Delhi Air Pollution - Need for Administrative Alterations

What is the issue?

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- Air pollution in Delhi is being recognised as one of the biggest public policy challenges that India is facing.
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- However, the shortfalls in the existing mechanism and approach call for course corrections.
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What is the present mechanism?

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- The present institutional framework includes the government at three levels, the Centre, the Delhi government and local municipal corporations.
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- It also involves three entities on the judicial side, the Supreme Court, the Delhi High Court and the National Green Tribunal.
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- Then there are the three regulatory/enforcement bodies -
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i. the Central Pollution Control Board
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ii. the Delhi Pollution Control Committee
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iii. the SC-mandated Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority for the NCR Region (EPCA)
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What are the shortfalls?

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- **Administrative** - The primary reason for the inability to respond in a coordinated manner is the multiplicity of actors involved.
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- Evidently, there are a number of entities working, but with little coordination.
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- There is also lack of clarity on who should be held accountable, as dissipated authority leads to dissipated accountability.
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- **Approach** - There are few signs of intervention for pollution control in the ground level.
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- Most of the interventions at present lack any evidence-based approach.
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- There is lack of proper evaluation on the effectiveness of the efforts and measures carried out.
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- There is little clarity even on what is causing pollution in the first place.
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- The studies done so far lack the quality and depth to unequivocally establish the pollution sources and their respective contributions.
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What is desired?

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- **Single Agency** - A single empowered agency under the Union government to deal with the issue on a war footing is required.
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- Importantly, the leadership role of such an agency should be clear and unambiguous.
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- **Centre** - The central government control is essential because pollution is a problem irrespective of geographical boundaries.
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- Evidently, Delhi’s problem has its genesis partly beyond the city’s borders.
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- Also, any solution will have components beyond the administrative and financial capabilities of regional/local governments.
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- **Executive control** - The agency has to be fully under the control of the executive.
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- It should be appointed by it and be answerable to it.
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- There is space for judicial intervention but it has to happen in a manner that does not force initiative from the executive.
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- **Judiciary** - The SC has shown initiative and leadership in bringing the pollution issue to the forefront.
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- But it should not take policy-making away from the executive which is assigned for that role.
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- Court's nature of intervention has to change, and it should transform its role from that of a policy analyst or a problem solver.
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- It should only be an institution that protects citizens' rights by holding the governments of the day accountable.
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Source: Indian Express

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