

Choking on pollution, Delhi may have to wait a while for health advisories from the govt

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THE DELHI government is unlikely to issue a detailed health advisory on the poor air quality in the capital anytime soon, in spite of explicit instructions from the National Green Tribunal (NGT) to do so, according to sources.

Officials of the Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC), the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and the Director General Health Services (DGHS) held a meeting Thursday to discuss contingency measures to tackle Delhi's deteriorating air quality. Though the meeting was held as per the NGT's instructions, no decision on issuing public advisories — about the poor air quality in the capital and ways to reduce exposure to it — was taken, said sources.

"We held discussions and identified proactive steps that we can take in a developing city and in particularly bad pockets like

Anand Vihar, ITO and R K Puram. Some pollutants are becoming problematic in particular areas, like Benzene in Civil Lines and Mandir Marg. We will be taking preventive steps to reduce pollution rather than telling people to stay indoors and halt their activities due to poor air quality," said an official who was present at the meeting.

While experts have not yet suggested that schools should be shut due to rising pollution levels, they have advised the Delhi government to direct schools to reduce outdoor activities for students on days with particularly poor air quality, said sources.

"We have no plans of advising that activities of schoolchildren and others should be restricted. We are looking at targeting people who cause pollution to target the source, as advised by the NGT, rather than take steps to restrict people inside their homes," said a source who attended Thursday's meeting.

The Delhi government was looking at steps to reduce traffic congestion and use of

DG sets in poor air quality areas, to curb sources of pollutants. In a meeting called by the DGHS in late November before the NGT order, sources said independent experts had pointed out the need for a smog alert system and associated health advisories.

"One environment expert had put together a detailed health advisory based on the parameters of air quality, defined on the national air quality index (AQI). The advisory urged limited exposure to ambient air and outlined precautions that people in particular age groups, like children, the elderly and those diagnosed with existing diseases, should take," said sources. Some long-term measures including ensuring schools and hospitals are not constructed near traffic intersections were also suggested, added the sources. Meanwhile, over a year after launching a national index to measure air quality, not much seems to have been done by the Centre to issue a health advisory on it.

According to sources, some medical

members from the group of experts which drafted the National AQI, including Dr Arun Agarwal, Dr T K Joshi from MAMC and Dr G C Khilnani from AIIMS, among others, were called by the CPCB for a meeting in October on steps needed to prepare a health advisory, but that meeting was postponed.

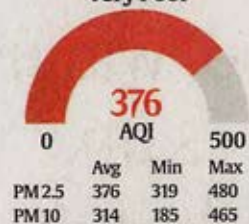
"We received a letter from the CPCB notifying us of the meeting on October 17 or 18. But then we received another email... telling us it had been postponed. There has been no communication from the CPCB since then," said a member. CPCB member-secretary A B Akolkar did not respond to phone calls or texts from *The Indian Express*.

While the national AQI was being drafted, the need for a detailed health advisory had been discussed, said sources. "At that time, the Centre had said state governments would have to be involved... after the introduction of AQI, not a single meeting has been convened," said another expert who was on the drafting committee.

AIR QUALITY METER

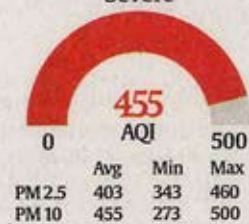
PUNJABI BAGH

Very Poor

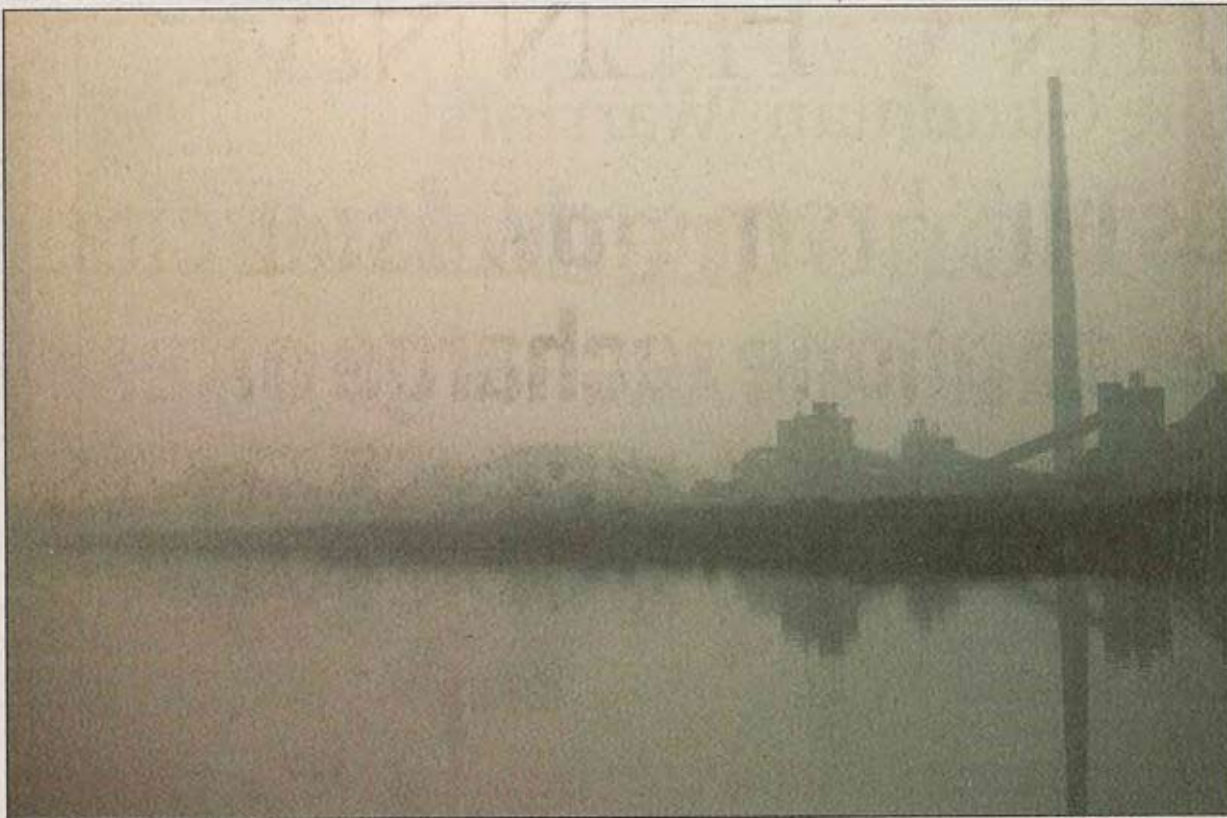


ANAND VIHAR

Severe



0-50	Good	NORMAL: PM* <10 µg: 100 µg/m ³ PM <2.5 µg: 60 µg/m ³ *Particulate matter *Air Quality Index (AQI)
51-100	Satisfactory	
101-200	Moderate	
201-300	Poor	
301-400	Very poor	
401-500	Severe	



Delhi witnessed another smog-covered morning Thursday. Tashi Tobgyal