

# Farm fires can push Delhi's AQI by over 104 points

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**New Delhi:** A study on burning of rice harvest remnants in Punjab and Haryana found that high fire counts can push up AQI in Delhi by more than 104 index points on a given day. Environment organisation Climate Trends' study, "Analysing Satellite Data on Fire Incidents in Punjab and Haryana and Its Impact on Delhi's Air Health," released on Tuesday, assessed farm fires between Sept and Dec from 2019 to 2023.

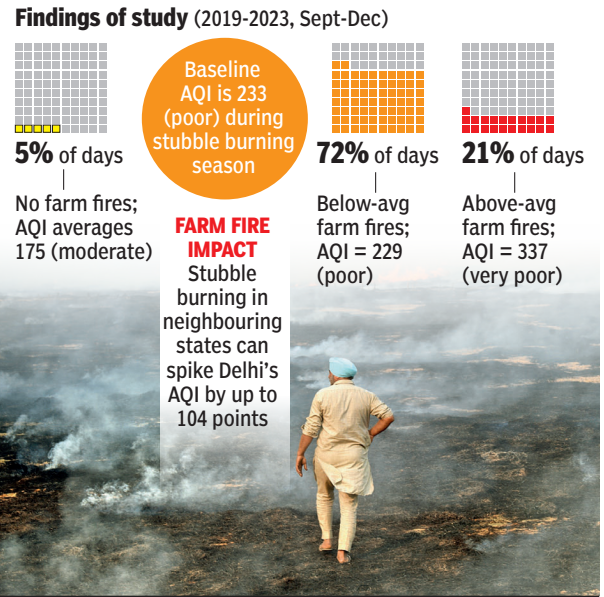
The baseline AQI during the stubble burning season, Sept-Dec, was considered by the study to be 233 or 'poor'. On days without farm fires, the city AQI averages 175, which is at the 'moderate' level, though such days constitute just 5% of the four-

month period. For 72% of the days when the fire count is below average, average AQI is around 229, or 'poor'. When the farm fires increase to beyond average, which is on around 21% of the days, AQI surges to 337 in the 'very poor' category, indicating a 104 AQI points effect.

The study also stated that while the number of farm fires has significantly dropped in both Punjab and Haryana in recent years, Delhi still sees high pollution during the peak stubble burning season due to its winter meteorology. For Haryana, the study notes that the fire counts dropped from 14,122 in 2019 to 7,959 in 2023, while the trend in Punjab has slid from 95,048 fires in 2020 to 52,722 in 2023.

"The reduction in fires across Punjab and Haryana is a mixed trend. Reductions in some districts of Punjab are

## NEED FOR CROSS-BORDER EFFORT



significant, although the total fire count is still high. In Haryana, there is an increase in fire counts in some districts. However, the cumulative count is lower," pointed out Aarti Khosla, director, Climate Trends. "Delhi, in the meanwhile, continues to struggle with poor air quality. While each stakeholder, from farmer to govt to scientist, is doing its best, the gap lies in communication. We need to understand the challenges faced by farmers and act accordingly. Practices like mulching, in-situ crop residue management and organic farming should be considered."

The study suggests a collaboration among Delhi, Punjab and Haryana to mitigate the effects of stubble burning on the capital's air quality. "There is increasing awareness and farmers are engaging in stubble management through



an integrated approach of using short-duration paddy varieties, employing appropriate farm machinery to incorporate straw in the soil, mulching and for the preparation of feed blocks, application of microbial decomposers, and options like supplying harvest residue to power plants," noted RN Padaria, joint director, extension, Indian Agriculture Research Institute. "Persuasive communication, custom-hired machinery and appropriate technological options have boosted management of stubble burning."

# Use electric or CNG buses for transport to Delhi, Rai urges neighbouring states

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi:** Delhi's environment minister Gopal Rai wrote letters to the transport ministers of Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan on Tuesday, urging them to ensure that they use only electric or CNG buses for transportation to Delhi instead of diesel buses.

While addressing a conference, Rai stated that the air quality of the city was deteriorating and the situation was the same in the entire northern India. He claimed that while Delhi govt was taking all necessary measures, vehicular pollution from neighbouring BJP-led states was adding to the city's pollution.

"One major component of this air pollution is vehicular emissions largely attributed to the significant number of diesel buses entering the city from Uttar Pradesh...The large influx of such buses significantly contributes to the degradation of air quality in Delhi, posing serious health risks to the residents. Delhi is already grappling with poor air quality, and

this additional burden from interstate traffic is aggravating the situation," Rai stated in a letter addressed to the transport minister of Uttar Pradesh.

"I kindly request your esteemed office to consider restricting the entry of diesel buses from Uttar Pradesh entering Delhi or implementing stricter regulations to control their emission norms," he added.

Similar letters were written to respective ministers in Haryana and Rajasthan. No such letter to Punjab was, however, shared by Delhi govt.

