Delhi air pollution: GRAP Stage III invoked; hybrid-mode classes up to Class 5

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News

As air quality worsened in Delhi–National Capital Region (NCR), the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) invoked Stage III of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) with immediate effect on 6 November 2026. The CAQM order put Delhi's AQI at 382 ('very poor') that day; CPCB data showed 364 on the morning of 7 November. The step was taken in advance because IITM Pune forecast that the AQI would enter the 'severe' range (above 401) in the coming days. Following this, Delhi's Directorate of Education ordered government, aided and recognised private schools, as well as MCD, NDMC and Delhi Cantonment Board schools, to run classes up to Class 5 in 'hybrid' mode from 7 November. Students may attend in person or, where facilities exist and parents choose, join online – classes were not shifted fully online. Dust-raising construction and demolition was banned, and BS-III petrol and BS-IV diesel four-wheelers were restricted in Delhi, