

# Delhi Today, Your City Tomorrow

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## 94 Cities Haven't Met Air Quality Standards In 5 Years

New Delhi: There's something the hillside retreat of Parwanoo in Himachal Pradesh has in common with the industrial town of Korba in Chhattisgarh—both have consistently recorded higher than acceptable PM 10 levels.

Since 2011, at least 94 Indian cities have not met national air quality standards. Many of these cities have been on the list from the 1990s, say officials of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB). Neither the Centre nor the states have put in place a plan to ensure that cities get taken off this list. The World Health Organisation's urban air quality database lists 10 Indian cities among the world's 20 worst polluted.

For the past couple of years when air pollution in Delhi, Kanpur, Lucknow and Varanasi touched dangerous levels, CPCB did not ensure that its directions on meeting air quality standards were enforced. It ignored its own studies, commissioned from Chittaranjan National Cancer Institute in 2003, on the impact of air pollution on children over 15 years, which found serious physical and psychological impacts.

The Centre has made only one major decision this year to tackle air pollution—notifying BSVI emission standards for vehicles manufactured after

April 2020, which will bring down particulate emissions from vehicles by 60%-80%.

The National Air Quality Standard notification, 2009, says safe standards for air should be met 98% of the year, a criterion none of the cities monitored by CPCB meet. Dipankar Saha, additional director, air laboratory at CPCB said: "This is irrelevant since we have started real-time monitoring of cities. Non-attaining cities are alerted every three years."

But CPCB only monitors 29 cities real time and has just one continuous air quality monitor at most locations. The rest are manual machines which are "highly inefficient", say experts.

"Only when there is public pressure, cities start acting on pollution. There is no national policy. Even the government's smart city project only makes a passing reference to air quality but doesn't make it binding on cities to meet this criteria," says Anumita Roy Chowdhury, head of Centre for Science and Environment's clean air programme. "CPCB and state pollution boards have the power to take immediate action," insists Kanchi Kohli of Namati Environmental Justice Programme.

573 places still monitor air quality manually

### 5 SINS OF POLLUTION

#### 1 We are not monitoring air quality in real time

Central Pollution Control Board gets real-time air quality data from only two or three monitoring stations in most cities. This gives a skewed picture of air quality status and compromises policy-making. Most cities depend on manual monitoring stations, which use obsolete technology, and data is released just twice a week.

#### 2 We don't know sources of air pollution

A study by IIT Kanpur for Delhi revealed that the contribution of each source of pollution—vehicles, waste burning, construction dust—changes with the seasons, but most cities don't have this information. Bengaluru's emissions inventory was conducted in 2010 and Chennai's by IIT Madras in 2011, while Kanpur, Mumbai and Pune released their reports in 2010

#### 3 Governments fail to enforce

But no city administration seems worried about getting off that list. Delhi, for instance, is still short of 5,000 buses; it hasn't implemented SC directions on prohibiting waste burning or ensuring construction projects don't pollute. Data for most cities makes it obvious that air pollution is not high on any government's priority list

#### 4 Ignoring health risks

While air pollution is hurting the country's exchequer, it's also associated with certain cancers, lower birth weight of babies, premature birth, strokes and respiratory disease. Across the country, air pollution is linked to 6.7 lakh premature deaths

#### 5 People aren't pitching in

The Deonar landfill fire drew attention to Mumbai's waste problem, while Delhi's three landfills are constantly on fire exposing lakhs to carcinogenic emissions. This is a common problem in all cities. If people segregated garbage at home, there would be no burning of waste. People can also choose public transport, or pick electric and CNG vehicles

2008 was when data on pollution sources was last collected in cities



8.5% of GDP — Welfare costs and lost labour income due to air pollution in 2013 as per World Bank report

