Graded Response Action Plan

Why in news?

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The union Environment Ministry recently notified a ‘Graded Response Action Plan’ against air pollution for Delhi and the National Capital Region.

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What does a ‘graded response’ mean?

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- The plan was prepared by the Supreme Court-mandated Environment Pollution Control Authority (EPCA).
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- A graded response lays down stratified actions that are required to be taken as and when the concentration of pollutantsi.eparticulate matter, reaches a certain level.
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- e.gAt the level of 100 microgrammes per cubic metre(µg/m³) of PM 2.5mechanised sweeping and water-sprinkling along roads has to start.
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- Traffic police personnel have to ensure smooth flow of traffic, and all pollution control measures that are already in place — such as stopping landfill fires, and enforcing Pollution Under Control (PUC) norms and a ban on firecrackers — have to be imposed strictly.
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- The response will change as pollutant levels increase.
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- In January 2016, the average PM 2.5 concentration was 211 µg/m³, with concentrations crossing 300 µg/m³ on a few days. If this level persists for more than 48 hours, an emergency will be declared.
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- This will mean a return of the odd-even road rationing scheme, ban on construction activity, and no entry of trucks in Delhi unless they are carrying essential commodities.
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- The actions under the graded response plan are cumulative in nature i.e the

actions under the previous level will be continued along with actions recommended in the current level.
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What was the need for such a system?

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- According to EPCA, the idea is to put in place graded response actions in a way that the emergency level is never reached.
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- The plan focuses on taking progressively tougher actions as pollution crosses each level, without waiting to impose strict measures when the emergency situation has already been reached.
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- During the first week of November 2016 — post Diwali — pollution levels were so high that several actions were taken simultaneously, including stopping construction, restricting the entry of trucks into Delhi, and shutting the Badarpur power plant.
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- Such knee-jerk reactions will not be required if the graded plan is followed.
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- Beijing and Parishave implemented graded action plans over the past few years. Paris recently implemented the odd-even road rationing scheme when PM 2.5 levels crossed 95 µg/m^3.
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- Several Chinese cities have a road rationing scheme when pollution reaches severe levels.
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How will the system work?

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- The concentration of pollutants will be communicated to EPCA. This will be an average for the entire city.
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- The EPCA will be ensuring implementation of the action plan.
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- It will delegate the responsibility to the concerned departments like the municipal corporations of all NCR towns, the traffic police, police, transport

departments, Delhi Metro Rail Corporation etc.
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- Each body has been set a task that it will have to carry out when EPCA asks it to, based on the concentration of pollutants.
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What are the challenges?

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- A large number of agencies, from different states, will have to work together.
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- Some agencies have already pointed out problems in implementing the plan. e.gOdd-even has to be imposed during an air quality emergency. But the Delhi government hasstated that it will be very difficult to implement the scheme without at least a week’s notice.
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- The municipal corporations, which have to hike parking rates by 3-4 times if the air quality is very poor, have to hold an elaborate meeting each time they change these rates.
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- A system will have to be devised to smooth out these problems.
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