



“Air Quality Improving, People Need not Panic”: Dr. Harsh Vardhan

‘Implement Graded Response Action Plan Earnestly and Meticulously’, Says Environment Minister

Posted On: 11 NOV 2017 5:20PM by PIB Delhi

Emphasising that air quality has been improving over the last two days, Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, Dr. Harsh Vardhan said that the people of Delhi need not panic, as several steps are being taken by the Government to mitigate air pollution. Speaking to mediapersons here today, Dr. Harsh Vardhan said that the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) must be earnestly and meticulously implemented by the concerned State Governments, as well as municipal and civic organisations. He added that focussed attention at the highest level has been ensured through committees headed by the Union Minister, Minister of State, MoEF&CC and Secretary, MoEF&CC. Dr. Harsh Vardhan referred to the review meetings with concerned State Governments and agencies and said that crop residue and stubble burning have been under detailed discussions during all these meetings.

The Environment Minister pointed out that for the first time, this year, a focussed approach has been adopted to deal with emergency-like situation through GRAP, which had been prepared last year. He added that a Task Force has been set up to review the air quality in Delhi-NCR headed by Member Secretary, Central Pollution Control Board well in advance. Dr. Harsh Vardhan also underlined the augmenting of the number of monitoring stations in Delhi-NCR to enhance the quality of information system.

Dr. Harsh Vardhan stressed the fact that as a part of advance planning and special intervention, 40 monitoring teams of CPCB have been deployed since September 1, 2017 to give feedback on the ground situation and air polluting activities in Delhi. ‘A systemic response mechanism was put in place for the last one year and regular alerts were conveyed to all stakeholders’, the Minister said.

Earlier, with a view to ensure wider public participation, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has launched campaigns such as “Harit Diwali, Swasth Diwali” and “Swachh Hawa for Swacch and Swasth Bharat” involving over 2000 schools in Delhi and over two lakh schools in the country. A mini-Marathon had also been organised on October 15, 2017 at India Gate, in which nearly 15, 000 school children had participated.

Additionally, special focus has been trained on monitoring the situation at specific hotspots such as Anand Vihar, I.T.O, Punjabi Bagh and DTU. Specific interventions have been suggested from time to time, as well as various directions have also been issued to implementation agencies such as state governments, district administration, police authorities, municipal corporations and industries for effective actions to curb air pollution.

Dr. Harsh Vardhan emphasised that in view of the recent episode of very high levels of air pollution, the following actions have been initiated in the Delhi-NCR region:

- Activated close co-ordination with the concerned Ministries/State governments and departments.
- A committee headed by the Secretary, MoEF&CC comprising Secretary, Science & Technology, Secretary, Earth Sciences, Secretary, Biotechnology, Chairman, CPCB, representatives of Niti Aayog and NDMA has been constituted to review the present situation and suggest immediate, as well as long-term measures.
- A meeting of the Central Committee chaired by Secretary, MoEF&CC, comprising Chief Secretaries of concerned State governments of NCR and Chairman, CPCB convened to deliberate on effective measures under GRAP.
- Meeting with EPCA and CPCB was held to improve upon effectiveness of enforcement mechanism and to ensure coordinated approach of various agencies.
- Meeting has been held at the level of Lt. Governor, Delhi for better coordination among all agencies within Delhi for effective ground actions.

The Environment Minister added that some of the immediate short-term measures initiated include:

- Ban on diesel gen-sets, brick kilns, stone crushers, hot mix plants as per GRAP is being effectively enforced;
- Ban on entry of trucks with non-essential supplies to Delhi is being strictly enforced.
- Enhanced parking fee and capacity augmentation of public transport. Metro has increased its frequency and number of coaches by 25%.
- Civil construction activities have been stopped for the moment.
- Watering over unpaved roads to contain road dust is being carried out on a large scale. Fire tenders, water tankers of corporations have been pressed into service for sprinkling water.
- Regulated emission from industries in NCR region advised the State governments to issue directions to the concerned authorities.
- Impose fines on defaulters through Municipal Corporations/State Pollution Control Boards and other organisations.
- Enforce ban on garbage burning.

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