

City is like a gas chamber: High court

Govts Told To Act Immediately



LET DELHI BREATHE

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Alarmed at the current air pollution levels in the city, the Delhi high court on Thursday termed it like living "in a gas chamber" and demanded an immediate action plan from the Centre and the state government to combat deteriorating air quality.

Zeroing in on emissions by vehicles and construction-related particulates as key pollutants in the capital, a bench of Justices B D Ahmed



The high court has given the Centre and the Delhi government till December 21 to enlist the steps being taken to tackle air pollution in the capital

and Sanjeev Sachdeva ordered a clampdown on both, asking the government agencies to take steps.

"The level of PM2.5 has crossed level of 60, still the government hasn't done anything!" the court said, dismissing the plans filed by the environment ministry and the Delhi government as "non-comprehensive".

The governments have been given time till December 21 to enlist the steps. Referring to dust particles floating due to construction activities, the court said the civic agencies

and the state government must ensure that no construction takes place without taking care of minimal generation of pollutants.

The high court also took a serious view of extreme air pollution being caused by unrestrained burning of trash and leaves in the city and the adjoining areas. It asked the Delhi government to ask all subdivisional magistrates to get cracking against the offenders. The government must widely publicise that such practices are prohibited, it added.

Turning to a status report by traffic police identifying 14 choke points leading to congestion and idling vehicles, the court said more personnel could be deployed, besides putting up plastic bollards, to segregate carriageways and regulate flow of traffic.

The judges also told the traffic police to book those violating yellow lines and don't adhere to lane driving. "Publicise (that) there would be strict action and fines for violations," it said while hearing a suo motu case on increasing air pollution in Delhi. In certain areas, the traffic police can install automatic synchronised traffic light changing system to discipline flow of vehicles, it added.

The bench further expressed concern over the plight of traffic constables manning lanes, saying the force must provide proper protective gear, including masks, to its personnel.

With regard to the poor air quality on the Delhi high court premises, the bench directed the registry to ensure that air purifiers are put up within two weeks in each courtroom as well as public access areas.

Bad air: Delhi races ahead of Beijing

Jayashree.Nandi
@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: After a neck-and-neck race with Beijing over the past few winters, Delhi may soon find itself without a rival for the 'most-polluted-city' crown. The Chinese city is doing its best to fall behind although, as happened last week, it sometimes nudges ahead with a wind-aided spurt.

A recent assessment by Beijing-based Greenpeace East Asia shows that between August 2014 and August 2015, Delhi's levels of PM2.5 (fine, respirable pollution particles) were far higher than those in Beijing.

Using data from Delhi Pollution Control Committee (DPCC) and Beijing Municipal Environmental Monitoring Centre stations in Beijing, Greenpeace East Asia found that the Chinese city's monthly PM2.5 averages were between 100µg/m3 and 200µg/m3. Delhi's monthly averages for October, November, December and January were well above 200µg/m3. A microgram (µg) is a thousandth part of a milligram.

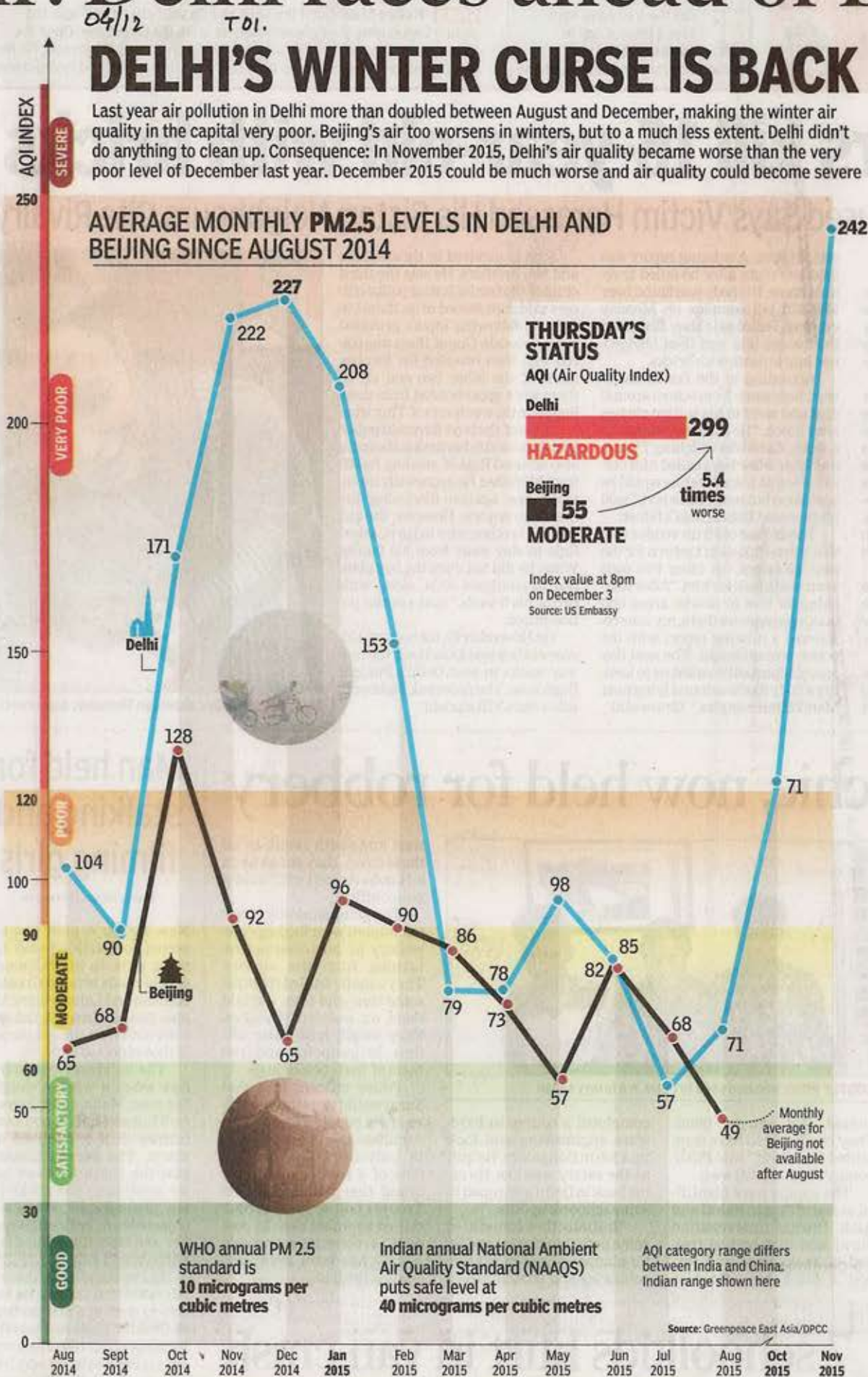
Not only the Chinese government but also civil society organisations are now saying that Beijing's air quality is improving steadily due to aggressive anti-pollution policies. Average annual PM2.5 levels fell by about 25% from November 2014 to November 2015, after more modest reductions since 2012.

