

# Centre's clean air plan goes beyond urban areas

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**NEW DELHI:** A draft of the National Clean Air Programme that the Union environment ministry will finalise in less than a month broadens the focus from Delhi to 100 non-attainment cities across India and calls for guidelines on indoor air pollution.

The ministry told the Supreme Court on Friday that the plan, that seeks to reduce pollution by 35% in three years and 50% in five years, will be finalised within four weeks.

The country's apex pollution regulator, the Central Pollution Control Board, has identified 94 cities that flout national standards for particulate matter pollution and are called "non-attainment cities", and a few others that flout norms for other pollutants.

The action plan also aims to ensure that all locations in the country meet the national air quality norms, however, a time frame was not provided in the draft version shared with Greenpeace India through an RTI request. "This should have happened 20 years ago, till now they have been dumping polluting industries, vehicles outside Delhi," MC Mehta, environmental lawyer, who is a petitioner in the decades-long case to tackle



■ The country's apex pollution regulator has identified 94 cities that flout national standards for particulate matter pollution. HT FILE

air pollution in the top court.

Other environmentalists criticised the plan for lacking specific timelines and directions.

"The draft needs more clarity in terms of articulating interim milestones for completing source apportionment studies to reduce 35% & 50% pollution in three and five years respectively along with specific targets for polluting sectors such power and industry," Sunil Dahiya, air pollution campaigner with Greenpeace India, said.

Less than 10% of 4,000 cities are covered by the manual air quality monitoring network.

The plan aims to expand it from the existing 680 stations to 1,000 stations. Continuous air quality monitoring, which helps generate regular updates useful for public, will be expanded from 40 to 67 cities with the number of stations growing from 55 to 268.

The monitoring of PM2.5, fine particulate matter capable of penetrating deeper into the body, will be increased from 67 to all stations. Calling indoor air pollution and ozone a "neglected issue" in rural areas, the National Air Quality Monitoring Programme said 50 stations will come up in rural areas.

# Plan to cut bad air by 35% in 3 yrs

## Centre Formulates National Programme To Improve Air Quality In 100 Cities

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**New Delhi:** As part of its dedicated air pollution abatement programme for 100 polluting cities, the Centre has formulated a National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) to fight the menace through a long-term strategy.

The programme focuses on target oriented approach with specific time-lines to reduce various pollutants in cities including Mumbai, Kolkata, Pune, Nagpur, Lucknow, Kanpur, Varanasi, Agra and Chandigarh.

All these cities will also have their own city-specific action plans, like the one in Delhi, under the NCAP.

Under this programme, reported by the TOI last month, the environment ministry targets 35% reduction of air pollution in the next three years and 50% reduction in the next five years for at least the 100 identified cities across India.

Concept note of this plan, accessed by Greenpeace India under RTI, talks about tackling pollution from various sources. It identifies power, transport, industry, residential and agriculture sectors as the key contributors making air toxic.

The note talks about setting up an effective multi-layered institutional fram-

### ACTION PLAN FOR CLEAN NCR AIR

SOME KEY STEPS TO BE TAKEN UNDER NOTIFIED PLAN



- Expansion of CNG programme across NCR
- Bus and metro to ensure NCR connectivity
- Introduce early alarm system during traffic congestion to facilitate route diversion
- Augment metro services for carrying more passengers

- Badarpur power plant to be permanently closed by mid-2018
- Increase number of buses in Delhi to 10,000 by December
- Tighten PUC norms for post-2000 vehicles
- Link PUC certification with annual vehicle insurance to ensure 100% compliance
- Strict enforcement of law against visibly polluting vehicles
- Fast-track construction of western and eastern peripheral expressways and open them to public by April

- Strict enforcement of dust mitigation measures, ban on stubble burning and waste disposal

ework to meet the air pollution abatement targets in all the 100 cities under the NCAP. Though the government has already notified a Comprehensive Action Plan (CAP) for Delhi, it will soon formally roll out the national plan for the remaining cities. Long-term strategy within the national plan will, however, also be implemented in the capital city.

"The government has formulated a separate NCAP as a

long term time-bound national level strategy to tackle the increasing air pollution problem across the country in comprehensive manner", said Union environment minister Harsh Vardhan.

Responding to a Parliament question in Rajya Sabha, the minister in his written response on Monday said, "The overall objective of the NCAP is comprehensive management plan for prevention, control and abatement of air

pollution besides augmenting and evolving effective ambient air quality monitoring network across the country".

Though he didn't disclose the details of the plan, he said, "The NCAP has specific component on formulation of city specific action plans for 100 non-attainment cities".

A non-attainment city is considered to have air quality worse than the National Ambient Air Quality Standards. The list of 100 cities,

identified on that basis, also include Guwahati, Vishakhapatnam, Bhilai, Surat, Bhopal, Indore, Amravati, Nashik, Kolhapur, Ludhiana, Allahabad, Jodhpur, Jaipur, Udaipur and Alwar among others.

"The concept note on the NCAP is a big step in the right direction to achieve breathable air across the country and we hope that the CPCB and environment ministry along with other ministries and departments come up with a detailed action plan soon and inform the public", said Sunil Dahiya, senior campaigner at Greenpeace India.

He, however, said there was an ambiguity on the planning given the lack of information on public domain regarding the NCAP. "The fact that this concept note is not even available in the public domain raises concerns on how the government is going to make it a truly participatory initiative," said Dahiya.

Increasing number of monitoring stations, data dissemination, public participation on planning and implementation, setting up of Air Information Center for data analysis and setting up of an updated national emission inventory are key proposals of the NCAP under this concept note.

# PPCB to collect stubble burning data

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**Patiala:** Punjab Pollution Control Board (PPCB) has again roped in Punjab Remote Sensing Centre (PRSC) to collect geospatial data of farm fires ahead of the wheat harvest which would be beginning next month.

Last year, the board had, for the first time, used the satellite imagery provided by the PRSC to get real-time data of farm fires, which were reported to the district monitoring committees for prompt action against the violators.

Wheat harvest in Punjab starts around mid-April. Statistics of last year show that a total of 2,321 instances of wheat stubble burning had been caught by keeping a watch from the skies. Out of these, environmental compensations of Rs 34.70 lakh had been imposed in 966 cases out of which a sum of Rs 11.45 lakh had been recovered by the state agencies.



The step may help monitor pollution during wheat harvest which starts in Punjab around mid-April

PPCB had paid Rs 7 lakh to the PRSC to ensure that district committees receive SMSs (text messages) alerts in real-time. This year also, the same process is being adopted.

During the paddy season in 2017, the number of farm fires caught using the satellites were 43,660. The details of environmental compensation imposed and recoveries made from the farmers is still being kept under

the wraps as the district level monitoring committees had failed to initiate action against the violators after Chief Minister Amrinder Singh had said that the government could not take action against the farmers as they were already under huge financial burdens.

PPCB chairperson K S Pannu said as the nodal agency, the board would be collecting all data of farm fires and share it with the

concerned district-level committees that had been constituted last year to check stubble burning. He said it would be for the district-level committees to initiate action against the violators.

Meanwhile, agricultural experts said as wheat residue was generally used a cattle fodder by majority of farmers, the number of instances where growers burn crop residue was less as compared to paddy.

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