

New low: Air quality worse than Diwali day

After A Brief Respite, Pollution In Capital At Its Most 'Severe' In 2015

TIMES NEWS NETWORK



NOT A PRETTY SIGHT: Large-scale biomass burning by people to fight cold is adding to the pollution

Anindya Chattopadhyay

New Delhi: After several days of slightly better air quality in the city, pollution levels have started rising alarmingly from Tuesday onwards.

According to System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research (SAFAR) under the ministry of earth sciences (MoES), Delhi on Wednesday recorded the worst air quality in 2015 with an AQI of 442 for PM 2.5 (fine, respirable pollution particles). The average PM 2.5 concentrations were even higher than the Diwali day, at 295 micrograms per cubic metres, which is about 5 times the safe standard.

The AQI bar turned a dark maroon indicating "severe" pollution from red or "very poor" level on Tuesday. Central Pollution Control Board's AQI also showed air quality deteriorating from "poor" to "very poor" category Tuesday onwards with an AQI of 375 being recorded on Wednesday. Even Delhi Pollution Control Committee's monitoring showed a 24-hour av-

erage PM2.5 level of about 366 micrograms per cubic metres in RK Puram and 336 micrograms per cubic metres on Mandir Marg. According to SAFAR, the day after Diwali, the concentration was 274 micrograms per cubic metres, which is about 20 micrograms per cubic metres lower than Wednesday's readings.

On the same day last year, the PM 2.5 concentration was 204 micrograms per cubic metre. The sudden spike in PM 2.5 levels is mainly due to the meteorological conditions. Particles blowing towards Delhi from the Indo-Gangetic plains area could also contribute to bad air in the city. "Today's is the highest AQI recorded in 2015 with both PM2.5 and PM10 reaching the highest levels. There is a medium range transport of pollutants from IGP area, which is already much polluted. The upper part of the boundary layer brings polluted air that gets settled close to the surface in Delhi. The IGP regions include Kanpur, Varanasi, Luck-

now, Patna and others that have also shown a jump in pollution in the past few years," said Gufran Beig, project director, SAFAR. He said one reason for the increase in pollution could be large-scale biomass burning by people to fight cold in these regions. Anumita Roychowdhury, head of CSE's clean air campaign said this is exactly why pollution emergency measures are required in Delhi. "Some days will be poor while some severe when the meteorological conditions turn hostile even as the overall levels continue to remain high. Delhi will be experimenting with an emergency measure for the first time with odd-even car days, but if too many categories of people are exempted, it will not work," she said.

The forecast by SAFAR for the next two days is "severe" on December 24 and "very poor" on the Christmas day.

On Tuesday at 11pm, PM 2.5 levels peaked to 822 micrograms per cubic metres, about 14 times the standard.

Ministers held meetings late into Wednesday night to finalise the plan, which is scheduled to be made public at 11am on Thursday. "There will be certain exemptions and the government will incorporate an advisory sent by MHA for this," a source confirmed.

Two-wheelers exempt? Final word on odd-even plan today

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New Delhi: The Delhi government will unveil its final plans for implementation of the odd-even numberplate proposal to reduce vehicular congestion on Thursday. It is expected that two-wheelers, women, differently-abled people and Union ministers will get an exemption based on an advisory sent by the ministry of home affairs to the state government.

The odd-even formula was proposed by the government as a mechanism to reduce air pollution in Delhi. It will be implemented on a trial basis from January 1 to 15 during which time odd number private cars will be allowed to ply on odd days, like January 1, 3, 5 etc. Those with numberplates

ending in an even number will ply on January 2, 4, 6 etc. Chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, in a letter written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently, said that if the trial was successful, the government would continue to use it as an emergency measure on days when pollution levels touch alarmingly high levels.

TRIAL & ERROR

Flouting the rule will be a punishable offence though it is not clear yet under what law the government hopes to penalise defaulters. The plan will also be implemented only between 8am and 8pm while Sundays will be free for all. The government is making massive arrangements to augment public transport for this period, from hiring additional buses to increasing operation hours for auto drivers. The government has simultaneously released a 12-point agenda to reduce air pollution levels in the national capital that include shutting down of coal-based power plants, greening of central verges and roadsides, mechanical sweeping of roads, etc.

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AT 374, AQI WORST IN 2015

If the past few days of clear air gave hope, it surely was a false dawn. AQI levels rose almost 100 points in 3 days

Date	AQI	Category
Dec 15	208	Poor
Dec 16	254	Poor
Dec 17	300	Poor
Dec 18	293	Poor
Dec 19	297	Poor
Dec 20	330	V poor
Dec 21	281	Poor
Dec 22	316	V poor
Dec 23	374	V poor

Source: Central Pollution Control Board

WEATHER TO BLAME FOR SPIKE IN PM2.5 LEVELS?



Morning fog may hit flight movement

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LET DELHI BREATHE

New Delhi: Delhi witnessed a cloudy Wednesday because of which the maximum temperature fell to 19.2 degrees Celsius, two degrees below normal. Dense fog was reported at the IGI Airport from 5.30am to 9am during which visibility dropped to 100m. The fog was eventually replaced with smog, which kept the visibility low for the entire day.

"There was a light wind over Delhi from 2pm to midnight on Tuesday and local moisture accumulation accompanied by a high content of pollution, which resulted in the dense fog on Wednesday morning. The fog spell is likely to intensify on Wednesday night, bringing the visibility below 50m on Thursday morning, which may affect flight movement. However, the spell may

not last long as strong winds are likely to pick up from Thursday afternoon or Friday morning," said R K Jenamani, director in-charge, IGI Met.

The city recorded a minimum temperature of 6.5 degrees Celsius, one degree below normal and humidity levels of 63% to 97%. The Met department said that no significant

WEATHER

Max 19.2°C / Min 6.5°C
 Moonrise: Thursday-4.46pm
 Moonset: Friday-6.39am
 Sunset: Thursday-5.31pm
 Sunrise: Friday-7.11am
 Mainly clear sky. Maximum & minimum temperatures on Thursday will be around 20°C & 6°C. Max humidity on Wednesday was 97% and minimum was 63%

change was expected in minimum temperatures over the plains of northwest India in the next two days. Shallow to moderate fog is expected over isolated places in Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, UP, and north Rajasthan in the morning hours during next two days.

"The partly cloudy sky is likely to become clear from Thursday. Shallow to moderate fog may occur at many places, with dense fog at isolated places in next 24 hours and thereafter, shallow to moderate fog will occur in the morning hours. A fresh western disturbance is expected to affect the western Himalayan region from December 26," said an official.



SWACHH BHARAT
 AIR QUALITY INDEX PM2.5

Delhi	442	Severe
Tomorrow	411	Severe
Pune	75	Good
Tomorrow	52	Good
Mumbai	285	Poor
Tomorrow	263	Poor
Chennai	50	Good
Kolkata	264	Poor

US Embassy data calculated as per Indian standards by SAFAR@MoES-ITM-IMD