Air Pollution and Unlivable Indian Cities

What is the issue?

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Increasing air pollution in the country will make Indian cities unlivable.

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What are the concerns led by air pollution in India?

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- According to WHO out of top 10 most polluting world cities nine are in India.
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- The Global Burden of Disease Study 2017 has spotlighted one out of eight deaths in India is attributable to air pollution and in absolute terms that number is at 12.4 lakh people.
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- India’s mean particulate matter (PM 2.5) of 90 micrograms/cubic meter is the worst in the world with as much as 77 per cent of the population exposed to significant air pollution.
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- It is also estimated that residents of New Delhi will live nine years longer if the air quality in the Capital met the WHO standards (PM 2.5 of 25 micrograms per cu meter or less).
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- Delhi to become comfortably livable, it needs to cut PM (2.5) by 75 per cent from its current levels.
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What is the economic toll of air pollution on India?

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- Foreign tourist’s inflow into Delhi which is a part of the famed Golden Triangle (Delhi-Agra-Jaipur) has dropped by 30 per cent so far this season

(mid-October to March).
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- India’s attraction as an investment destination is primarily its demography but the noxious air quality, over time, will leave its young work force unhealthy thereby affecting productivity.
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- If that happens, foreign investors will start looking elsewhere to set up manufacturing capacities.
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- Domestic manufacturers will eventually follow them leaving the 12 million people joining the work force every year with an uncertain future.
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What measures are underway to address air pollution in India?

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- Some good policies have been announced by respective governments to address air pollution such as decontrol of fuel prices, especially diesel which has reversed dieselization of cars (diesel cars are account for just 25 per cent of the fleet but contribute for 75 per cent of PM 2.5 generated by vehicles).
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- Ujjwala Yojana has seen distribution of LPG cylinders to over 50 million households, it replaces solid fuels in households which is a big source of air pollution.
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- Roll out of BS-VI emission norms have been accelerated and plans to convert agro-waste into ethanol (burning of agri-waste is another major cause of air pollution in Delhi) has also been mooted.
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- To address air pollution, union government released the concept note on National Clean Air Program (NCAP) seeking comments from stakeholders.
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What further measures are needed?

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- For the NCAP to be more than just an intent of purpose, it should set clear

targets for reducing pollution levels.
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- Its implementation should be closely monitored through proper compliance and reporting mechanism.
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- Considering governments' past performances, a legal over-sight is essential, as there is a dire need to accelerate the pace of change.
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- If the executive is not able to do so, the judiciary will have to step in as the Constitution has enshrined citizen's right to life.
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- China in 2012 decided to reduce PM (2.5) in its capital by 25 per cent in five years.
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- It achieved it by taking drastic steps like capping number of cars sold in a year, shifted to clean energy by shutting down coal-based power plants in the area and implemented odd-even rule to curb the number of vehicles on the roads.
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- Thus there is an urgent need to act as decisively as how China tackled pollution in Beijing.
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Source: Business Line

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