"This November was the worst on record in Beijing since 2010, largely due to the horrendous smog episode that the city just experienced. However, even after that, 2015 is on track to be by far the best year on record," said Lauri Myllyvirta, global campaigner, coal at Greenpeace. "This reduction is not happening only in Beijing but all across eastern and central China, and it can be verified from NASA satellite imagery along with official data."

Other Chinese cities have also shown improvement, say activists. A Greenpeace East Asia analysis of data from 360 Chinese cities released last year reveals "modest" air quality improvements in coastal regions and cities such as Beijing over 12 months. Even the industrialised Hebei province, just outside Beijing, has improved by 31%.

"Our analysis shows that the government's strict pollution control measures are working," said Zhang Kai, climate and energy campaigner at Greenpeace East Asia.

On the other hand, DPCC's average PM2.5 data for winter months in Delhi shows no improvement whatsoever. DPCC



Beijing's air quality is improving steadily due to aggressive anti-pollution policies. Average annual PM2.5 levels fell by about 25% from November 2014 to November 2015

such as limiting car numbers and scaling up public transport at the same time," said Anumita Roychowdhury, head of Centre for Science and Environment's (CSE) Clean Air campaign. "Now they are considering implementing the California emission standards by December 2017 which are among the most stringent in the world. We cannot do with small steps anymore in Delhi."

Experts say Beijing may have been able to achieve rapid improvements in air quality by idling coal-burning power plants, which helps it meet climate targets along with controlling air pollution.

"Based on our analysis of weather patterns in Beijing and the fact that the fall in pollution levels is the largest since satellite records started in 2003, we are confident in saying that the fall in pollution levels is due to a real reduction in air pollutant emissions," said Myllyvirta. "China has achieved this by significantly reducing coal consumption in industry and power plants—coal-burning is responsible for an estimated 60% of PM2.5 in China."

In 2013, China had released an air pollution action plan called Air Ten, setting targets for 2017 that gave it the momentum to act quickly. Three of Beijing's four coal-fired power plants have been shut down and the last one will be closed in early-2016. A new air pollution law will also take effect next year," said a campaigner from Greenpeace East Asia.

Severe pollution has undermined public health in both cities and reduced life expectancy.

C. Arden Pope III, Mary Lou Fulton Professor of Economics at Brigham Young University, told TOI: "The estimates are that living in a highly polluted city such as New Delhi results in an estimated loss of life expectancy of about three years."

In an article about China published last year, he and Dr Doug Dockery at Harvard School of Public Health, had said life-time exposure to ambient air pollution in a city like Beijing may also result in an estimated loss of life expectancy of approximately three years.

monitors air quality at RK Puram, Mandir Marg, Punjabi Bagh, Civil Lines and Anand Vihar. Some of the stations have in fact shown an increase in PM 2.5 pollution. Only

IGI Airport showed considerable improvement in December 2013, January 2014, and January, February, October and November this year. This might be because construc-

tion activity—a major polluter—at Aerocity which started in 2010 finished by 2014. Spokespeople for Aerocity said they also have a traffic plan for the area.

"Delhi and Beijing started neck and neck. Both had severe pollution levels but Beijing never lost the momentum in dealing with it. They implemented restraint policies