Tackling air pollution

What is the issue?

\n\n

Most Indian cities will become unliveable in the future if there is no pro-active and decisive action by the government to tackle air pollution.

\n\n

What is the status of air pollution in India?

\n\n

\n
- The World Health Organisation announced that nine out of the top 10 most polluting cities in the world were in India.
\n
- The Global Burden of Disease Study 2017 shows that one out of eight deaths in India is attributable to air pollution and in absolute terms, the number stands at 12.4 lakh people.
\n

\n\n

\n
- Also, country's mean particulate matter (PM 2.5) of 90 micrograms/cubic metre is the worst in the world with as much as 77% of the population exposed to significant air pollution.
\n
- The Energy Policy Institute at University of Chicago has estimated that residents of New Delhi will live nine years longer if the air quality in the Capital met the WHO standards (PM 2.5 of 25 micrograms per cu metre or less).
\n

\n\n

What could be the effects?

\n\n

\n
- Foreign tourist inflow into Delhi, which is a part of Golden Triangle (Delhi-

Agra-Jaipur), has dropped by 30% so far this season (mid-October to March).
\n
- India’s attraction as an investment destination is primarily its demography but the falling air quality, over time, will leave its young work force unhealthy thereby affecting productivity.
\n
- If that happens, foreign investors will start looking elsewhere to set up manufacturing capacities.
\n
- Domestic manufacturers will eventually follow them leaving the 12 million people joining the work force every year with an uncertain future.
\n

\n\n

What are the judicial interventions in this regard?

\n\n

\n
- As successive governments have failed to measure up to the situation, it has been the Supreme Court (SC) that has taken the lead to force a change in most instances.
\n
- For example, in the case of Delhi, adoption of CNG as a fuel, implementation of the emission standards, shifting polluting industries out of the capital or shutting down coal-based power plants were all pushed by the supreme court.
\n

\n\n

\n
- The judiciary has also intervened again after the 2016 smog in the National Capital Region (NCR).
\n
- It has called upon the Ministry of Environment to come up with an air quality index which classifies the conditions as poor, very poor and severe.
\n
- It also sought an emergency action plan that will be implemented depending on the severity of the problem, which is under implementation this year.
\n
- SC has also asked for a comprehensive action plan that can be implemented round the year rather than during an emergency.
\n
- This action plan should not just be for New Delhi but should be extended across the country with clear short, medium and long-term goals.

\n
- Following this, the government recently released the concept note on National Clean Air Programme (NCAP).
\n

\n\n

What is the importance of NCAP?

\n\n

\n
- The government has formulated NCAP as a medium term national level strategy to tackle the increasing air pollution problem across the country in a comprehensive manner.
\n
- The overall objective is to augment and evolve effective ambient air quality monitoring network across the country besides ensuring comprehensive management plan for prevention, control and abatement of air pollution.
\n
- It focuses on collaborative and participatory approach covering all sources of pollution and coordination between relevant Central Ministries, State Governments, local bodies and other stakeholders.
\n
- Also, a separate component on 'Technology Assessment Cell' has been envisaged under NCAP to evaluate the technologies for prevention, control and abatement of air pollution.
\n
- However, for the NCAP to be more than just an intent of purpose, it should set clear targets for reducing pollution levels.
\n
- Its implementation should be closely monitored through proper compliance and reporting mechanism, along with a legal over-sight.
\n

\n\n

What should be done?

\n\n

\n
- The government has taken many measures to control air pollution as –
\n

\n\n

\n
1. Decontrolling of fuel prices to reduce dieselisation of cars

\n
2. Ujjwala Yojana to replace solid fuels in households
\n
3. Roll out of BS-VI emission norms
\n
4. Conversion of agri-waste into ethanol
\n

\n\n

\n
- Apart from these initiatives, there is a need for a solution that has scale, depth and stringency of action to deal with this problem that is assuming menacing proportions.
\n

\n\n

\n\n

Source: Business Line

\n