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Wednesday, Jul 17, 2024

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Govt to review clean air action plan of cities, to ensure fast-track use of funds

Funds of Rs 1,165.48 crore have been released to 82 cities between 2019-20 and 2023-24, of which 51% or Rs 830.04 crore has been spent by states, the minutes of the meeting said.

Written by **Nikhil Ghanekar**

New Delhi | Updated: July 17, 2024 07:45 IST





The ministry's submissions to the green court showed that besides idling of funds, many cities spent funds on projects such as football grounds, water fountains and desludging machines.
(Representational Image)

The review of **air quality improvement action plans** of 131 cities to ensure expeditious use of funds allocated under the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) is slated this month as part of the Centre's 100-day agenda, officials familiar with the developments said.

While one meeting of the NCAP monitoring committee to review progress in 82 cities took place earlier this month, another meeting of the NCAP steering committee will be chaired by the secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEF&CC) next week.

The meeting will take stock of the action taken by the respective city administrations with focus on key target areas such as dust control measures, setting up of charging stations for electric vehicles, improvement in public transport, waste management and urban greening, sources said.

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Launched in 2019, NCAP covers 131 cities and the target is to cut particulate matter pollution by 40% by 2025-26 or meet the National Ambient Air Quality Standards. The 131 cities across 24 states, known as non-attainment cities, were selected as they did not meet national air quality standards consecutively for five-years between 2011-2015.

During the meeting earlier this month, ministry officials urged cities to expedite actions and ensure timely completion of targeted activities.



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The ministry's review to ensure expeditious fund utilisation comes at a time when the National Green Tribunal is scrutinising the national programme, specifically the funds lying unused. The ministry's submissions to the green court showed that besides idling of funds, many cities spent funds on projects such as football grounds, water fountains and desludging machines.



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“The use of funds on fountains, football grounds etc raises questions on the understanding of air pollution issues by the concerned authorities. We need better indicators in place to monitor progress of NCAP . Allocation of the finances should be linked to efforts towards reducing emissions load in the geography of interest rather than just a utilisation certificate...” said Sunil Dahiya, South Asia analyst, Centre For Research on Energy and Clean Air.

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Nikhil Ghanekar

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