

## Breathing Fresh Air into the NCR's Pollution Control

### Why in news?

The National Green Tribunal (NGT) and the Supreme Court asked the Centre and Delhi government to come out with suggestions to control air pollution.

### Why there is a need to change the strategy?

- **National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)** - NCAP with its 'collaborative and participatory approach', monitoring, targets, emergency measures and even role for international organisations **has not yet made an impact.**
- So the Supreme Court questioned the ground results of the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) and the role of Commission for Air Quality Management to reduce air pollution.
- **Commission for Air Quality Management-** It raises the fundamental question about the role of the Commission in what it should be doing rather than what it has done — as it has not been responding to interdependent causes driven by complex urban problems.
- Experts frame environmental concerns in technical terms (pollutants, their monitoring and penalties)
- In reality air pollution in cities is driven by urban factors and transport infrastructure.
- Urban transformation is a social process (people, services, lifestyles) rather than a physical problem (congestion, technology, regulation).
- Solutions depend on the stage of development.

### What changes are expected to be made?

- Now National Green Tribunal (NGT) had begun the process of taking a new look at an old problem by asking the Government to list its causes.
- NGT has directed the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change to **modify the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)** which proposes 20%-30% reduction of air pollution by 2024.
- The Solicitor General demanded Supreme Court that **Commission's power structure needs reworking** for which the Court asked for 'creativity'.

- The focus of the Commission has to be on how cities are organised, which in turn requires collaboration between multiple stakeholders.

### Why should we learn from Beijing?

- The population size of Beijing and Delhi is comparable.
- Delhi, Beijing, and other cities follow the three stages in dealing with urban air pollution as a long-term task.
- First stage starts with end-of-pipe air pollution control. It refers to last stage of a combustion process before the stream is disposed of or delivered.
- Secondly it moves to integrated measures targeting primary pollutants (SO<sub>2</sub>, NO<sub>2</sub>, PM<sub>10</sub>, and CO), with the Government playing the main role.
- Later, secondary pollutants and particulate matter (primarily PM<sub>2.5</sub>) leading to smog, become the main focus for control with a regional coordination mechanism. The similarity ends there.

### What are the lessons from Beijing's Programme?

- **Management system** - UN acknowledges China's management system. It is characterised by systematic planning, strong monitoring capacity, local standards, specific enforcement mechanism and public awareness.
- Warnings are issued in advance (at least 24 hours) through the media, in addition to daily air quality reports and forecasts.
- This is the result of new model of network operation and quality control.
- The technical system combines high-resolution satellite, laser radar and network of over 1,000 PM<sub>2.5</sub> sensors throughout the city to accurately identify high-emission areas and periods.
- **Approach to urbanisation** - The difference was not shutting down polluting units, restricting car ownership and travel, and improved fuel standards but the approach to urbanisation.
- 'Smart cities' such as New York, London and Beijing provide more space for public transport and mixed land use spatial planning minimising travel.
- The problem of Beijing and Delhi, as transit centres is there is no specific peak-hour traffic.
- Beijing's 7th Ring Road to ease congestion is 1,000 kilometres long. Even before buildings came up, the metro link was operational.
- Beijing already has more than 550 km of metro which is more than one-and-half times that of the Delhi Metro. The plans are to have 1,000 km of metro rail.
- The bus transport system has 30,000 low floor buses, more than eight

times the number with the Delhi Transport Corporation.

- In China, 72% of travel is completed by public transport compared with 37% in Japan, 17% in Europe and 10% in the U.S.
- **Vehicle policy** - PM2.5 is largely caused by vehicle emissions. Beijing's analysis showed Regional transport contributes most to pollution on heavily polluted days.
- Phasing out older diesel vehicles made the most significant contribution.
- Beijing plans to have 48 lakh charging points by 2022 to push the use of electric vehicles.
- Delhi has nearly two times the number of registered vehicles than Beijing and is increasing at a faster rate.

### What are the other innovative steps?

- **Innovative steps** - Local regulation targeted controlling both the concentration and total emission amount
- It led to transforming and upgrading the industrial structure production processes and equipment.
- Economic incentives like subsidies to high-polluting enterprises to close their production
- Differentiated fees based on concentration of waste gas emissions for those who chose to remain in production.
- Enforcement at the municipal and State levels is coordinated, with each level having different responsibilities and a mechanism for cooperation.
- Independent evaluations review the air quality management system and providing recommendations for further improvement in air quality and building public support.

### Reference

1. <https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/breathing-fresh-air-int-o-the-ncrs-pollution-control/article37816349.ece>.