## DELHI IS THE MOST POLLUTED, BUT OTHER METROS AREN'T GETTING BETTER

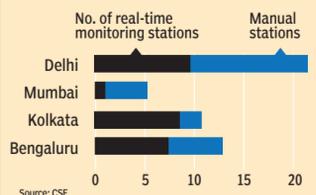
An unusual combination of a long weekend, a dispute over sharing water keeping out fireworks from Tamil Nadu, and activism meant Bengaluru had slightly cleaner air this Diwali compared to previous years. But that's no indication of overall air quality in the city. The annual average increase in levels of respirable suspended particulate matter in the last five years is 5%, according to the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board. The increasing pollution is in step with the rising number of vehicles: 8% every year. While vehicle emissions are the main source, road and construction dust and burning of garbage also contribute. "In fact, the air we breathe in Bengaluru is clean only during bandh days," says Lakshman, chairman, KSPCB. The problem is the lack of coor-

dated efforts by various civic agencies. While KSPCB monitors air quality and churns out data, its power stops at issuing notices to various agencies. State governments have failed to set out an action plan to tackle air pollution. Transport department officials said they try to detect polluting vehicles. "We have random checks to fine those without pollution under control certificates. It isn't easy as we are short staffed," said an official.

—Rohith BR & Aditi Sequeira

### Scant monitoring

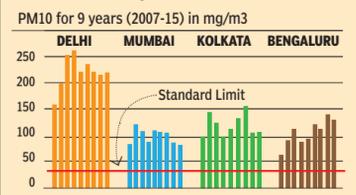
Beijing has nearly 100 real-time monitoring stations. Most Indian metros have less than 10



Source: CSE

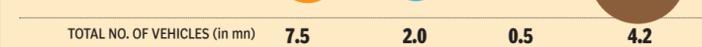
### PM10

Delhi is clearly the worst, but other cities are also at double or triple the safe limit



### No. of vehicles

Delhi has more than several metros combined, but its growth rate between 2003 and 2013 wasn't the fastest



Source: CSE

## HOW CHINA TACKLES AIR POLLUTION

In 2013, China started a 'war against pollution' with the govt introducing 10 measures. Some of these are policies India can adopt

### RED ALERTS

In December 2015, Beijing issued its first pollution 'red alert', closing schools, factories and construction sites, and hundreds of cars were ordered off the road in odd-even bans until the air quality dropped below hazardous levels.

### CUTTING COAL USE

By 2017, Beijing region aims to cut use of coal by replacing it with electricity from non-fossil fuels and closing all excess iron, steel, cement and heavy industries that burn coal.

### LAWS

In 2015, China's Environmental Protection Law came into force. There is no cap on fines for polluting companies, non-profits can file public interest lawsuits against polluters

### REAL-TIME WATCH

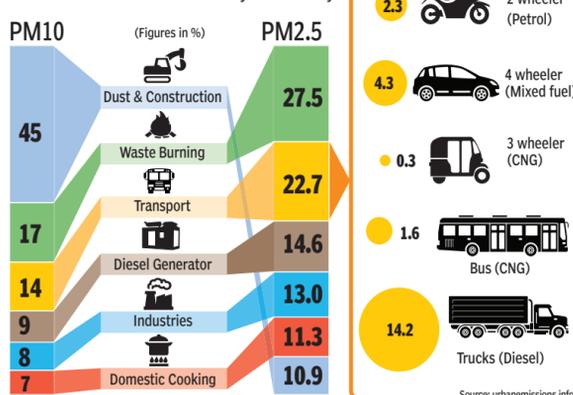
After shrouding air quality information in secrecy till 2008, China has created an online air reporting system with hourly air pollution data from over 1,500 sites

### OFF THE ROAD

High-polluting heavy vehicles manufactured before the end of 2005 will be taken off the roads by 2017. Big cities like Beijing and Shanghai have begun to restrict the number of vehicles

## LEAD POLLUTANTS DISSECTED

The sources of PM10 and PM2.5 vary substantially



Source: urbanemissions.info

## WHAT'S IN YOUR AIR

### PM2.5

Tiniest, most unhealthy, high levels in winter

### PM10

Another lead pollutant on winter days

### Ozone

Forms when oxides of nitrogen (NOx) react with volatile organic compounds in bright sunlight. Lead pollutant in summers

# Government's blackout of two TV news channels dangerous for democracy

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Across the board, journalists and editors have opposed the one-day ban on NDTV India and News Time Assam, declaring it authoritarian overreach by the government. This is the first time a news channel has been barred for reasons of national security.

