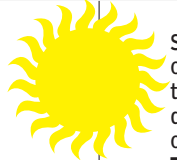




Delhi had the highest concentration of PM2.5 particles among **1,600 cities** globally. These particles are so tiny that they can directly lodge in lungs. In 2013, Delhi's PM2.5 average was 153 micrograms per cubic metre



Summer concentrations of ozone (O3), a highly toxic gas, are often double the safe standard of 50 parts per billion. **This year, ozone levels were consistently high from May 19 to 27 in Delhi University (North Campus), Dheerpur and Aya Nagar with a peak of 120ppb at Dheerpur**

Between October 2014 and February 2015, Delhi's air quality was 'poor' and, at times, 'very poor' on 86% of the days



US-based Health Effects Institute found that people within 500 metres of the roadside are the worst affected. About **55% of people** in Delhi live within that range

Delhi has **82 lakh** vehicles, close to what Chennai, Mumbai and Kolkata have altogether



A study by Chittaranjan National Cancer Institute found that children in Delhi are vulnerable to **pulmonary disorders, hypertension, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and depression** because of exposure to air pollution

Another study done by CNCI for Central Pollution Control Board found that every third child in Delhi has reduced or impaired lung function. The researchers examined **12,000 school children** for the study



Feeling breathless in 'gas chamber' Delhi

Some Are Getting Ready To Escape, Others Want To Fix It, But Both Expats And Indians Agree That The City's Air Is Terrible

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: As the Centre and state governments in NCR dither on fixing air quality, the capital's image is taking a beating and its residents are paying the price of bad air with their health. After TOI published a piece by Gardiner Harris, South Asia correspondent of The New York Times, on his decision to return to the US due to the harm Delhi's air has done to his eight-year-old son, Bram, many other expatriates in the city also said they found their quality of life "severely compromised" here.



(AQI) in winter goes up to 10 times the safe standard. During Christmas last time, it was 600. You can definitely feel it when it's high and you have to stay indoors."

Like Harris, Genevieve Chase and her husband have also decided to move back to the US after living in Delhi for three years. Her children, aged 10 and 12, have not developed any chronic problem

but she is wary of exposing them to dirty air. "We have decided not to elongate our stay because our kids are not as active here compared with how they are in places with cleaner air. As a public health professional, I feel very strongly about it." She keeps her children indoors whenever the air quality index shoots up.

Harris writes in his piece that he had considered moving back after his son's first hospitalization for asthma in Delhi but was pushed to ask for a change of location when his inhaler became ineffective. "It was a tough decision but I told my bosses that I will



INTREPID: Chris Carlisle braves traffic and toxic air on his bicycle in GK-1 on Monday

have to move back. My stint here was the best job I ever had. My sons have their best friends here but we asked ourselves, what are we doing? Lung problem is an invisible disease but it can't be neglected," Harris told TOI. Some termed Harris's remarks an exaggeration. Vanessa Asvin Koumar, a French student in Jawahar-

lal Nehru University, said, "Paris is also polluted. It's normal for any big city to face such problems of urbanization." But most comments reflected anger and shock. "I grew up in Delhi in the 1970s and 1980s. The air had started to get bad then, but nothing like it is now. What are we doing to ourselves? No regard

for anything except getting rich," said one. Some blamed Harris for bringing his children to Delhi: "I seriously doubt your career advancement was worth the impact on your son's health." Another wrote: "I was born in India. Have lived here in the US for most of my life. As much as I want my two young children to know

their 'motherland', I will never expose them to the health risks posed by living there."

Indians also vented their anger: "It seems that Modi's catchy slogan 'Swachh Bharat' has not moved beyond his wishful populist mind," wrote one. However, some saw a conspiracy behind Harris's piece. Government sources said the West wants to portray India as a major contributor of greenhouse gases (GHG) before climate negotiations.

But Harris said, "My son didn't get asthma from climate change. Some 1.5 million Indians die annually from polluted air, not climate change."

Keshav Varma, who was World Bank's director for east Asia from 1997 to 2009, said the Chinese government had done a lot to clean up Beijing's air. "Delhi is a gas chamber but most people don't understand how pollution is harming their health," Varma added.

Delhi's air also figured in expat group discussions. "There's that permanent 'diesel' smell in the air. And it (Delhi) does try and balance it with some green areas but needs so much more, and so

"I'm not sure if I qualify to comment as an 'expat', having lived in Delhi for 30 years. But the pollution has gotten worse, and it's not just the foreigners, but everybody who's noticed it. My wife (artist Olivia Fraser) is asthmatic and she feels that strongly. However, we don't live in Delhi but on the outskirts on our farm in Mehrauli, but we've installed air purifiers there too, as have many of our friends, both Indian and expat. Winters, when that thick polluted fog descends, is the time when we feel it worse

—WILLIAM DALRYMPLE



Vivien Massot, a French economist who has been in Delhi for five years, said he can feel the smog and pollution in Delhi much more than in Paris. "It's very visible and you can feel it too. But it has not made me sick yet. It could be because I am less exposed to the traffic fumes: my house is only a few minutes away from my office in Lajpat Nagar."

Experts said moving out isn't an option. "We have to recognize that people have to live here to demand their right to good health. The government has the duty to protect all. Every third child in Delhi has impaired lungs, what other reason do we need to act against air pollution?" said Anumita Roychowdhury, head of CSE's Clean Air campaign.

No concrete step has been taken to counter Delhi's air problem so far. National Green Tribunal proposed banning diesel vehicles that are more than 10 years old because of high PM2.5 (fine, respirable particles) emissions but the Centre filed an application opposing it. NGT will give its final judgment on a petition seeking policy action on the issue in July.