

DELHI

# Delhi Cabinet terminates study on real-time sources of air pollution

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NEW DELHI , AUGUST 06, 2021 02:23 IST

UPDATED: AUGUST 06, 2021 02:23 IST

Govt. had allotted it without open tender to University of Washington, paid over ₹88L

## Real-time source apportionment study

The study was being done to create a model, which will be able to find out what are the sources of air pollution in the city at any given time. Once operationalised, the government can use the model to identify chief sources of pollution at a particular time and thus, control it.



**TIMELINE**

- 2018**
  - July 3** Delhi Cabinet, headed by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, approves a proposal for the study at a total cost of ₹1.2 crore. The study was allotted on a "nomination basis" without an open tender and was supposed to be completed before March, 2020
- 2020**
  - May** Washington University submits a revised interim report on the study. By this time, the Delhi government had paid over ₹88 lakh in two installments
  - September** Based on a report by a government-appointed committee, which raised several red flags about the study, the Delhi government asks for comments from the university
- 2021**
  - December** Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia takes a decision to terminate the study and directs to find a new agency to conduct the study
  - July 7** Delhi Cabinet terminates the study
  - July 9** Environment Minister Gopal Rai says Cabinet has approved a "first of its kind" study to find sources of pollution on a real-time basis. This study will be done by another agency and MoU is yet to be signed for it

■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

The Delhi government has terminated a study to find the sources of air pollutants on a real-time basis, despite paying over ₹88 lakhs for it, according to a government letter seen by *The Hindu*.

The study was allotted on a "nomination basis" without an open tender to the University of Washington in St. Louis and was supposed to be completed by March 2020.

“In view of the decision taken by the Council of the Ministers of GNCTD on 07.07.2021, an agreement between DPCC and WU regarding the study titled as “A Real-time source apportionment study for Delhi” is hereby terminated,” read a letter sent to the University dated July 28.

The government has paid about ₹88.9 lakh (\$120,000) to the University till now in two installments, as per the letter.

The study, a flagship project of the AAP government, was approved by the Cabinet headed by Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in July 2018.

It was projected multiple times as a way forward to solve the air pollution crisis in the city by the Chief Minister as well as the Environment Minister.

Despite the study being cancelled by a Cabinet decision on July 7, the government has not yet officially said anything about it.

## **A new study**

But on July 9, Environment Minister Gopal Rai said the Cabinet has approved a “first of its kind” study to find sources of pollution in a real-time basis. He said the study will be done by a team of IIT-Kanpur, IIT-Delhi, The Energy & Resources Institute (TERI) and IISER Mohali.

Mr. Rai also did not say anything about the previous study. An MoU is yet to be signed for the new study, sources said.

“WU’s study has contrasting results and findings which are confusing and lowers the confidence in results and conclusions. WU’s study has limitations and has not helped in the application of real-time source apportionment in taking the decisions on day-today-basis,” the letter said.

The new study is supposed to be more comprehensive than the previous one, said officials.

The study is important since what causes pollution in the national city has been a matter of constant debate between the city and the Central government.

The Delhi government has been stating that stubble burning in Punjab and Haryana is the major cause of air pollution in Delhi during winters.

On the other hand, the centre had multiple times cited local pollutants in the city as the main reason.

## **Flagship project**

After the AAP government returned to power in February 2020, within days, Gopal Rai, who was given the Environment Minister's portfolio, visited a location near India Gate from where the study was being carried out.

“Obtaining real-time data is necessary to monitor the real sources of pollution at a particular point in time. Until we can gather information about the sources of pollution, we will not be able to devise any mechanism for reducing these sources,” Mr. Rai said on February 20, in the first statement from his office as the Environment Minister.

Dr. Pratim Biswas, a professor at the University of Washington in St. Louis, who was a part of the study, did not respond to an email requesting his comment, at the time of writing this report.

In December, Mr. Biswas had said that they had responded to all questions raised by the government and scientific aspects of the study were “solid”.

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