This expression of solidarity follows the strong statements last week from the Editors Guild of India, the Broadcast Editors Association and the News Broadcasters Association.

On November 2, the information and broadcasting (I&B) ministry had directed NDTV India and News Time Assam to shut down their broadcast for a day from November 9. The charge against NDTV was that its coverage of the Pathankot terror attack revealed information about the ammunition stockpiled in the airbase, details of the planes like MiGs, fighter planes, rocket launchers, mortars, helicopters, fuel tanks and other details, which could have been used by the terrorists or their handlers to cause massive harm.

In response, NDTV issued a statement expressing shock at being singled out. "Every channel and news-



They could have levied a heavy fine and warning. But taking anyone off the air shows that they have gotten carried away with their power

MADHU TREHAN  
Newslandry editor



paper had similar coverage. In fact NDTV's coverage was particularly balanced. After the dark days of the Emergency when the press was fettered, it is extraordinary that NDTV is being proceeded against in this manner. NDTV is examining all options in this matter."

The government's move has been criticised by editors from print, TV and digital media. Editorials pointed out that NDTV had not divulged operational details that were not already known. They questioned this blanket ban, this attack on free expression by a sweeping invocation of national security.

"It's inherently wrong and dangerous for a government committee to have the power to take a TV channel off air," said Business Standard chairman and business director T N Ninan.

"We need to take a relook at Sec 20 of the Cable Act. The power to regulate and penalise a TV network should rest with an independent body, not the government," said Mukund Padmanabhan, The Hindu editor.

India Today consulting editor Rajdeep Sardesai

## TimesView

The media is supposed to be one of the pillars of a democracy. It obviously cannot play that role if the government of the day can simply shut it down whenever it chooses to. Hence, the recent orders by an inter-ministerial committee asking NDTV India and an Assam-based channel to be kept off air for a day each need to be strongly condemned and fought by all who believe in democracy. The government will argue that the bans are only temporary, indeed token, and that the channels concerned have brought these upon themselves by stepping out of line, allegedly endangering national security in one case and violating the privacy of a minor in the other. This is a specious argument. The issue is not how long the bans are for or even whether or not norms have been violated. The crux of the issue is that it is not for a government to decide what the penalty will be. And shutting down even for a day should not be the penalty anyway. Once we accept that governments can punish media outlets by shutting them down, even if only temporarily, how do we ensure that they won't use this power to silence critics? Any regulator of media has to be totally independent of the government. And violations of the sort being alleged should at best invite stiff fines, not shutdowns. There has been much talk of never allowing another Emergency; let's not embark on a path that could lead to the muzzling of a free press.



In this case, both complainant and adjudicator are the government. If the government was concerned about violations, they could've handed the case to the broadcasters' redressal forum

RAJDEEP SARDESAI  
India Today consulting editor

called it a case of government overreach and arbitrariness. "In this case, both the complainant and the adjudicator are the government," he said.

The government had used Rule 6(1)(p) of the Cable TV Network Regulation Act, which prohibits any programme that contains live coverage of any anti-terrorist operation by security forces. The programme code was amended in June last year to add the controversial new section.

