operate at full capacity in double shifts, supported by digital tracking and AI-based monitoring through Integrated Command and Control Centres (ICCCs).
- Physical inspections of more than 3,000 active construction sites have been directed to ensure compliance with dust-control measures.

5. Municipal Solid Waste Management

- NCR faces a shortfall of 6,747 tonnes per day in municipal solid waste processing capacity.
- States have been directed to prevent open dumping and burning of waste and expedite remediation of legacy waste at four major landfill sites: Okhla, Ghazipur, Bhalswa and Bandhwari.

6. Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP)

All agencies have been directed to ensure strict implementation of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP). NCR states have been encouraged to adopt Delhi's hotspot-focused winter action plan, covering:

- Traffic management and decongestion.
- Work-from-home measures.
- Restrictions on construction activities.
- Prevention of open waste and biomass burning.

Technology-driven monitoring through Delhi's Integrated Command and Control Centre (ICCC) and CAQM's PAVAN platform will strengthen enforcement and track pollution-control measures.

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7. Delhi's Air Quality – Persistently 'Very Poor'

- Delhi's 24-hour average Air Quality Index (AQI) is hovering around 370.
- Of the 59 monitoring stations reporting data, 17 recorded severe air pollution, 38 recorded very poor air quality, three recorded poor air quality, and only one recorded moderate air quality.
- PM10 was the predominant pollutant.
- Major sources of pollution include vehicular emissions, stubble burning and firecrackers.

8. Key Challenges

- Fragmented governance: Multiple state agencies and municipal bodies complicate coordinated enforcement.
- Implementation deficit: Delays in road redevelopment, waste processing and installation of pollution-control equipment undermine existing regulations.
- Vehicular dependence: Traffic congestion and older commercial vehicles continue to contribute significantly to emissions.
- Transboundary pollution: Pollution from stubble burning, industries and transport across NCR requires inter-state coordination.
- Weak accountability: Delayed action and inadequate monitoring reduce the effectiveness of pollution-control measures.

9. Way Forward

- Strengthen the CAQM's coordinating and enforcement capacity across NCR.
- Shift from episodic winter interventions to year-round, airshed-based pollution management.
- Accelerate public transport, electric mobility and cleaner industrial technologies.
- Expand scientific source apportionment and real-time emissions monitoring.
- Strengthen municipal waste segregation, processing and scientific landfill remediation.
- Ensure measurable accountability through time-bound targets, independent inspections and transparent public reporting.

10. Conclusion

Delhi-NCR's air pollution crisis requires a transition from reactive emergency measures to sustained, science-based and regionally coordinated air-quality governance. Effective implementation, institutional accountability and cleaner urban infrastructure are essential to securing the constitutional right to a clean and healthy environment.

Source: Times of India (ToI) | The Indian Express (IE)