

**TIDING OVER : ON NORTH INDIA AND
ITS ANNUAL AIR QUALITY
INFLECTION POINT IN NOVEMBER****The Hindu**

Paper - III (Environment)

Delhi and parts of the surrounding States of Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh encounter their annual air quality inflection point. This is the time when the southwest monsoon has receded and with it, the great drafts in the upper atmosphere that normally flush out pollutants from the gamut of anthropogenic activities such as construction, driving, power generation and the burning of agricultural residue. Through the years, there have been studies commissioned and executive action initiated to study, acknowledge and address the crisis. The science is also fairly clear on the relative contribution of pollutants and the limits of corrective intervention in the face of adverse meteorology and the disruption to economic life that this can entail. The consequence of this is that the air pollution crisis has now devolved into a stalemate. The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM), which is tasked with addressing the causes of air pollution in Delhi and the adjoining States, is now a body packed with expertise but whose powers are limited to evoking and recommending grades of measures depending on the degree of deterioration in air quality.

While the CAQM pointed out, as recently as October 31, that the daily average air quality in Delhi from January to October of this year was the best in the last six years, it elides the fact that the number of days in November when air quality becomes 'severe' (over 450 AQI) has remained roughly the same. Thus, in 2022, the AQI was in the severe category in the first fortnight of November for three days, the same as in 2021, 2020 and 2019. While there is greater awareness and action to curb the sources of pollution, November, which has in recent years emerged as the critical month for pollution, remains to be tamed. Incidents of stubble burning in Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh this year have been roughly half that when compared to previous years, though the weeks ahead are expected to see more such activity. While the measures earlier have seen an institutionalised response to tackle air pollution, it is now time for a concerted approach to address these challenges of November. Beyond

stubble burning, this means addressing the more daunting challenges of vehicular pollution and construction dust. While urban Delhi could have always blamed the distant farm fires for the pollution crisis, tackling November may mean hard measures and greater inconvenience. Bodies such as the CAQM have to assert their independent credentials and ensure greater coordination and compliance within Delhi and the surrounding States to address the challenge.

Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM):

- ❖ The Commission was first formed by an ordinance in October 2020.
- ❖ The erstwhile Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority, or EPCA had been dissolved to make way for the Commission.
- ❖ The Commission will be a statutory authority.
- ❖ The Commission will supersede bodies such as the central and state pollution control boards of Delhi, Punjab, Haryana, UP and Rajasthan.
- ❖ In 2021, the Parliament approved the Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas Bill.

Composition:

- ❖ Chairperson: To be chaired by a government official of the rank of Secretary or Chief Secretary.
- ❖ The chairperson will hold the post for three years or until s/he attains the age of 70 years.
- ❖ It will have members from several Ministries as well as representatives from the stakeholder States.
- ❖ It will have experts from the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB), Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and Civil Society.

Powers and functions:

- ❖ It will have the powers to issue directions to these state governments on issues pertaining to air pollution.
- ❖ It will entertain complaints as it deems necessary for the purpose of protecting and improving the quality of the air in the NCR and adjoining areas.
- ❖ It will also lay down parameters for control of air pollution.
- ❖ It will also be in charge of identifying violators, monitoring factories and industries and any other polluting unit in the region, and will have the powers to shut down such units.
- ❖ It will also have the powers to overrule directives issued by the state governments in the region, that may be in violation of pollution norms.

Expected Question

Que. Who chairs the Air Quality Management Commission set up for the National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas?

- (a) Chief Minister of Delhi
- (b) Lieutenant Governor of Delhi
- (c) Union Home Minister
- (d) None of the above



Answer : d

Mains Expected Question & Format

Que.: "The level of air pollution starts increasing in Delhi as winter approaches, but the organizational structure created to prevent it is toothless." Comment.

Answer Format :

- ❖ In the first part of the answer, discuss the various factors responsible for increasing the level of air pollution in Delhi with the arrival of winter season.
- ❖ In the second part, analyze the structure and powers of the organizational structure created for the prevention of air pollution.
- ❖ Finally give a conclusion giving suggestions.

Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC mains examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.