Controlling Air Pollution – Global Experience

What is the issue?

\n\n

Delhi government needs to look at the experience of global cities in cutting down their automobile usage and to improve air quality.

\n\n

What are the measures taken by the government?

\n\n

\n
- The Delhi government recently flagged off a trial run for its first e-buses.
\n
- The government's looking to add 1,000 electric and 3,000 CNG buses to Delhi Transport Corporation's fleet by end-2019.
\n
- It also aims to build sleek, modern bus terminals to spur people to switch from private transport and taxis to buses.
\n
- However, far more needs to done to reduce pollution as the air quality index hits new high in the city.
\n
- The air quality index has topped 600 in many parts of Delhi (the WHO mentions any reading over 25 harmful), making it the most polluted mega-city globally.
\n
- Successive Delhi governments and the courts have attempted to devise solutions for Delhi's pollution, but their actions have been scattershot.
\n
- The new BS-VI cleaner fuels are already selling in Delhi and very recently, the ageing Badarpur power station was closed.
\n
- Also, new restrictions were placed on trucks entering Delhi and on construction.
\n
- But the government constantly relies on short-term solutions, while lacking consistency in its implementation.

\n
- For example, though the court ordered ban on SUV registrations in Delhi, the Delhi government swiftly withdrawn the ruling.
\n

\n\n

What are the global experiences in this regard?

\n\n

\n
- London was an early starter in discouraging car use and is world leader among big cities in putting up roadblocks to automobiles.
\n
- The congestion charges levied in the country slashed the number of vehicles using the central zone by 39% between 2002 and 2014.
\n
- From April, London will charge drivers of older petrol and diesel cars a Euro 12.50 fee on top of the existing Euro 11.50 congestion charge to drive into the central Ultra-Low-Emission-Zone.
\n
- Only Electric Vehicles will be exempt from this congestion charge.
\n
- In Germany, a German court ruled that cities can ban diesel vehicles to fight air pollution.
\n
- Spain recently imposed stringent new rules banning older petrol and diesel vehicles from a two-sq-mile zone in Central Madrid.
\n
- The city reports the ban has already cut the number of vehicles plying the roads by 20% and public transport speeds have risen by 14%.
\n
- China, on its part, is rolling out extensive EV infrastructure and offering automakers numerous incentives to produce clean cars.
\n

\n\n

What should be done?

\n\n

\n
- Vehicular pollution account for one-third of overall pollution in Delhi.
\n
- The Delhi metro lacks last-mile connectivity and carries just 5-6% of total commuters.

\n
- Many pollution-checking centres were recently found to be not working and older vehicles are still plying Delhi streets while others are sold and exported to less strict smaller cities.
\n
- Hence, Delhi needs to promote public transport, taxi services like Uber and extensive bicycle routes to reduce vehicular pollution.
\n
- Also, like Netherlands, the government cangivetax credits for cycling commuters to encourage bicycling.
\n
- Though congestion chargescan be introduced, it is not a one-stop measure to control vehicular pollution in the city.
\n
- For example, since taxis were exempt from congestion charges in London, the number of taxi-rides into London's restricted zone increased by 29%.
\n
- Thus, the promotion of alternate mode of transport does not seem to drastically reduce the pollution levels in the city.
\n
- Also, though there are efforts to promote electric vehicles in Delhi, speeds in EVs are slower and in sprawling cities like Delhi, the distances the e-vehicles can go are often not enough.
\n
- The electric buses also cost significantly more than CNG buses, raising concerns on the affordability of the measure.
\n

\n\n

\n
- Though India declared a goal of 30% of vehicles to be electric by 2030, there's still no clear-cut policy framework for achieving even that target.
\n
- Hence, a clear policy framework has to be laid down for it, along with road safety for cyclists and better sidewalks to encourage walkers.
\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: Business Line

\n



SHANKAR
IAS PARLIAMENT
Information is Empowering