

China fixed Beijing air with iron hand

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The air Beijing was inhaling a couple of years ago was as toxic as Delhi's, but the Chinese capital had managed the crisis quickly and effectively. Experts say China's strategies were stringent and aggressive.

Beijing barred registration of diesel cars as early as 2003. It implemented China V emission standards in 2013 while India is still following BS IV norms. They have a four-level alarm system to respond to severe air pollution episodes like shutting down industries, reducing use of private vehicles, closing schools depending on how bad the pollution levels are.

Not long ago, Beijing too went through a similar phase when there was massive criticism from the international community and expatriates had started leaving the city to avoid exposure to the toxic air. A report in Los Angeles Times published on June 20, 2014 talks about how expatriates started leaving because their children could not have enough physical activity outdoors or because they were falling sick and it was becoming a huge economic concern for China.

On March 21, 2014, BBC reported what prompted an American couple to decide to leave the city after working there for five years. There are similar stories of expats fleeing China during the worst air pollution episodes. But China's response to the prob-

lem was swift.

"China did go through a similar phase when there was international glare on Beijing's air pollution. There were media reports that tourism was getting affected. When Hong Kong had high pollution

levels, even offices started shifting out. But China managed to address it quite comprehensively," said a researcher who doesn't wish to be identified.

According to an analysis by Centre for Science and En-

vironment (CSE), during 2011-14, over 1.4 million vehicles older than six years were retired or replaced in Beijing. It also introduced an environmental labeling system—Yellow: Euro I gasoline, Euro III diesel; Green: Euro IV; Blue:

Euro V. This also includes use of electronic tags, and embedded chips in vehicles since 2009 so that information about the vehicle can be stored and remote reading can be taken.

Vehicles without labels are illegal on Beijing's roads. It helps them identify, which vehicles could be polluting. For example, traffic restriction on yellow label vehicles began in 2003. China will eliminate yellow label vehicles in key regions by the end of 2015 and from the entire country by the end of 2017.

"India, unlike China, lacks a comprehensive clean air plan. Here, we have an AQI that does not take into account the dreadful emissions from the industrial sector and particularly the coal-fired power plants, which are responsible for more than 50% of the particulate matter emissions in the country. This is simply unacceptable. India needs to adopt a national clean air plan similar to that of China," said Aishwarya Madineta, campaigner, Greenpeace.

China also has advanced in-use vehicle emission testing system. "They (China) introduced 20,000 buses, including CNG-run ones by 2008, Metro and light railway, imposed restrictions based on odd and even number vehicles; stringent control on emissions from industry, power plants, etc.," CSE's assessment said. About 20,000-30,000 polluting heavy duty trucks that ply through Beijing figure in "smoke blacklist" and are fined by authorities.

CAPITALS IN CONTRAST

	Delhi	ACTION	Beijing
	None	Near-term target	Annual average of 60 microgram per cubic metre for PM2.5 by 2017
	None	Deadline to meet safe standard	2030
	None	Emergency action on high pollution days	Stringent action along with health advisory and 4-level alarm system
	None	National Action Plan	Yes
	CNG for autos, buses	Policies on transport	Limits on car registration, private car use, car emission standard in line with EU

POLICIES ON INDUSTRIAL EMISSIONS

Delhi: No standards for thermal power plants, emission standards allow 4-20 times higher emission from industries

Beijing: 5-year plans with emission reduction targets, stringent emission standards for power plants and industry



(Source: Greenpeace)

How Beijing's alarm system works

Triggers based on PM2.5 Levels

BLUE 1 day over 150 microgram per cubic metre

YELLOW 3 days over 150µg/m³ or one day over 250µg/m³

ORANGE 3 consecutive days alternating between over 150 & over 250µg/m³

RED 3 days over 250µg/m³

ACTIONS TO COMBAT IT

BLUE

- Children, elderly and people with respiratory or cardiovascular conditions warned
- Increase dust prevention at construction sites
- Reduced use of government vehicles

YELLOW

- Vulnerable groups told to stay inside
- Power plants and factories cut emissions



ORANGE

- Factories shut
- Schools stop exercise classes
- Everyone told to avoid exercise outside and wear masks
- Excavation and demolition work at construction sites stopped

RED

- Schools and kindergartens closed
- Power plants cut emissions further
- Car use regulated based on licence plate number (odd/even number system)