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Delhi gears up to combat annual smog spell

POLLUTION Smoke from paddy fields in Haryana, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh mixes with pollution to make a deadly cocktail every winter

NEW DELHI: As smog season approaches, the authorities have started bracing up to minimise the impact of the deadly haze that normally engulfs Delhi between late October and early November.

Smoke particles billowing from the farm lands of Haryana, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, where paddy stubble is burned, move to Delhi and remain in the air because of low wind speed, typical of winters, resulting in reduced visibility.

The situation gets aggravated when the haze mixes with Delhi's massive vehicular pollution and becomes heavier and deadlier. Last year, Delhi saw a 12-day smog spell (October 26 to November 8) that led to increased respiratory and asthmatic complications, particularly among the elderly and children.

Bhure Lal IPS Retd *BA Eco Hons 1956 SGTB Khalsa, PhD Do Economics,*

chairman of a Supreme Court-appointed pollution control committee, said, "This time around we seem better prepared. We have held meetings with officials of Delhi and the adjoining states. Burning of paddy stubble has now been declared an offence in Haryana and Punjab."

"There are two functional power plants in Haryana, where paddy stubble is being fed as fuel. Punjab will also follow suit. The idea is to make fertiliser out of stubble. Burning of paddy stubble is not very prevalent in western Uttar Pradesh but necessary instructions have been issued to state authorities," he said.

"Instructions have been issued to ensure a ban on burning of leaves, and smoke-billowing vehicles in Delhi and diversion of non-destined trucks," he said.

Pollution-control expert Anumita Roychowdhury said: "The extended monsoon has meant the sky is relatively clear. But with temperature dipping and because of low wind speed, smog is beginning to build up."

"Don't dismiss smog as a mere weather phenomenon. We cannot afford to avert our eyes from constantly rising pollution levels in Delhi's air. Farm fire which takes place between late October and early November has only a limited role in smog build-up," she said.

During the last winter season, the Delhi government had promised various measures to fight winter pollution.