

Environmental groups hail Delhi's controversial car ban

December 6 2015



A participant runs through smog on Rajpath during the Airtel Delhi Half Marathon 2015 in New Delhi on November 29, 2015

Environmental groups on Saturday lauded the Delhi government's move to drastically reduce the number of private vehicles on the capital's roads in a bid to clean up the city's notoriously toxic air, as a political row erupted over the controversial decision.

According to the new measure passed on Friday, private vehicles will only be allowed on the capital's roads on alternate days starting in January. The Delhi government also vowed to improve public transportation, shut down a coal-fired power station and start vacuuming roads to reduce dust.

Anumita Roychowdhury, executive director at the Delhi-based Centre for Science and Environment, said the decision was a milestone.

"The city has little choice when there is at least one death per hour due to air pollution related diseases and the lung of every third child is impaired," Roychowdhury said in a statement.

The temporary measures are seen as a desperate attempt to cut down alarming [pollution levels](#) during the winter months as cooler air and clouds trap pollutants creating a smoggy layer over the city.

The issue has been in the spotlight this week as negotiators from 195 nations haggle in Paris over a planned universal accord to slash the greenhouse-gas emissions that trap the Sun's heat.

Greenpeace's Sunil Dahiya said the decision would bring down daytime pollution levels significantly but added that more steps are needed for a long-term solution.

"This is going to have a wonderful impact on pollution but we cannot ignore the burning of crop waste in neighbouring states," Dahiya told AFP.



People relax on the lawns near smog enveloped government offices on Rajpath in New Delhi on December 2, 2015

However, political opponents lashed out at the new ruling.

The opposition Congress party, which ruled the capital for more than a decade before losing in municipal elections earlier this year, said the decision would hurt "the common man" in Delhi.

"This is not practical and will harass the common man," Congress leader Shakeel Ahmad told reporters.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) labelled the initiative: "half-baked" and "knee-jerk".

Successive Delhi governments have faced flak for failing to clean up the capital's noxious air, ranked as the worst globally in a World Health Organization survey of more than 1,600 cities.

There are more than 8.5 million vehicles on Delhi's roads with 1,400 new cars added every day.

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Citation: Environmental groups hail Delhi's controversial car ban (2015, December 6) retrieved 26 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2015-12-environmental-groups-hail-delhi-controversial.html>

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