Air Pollution – II

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A new international report has drawn attention to the deadly pollutants that pervade the air that people breathe in India, causing terrible illness and premature death.

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What the Global Air study reveals?

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- The State of Global Air 2017 study is conducted jointly by the **Health Effects Institute and the Institute of Health Metrics and Evaluation.**
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- Accordingly the concentration of the most significant inhalable pollutant, fine particulate matter with a diameter of 2.5 micrometres or less (PM2.5), has been growing in India.
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- The rise in average annual population-weighted PM2.5 levels indicates that the Centre’s initiatives to help States reduce the burning of agricultural biomass and coal in Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana and Delhi have failed.
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What are the impacts of govt’s measures?

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- The directions of the National Green Tribunal to Delhi, which were reviewed last year, could not end **open burning of garbage and straw, or curb the urban use of diesel-powered vehicles**.
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- It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the weighted national PM2.5 level estimated in the international report rose from 60 micrograms per cubic

metre in 1990 (the acceptable limit) to 74 in 2015, with a steady rise since 2011.
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- Weak policy on pollution is leading to the premature death of an estimated 1.1 million Indians annually, and the number is growing, in contrast to China’s record of reducing such mortality.
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Steady deterioration:

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- Several studies show long-term evidence of a steady deterioration in air quality in many countries, and South Asia, dominated by India, is today among the worst places to live.
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- Although the central role played by burning of crop residues in causing pollution is well-known, and the Indian Agricultural Research Institute proposed steps to convert the waste into useful products such as enriched fodder, biogas, biofuel, compost and so on, little progress has been made.
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- Last year, helpless farmers in the northern States who wanted to quickly switch from rice to wheat burnt the waste in the fields, in some cases defying local prohibitory orders.
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What government should do?

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- The government has no one to blame but itself, since it has not been able to supply affordable seeder machinery in sufficient numbers to eliminate the need to remove the straw.
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- In a country producing about 500 million tonnes of crop residues annually, the issue needs to be addressed in mission mode.
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- Easy access to cheap solar cookers and biogas plants will also cut open burning, and help the rural economy.
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- Yet, there is no reliable distribution mechanism for these. On the health

front, it is a matter of concern that in the most polluted cities, even moderate physical activity could prove harmful, rather than be beneficial, as new research indicates.
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- India’s clean-up priorities need to shift gear urgently, covering both farm and city.
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Source: The Hindu

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