

REPORT ON AIR POLLUTION IN DELHI-NCR

Review vehicular emission standard, install air purifiers in schools, suggests House panel

Nikhil Ghanekar, New Delhi, December 12

FROM RECOMMENDING a comprehensive review of the country's vehicular emission standards, launch of a satellite to monitor farm fires, to installing air purifiers in all public schools and hospitals, a parliamentary panel has made several policy prescriptions to the central government to combat Delhi-NCR's air pollution in a new report tabled in Rajya Sabha, Thursday.

The panel has also suggested that the government consider abolishing or reducing GST on air purifiers and HEPA (high-efficiency particulate air) filters, capping the registration of non-electric cars and offering tax incentives for adoption of EVs. It also asked the Centre to expedite its revision of the National Ambient Air Quality Standards and installation of pollution cutting devices in thermal plants within 300-km of Delhi-NCR.

The Standing Committee on Science and Technology, Environment, Forests and Climate Change report was tabled by the panel's Chairman and BJP MP Bhubaneswar Kalita.

The panel said that no single policy or quick fix solution can untangle the deep-rooted pollution issue. It noted that even as the government's effort to reduce air pollution have fallen short, a prohibitive tax was levied on air purifiers. "Imposing such a tax effectively monetizes a public health failure," the panel stated.

It added that since children are among the most vulnerable to poor air, it recommended installation of air purifiers in all public schools of Delhi-NCR, and public hospitals, especially critical wards. It also sought that the government make it mandatory to install air purifiers in government offices.

Analysing vehicular emissions and adoption of ethanol as alternate fuel, the panel acknowledged the rationale of ethanol blending for energy security, but flagged unintended impacts such as rise in nitrogen oxides emissions from vehicles which when blended fully or in part with blended fuel. It also delved into the science of evaporative emissions, which lead to ozone formation. It thus recommended that the government should "undertake a comprehensive review of the nation's vehicular emission standards."

It said that the review should evaluate the necessity of adopting more stringent evaporative emission standards. These standards relate to capturing fuel vapours from vehicles. On EV adoption, the panel noted bottlenecks and insisted the government could consider incentives and disincentives.

It suggested offering cheaper or free public parking for EV owners, and steeper rates for petrol and diesel vehicles. Beyond parking incentives, it said the government could also consider an "annual ceiling on the registration of non-electric vehicles" across NCR.

On stubble farming, the standing committee also took cognizance of media reports which indicated that farmers were evading satellite detection of farm fires. Expressing concern about these tactics, the panel recommended that ISRO launch a dedicated high-resolution satellite

capable of monitoring farm fires 24x7, and a space application mapped with digital farm records.

The panel also examined the national ambient air quality standards and average annual air quality index. It noted that Delhi's annual PM 2.5 levels needed to be slashed by 62% to meet the air quality standards, and by 95% to WHO standards.