Rai further stated that 6,200 MCD workers would be deployed to ensure that water sprinkling was carried out properly.

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said that the city had already become a "mini-gas chamber" this year because Delhi govt "failed" to implement anti-pollution measures. Rai keeps blaming Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan for political reasons, while Delhi's weather and pollution are determined by winds from Punjab and Himachal Pradesh, he claimed.

# Air Worsens, Anand Vihar Leads Assault On Lungs...

## City's Foulest Day Since Feb 14, No Relief Likely Anytime Soon

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**New Delhi:** The city's Air Quality Index (AQI) spiked to 327 on Tuesday, deteriorating from 310 a day earlier, both in the 'very poor' category. No relief is expected from the haze and toxic pollution for the next few days as pollution is predicted to remain in the red category. Tuesday was the foulest day since Feb 14, when AQI was 341.

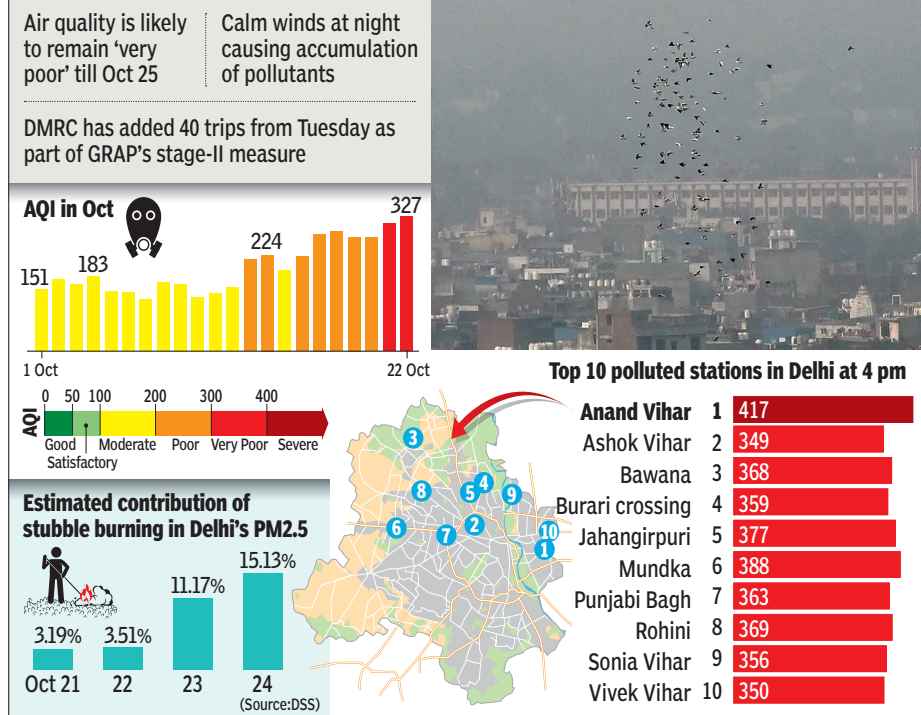
Though the overall AQI remained in the 'very poor' range for the second consecutive day, Anand Vihar exceeded the city average, recording 417 in the 'severe' category at 4pm to become the most polluted locality in the capital, according to Central Pollution Control Board data.

Since the wind direction is likely to change to north-westerly on Wednesday, thus bringing pollutants from the farm fire states to Delhi, the share of stubble burning in PM2.5 is predicted to rise from 3.5% on Tuesday to 11.2% on Wednesday and 15.1% on Thursday, according to the Decision Support System.

"Calm winds have been prevailing in the city during the nighttime for the past few days. However, as wind direction was variable on Tuesday and wind speed was light during the daytime, it caused trapping of pollutants and caused a haze in the city," explained Mahesh Palawat, vice-chairman, Skymet Meteorology. He added that wind direction was expected to change to north-westerly from Wednesday and increase the likelihood of transfer of smoke from stubble burning sites to Delhi from the neighbouring states.

Data shows that paddy

## WHAT ARE YOU SMOKING?



remnant burning is rising, with Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, UP and Madhya Pradesh reporting, respectively, 71, 10, 17, 36 and 98 farm fires on Tuesday. Between Sept 15 and Oct 22, Punjab had a fire count of 1,581 against 1,794 in the same period last year. In the same period, Haryana saw 665 fires compared with 714 in 2023.

The air quality is predicted to remain 'very poor' till Friday. "The outlook for the six days from Friday onwards is air quality in the 'very poor' or 'poor' categories. Meteorological conditions are unfavourable for effective dispersion of pollutants as calm winds prevail during the night," said the Air Quality Early Warning System for

Delhi, which is the forecasting body under the Union ministry of earth sciences. With stage II of Graded Response Action Plan implemented, Delhi Metro Rail Corporation added 40 additional trips from Tuesday to meet increased demand of commuters. Meanwhile, the maximum temperature at Safdarjung, the city's base weather station, on Tuesday was 34 degrees Celsius, one above normal. The minimum was 20.4 degrees Celsius, two notches above normal. However, the Ridge in north Delhi saw the mercury plummeting to 16.9 degrees Celsius, three degrees below normal.

