Delhi's Pollution Crisis

What is the issue?

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The rising proportion of smog over Delhi is yet another reminder of the government's failure to act before an emergency.

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What is the recent concern?

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- The Delhi-NCR faces with difficult situation each winter when air pollution levels goes up out of control.
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- Last year, the day after Diwali, air pollution levels were recorded at eight times the safe limit, in Delhi.
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- In response, the Supreme Court-appointed EPCA, a body empowered to enforce the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP).
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- The GRAP aims to roll out progressively tougher actions as pollution levels rise, without waiting for an emergency to impose strict measures.
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- The main objective of EPCA and GRAP is to institutionalize measures to tackle air pollution emergencies.
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- Besides these, there was recently a ban against firecrackers in the National Capital Region.
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- Despite these measures, pollution levels did surge after the festivities, though lower compared to the past two years.
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- Notably post-Diwali smog never receded and very recently the city registered “severe” on the Air Quality Index (AQI).
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- This comes along with a warning for serious health effects.
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What are the administrative shortfalls?

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- **Response** - EPCA is the nodal authority for tackling pollution in the national capital.
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- With the recent serious pollution crisis, the EPCA has recommended a series of measures to be undertaken by various government authorities.
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- It suggested that parking fees be quadrupled, and asked Delhi Metro to lower fares during non-peak hours for at least 10 days and introduce more coaches.
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- But, the EPCA should not have waited for pollution to rise to the level of being a public health emergency.
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- It failed to respond earlier when air quality was deteriorating due to long persistence of haze.
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- **Coordination** - An even more serious problem pertains to the passive attitude of the authorities.
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- The EPCA's proposals require at least 16 authorities to work together.
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- However, there is a lack of coordination among the implementing authorities leading to delayed response.
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- E.g. The EPCA wants to re-enforce the odd-even policy but the Delhi government is delaying to submit time-bound plan on it as directed by the Delhi High Court.
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What should be done?

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- The EPCA and the Delhi government should devise a coordination mechanism between various governmental bodies.
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- This is essential to ensure the timely implementation of various policy

initiatives.
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- More importantly, the crop stubble burning practice in neighbouring states is a major reason for the present worsening of air quality in Delhi.
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- Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan should stop crop stubble burning, in keeping with the National Green Tribunal (NGT) ban on the practice.
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- There should be a system in place to facilitate subsidies for stubble-removing machinery.
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- An alternative is the Bathinda (Punjab) district administration's use of MGNREGA to drive construction of compost pits in farm land.
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- This aims at encouraging farmers to use the crop stubble as raw material for composting.
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- Such inclusive, innovative and feasible practices could be implemented in other states as well, to address the multi-rooted air quality problem of Delhi.
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Source: Indian Express, Financial Express

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