Madhu Trehan, editor of Newslandry, said that the government's new move to ban other channels to appear that they are not targeting NDTV alone, gives the media even more reason to protest. "They could have levied a heavy fine and

## MEDIA GAG

warning. But taking anyone off the air shows that they have gotten carried away with their power," she said. Demanding a withdrawal of the ban, the Editors Guild called it "a direct violation of the freedom of the media and therefore the citizens of India, and amounts to harsh censorship imposed by the government reminiscent of the Emergency". It added that "this first-of-its-kind order to impose a blackout has seen the central government entrust itself with the power to intervene in the functioning of the media and take arbitrary punitive action as and when it does not agree with the coverage."

The time has come to not just question the relevance of the programme

code for broadcasters, but also to uproot this provision of banning altogether. We must ensure that reasonable restrictions are strictly within the confines of Article 19 (freedom of speech and expression)," said Malayala Manorama resident editor and former secretary-general of the Editors Guild, Sachidananda Murthy.

The News Broadcasters Association (NBA) said that the government should have seen the violation from the "prism of freedom of the media, which is guaranteed in the Constitution and not gone strictly by the regulations under the Cable Act. It would have been appropriate, if the I&B ministry had referred the alleged violations by NDTV India to the News Broadcasting Standards Authority (NBSA), the independent self-regulatory body of the NBA."

Peer review and regulation is the right approach, said Sardesai. "I am not saying that it is perfect, but if the government was concerned about violations, they could have handed the case to the news broadcasters' redressal forum," he said.

## 6kg gold seized from gang in multi-city op

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Chennai: Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) sleuths busted a gold smuggling racket and seized 5.9 kg gold worth ₹1.8 crore on Friday.

The smugglers concealed crude gold bars by using them as handles of cutting pliers, a modus operandi spotted for the first time. Four people were arrested in this connection.

The gold was shaped and fitted to the pliers in a seamless manner to help smugglers escape from scanners at the airport. The handles were covered with moulded plastic. They looked like pliers on the screens. There is no rule that stops people from bringing pliers in checked-in bags.

The gold was seized from a Swift Dzire car which was intercepted by a team of sleuths who were waiting on the national highway near Chengalpet. Sabeer Ahmed, 29, and Ubayathulla, 33, who were in the vehicle, told the officials that they had collected the gold from different carriers who had arrived from Singapore and Dubai on different flights on Thursday and Friday.



GRIPPING TALE: Moulded gold rods were found sheathed in the plastic grips of cutting pliers

Sources said that the duo did not reveal that gold was hidden inside the cutting pliers, instead pointing to gold jewellery which was packed in plastic sachets and hidden under the front seat. The pliers were found only after a detailed search of the vehicle was carried out in Chennai.

In another incident, the same agency seized one cutting plier with a gold handle from a passenger who arrived from Dubai at Madurai airport. The racket was busted following a detailed probe based on leads and inputs from informers that gold was being smuggled into the country through Madurai, Chennai and Trichy airports and transported by road to other parts of the state.

## Tiger poaching highest in MP

► Continued from page 1

The Tadoba and Melghat regions of Maharashtra have always been more prone to tiger poaching. Maharashtra shares its border with Madhya Pradesh, where tiger mortalities and cases of poaching are the highest. The Nagpur region is known for cases of illegal trade of wildlife body parts," he said.

Experts say the growing number of seizures could also mean that the government's intelligence gathering is becoming more sophisticated, which has helped trap more poachers.

Debi Goenka, founder of NGO Conservation Action Trust, said tiger habitats in the country were under tremendous pressure. "There have been some success stories where tigers are bred-

ing well which has helped increase their count, but this has happened in isolated pockets and not in all sanctuaries. In the case of saturated reserves, cubs move out to look for their own territory and become vulnerable to poaching and road accidents," he said.

Goenka said the forest department's practice of upgrading posts has led to a decline in the number of forest guards manning reserves for tiger protection. "Upgrading certain posts means that the job once handled by somebody much younger now has to be done by an older official of a higher rank. Such officials cannot really exert much energy on the field. Department headquarters are closer to cities, where other officials often have to attend meetings," he said.



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Business Standard chairman and columnist