# ...Oct not over yet, PM2.5 levels are already at year-ago period average

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**New Delhi:** An analysis of PM2.5 levels in just 20 days of Oct reveals that several air monitoring stations in Delhi have almost reached the average levels recorded in Oct last year. Some stations, like Vivek Vihar and Alipur, have recorded higher PM2.5 levels this Oct so far compared with the month last year. 2023 had

the worst Oct in the past three years since 2020.

The Centre for Science and Environment, which analysed the Central Pollution Control Board's real-time air quality data for the month, said that the average PM2.5 concentration in Oct 2023 was 104 micrograms per cubic metre. This was much higher than the daily national ambient air quality standard of 60 micrograms per

cubic metre and WHO's daily safe guideline of 15 micrograms per cubic metre.

While the average PM2.5 level at Anand Vihar in Oct last year was 141 micrograms per cubic metre, this had already reached 135 micrograms per cubic metre by Oct 20 this year. Seven air stations — Anand Vihar, Wazirpur, Bawana, Jahangirpuri, Vivek Vihar, Burari Crossing, and Alipur — have logged PM2.5

levels higher in the 20 days of Oct this year than in Oct 2023. In fact, three stations recorded worse pollution till Oct 20 this year than in the entire month in 2023.

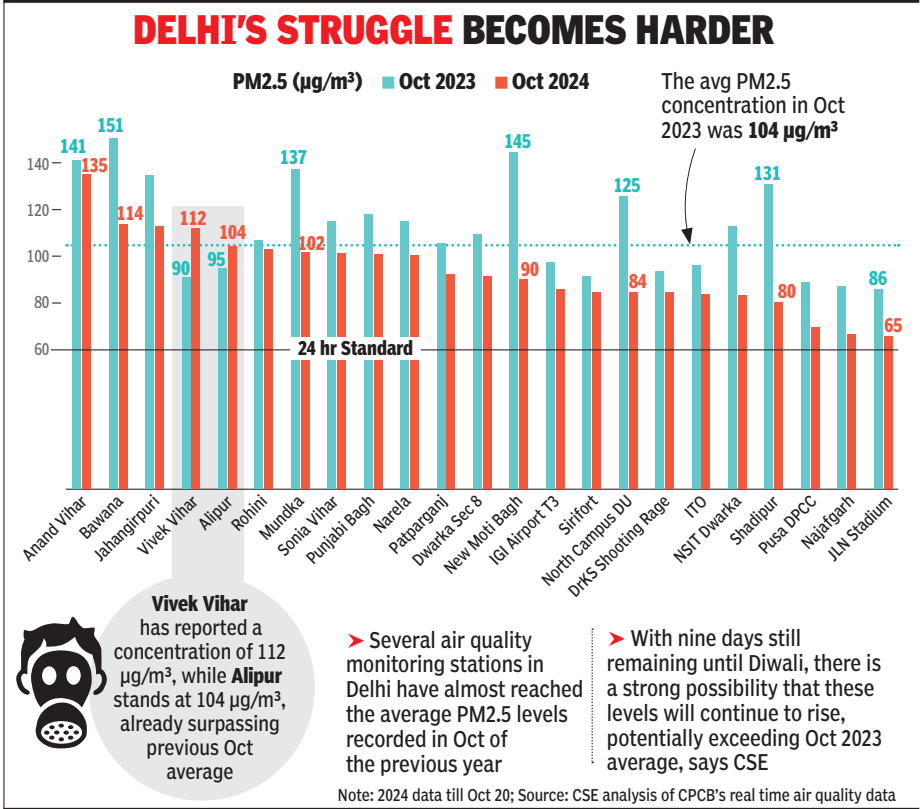
CSE's analysis shows that the average PM2.5 concentration at Vivek Vihar in Oct 2023 was 90 micrograms per cubic metre, which rose to 112 micrograms per cubic metre this Oct. Alipur so far has seen a mean PM2.5 level of 104 micrograms per cubic metre compared with 95 last Oct.

"With nine days still remaining until Diwali, there is a strong possibility that these levels will continue to rise and potentially exceed the Oct 2023 average," said CSE.

In Oct last year, Bawana was the most polluted area in the city with an average PM2.5 concentration of 151 micrograms per cubic metre, followed by New Moto Bagh at 145.

The month last year had five 'very poor' days, and of these, four were in the last week of the month. However, Delhi has already seen two such days on Monday and Tuesday, with the air quality expected to remain 'very poor' for the next few days.

"In Oct last year, the capital recorded a rainfall of 5.4mm on Oct 17. Rain helps wash out the pollutants and gives temporary relief from rising pollution," said a weather official. "However, the weather has remained dry this Oct, with not a single day of rain activity. Rain is unlikely in the next seven days too."





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