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 (SO2, NO2, PM10, and CO), with the Government playing the main role.
- Later, secondary pollutants and particulate matter (primarily PM2.5) 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 PM2.5 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-into-the-ncrs-pollution-control/article37816349.ece.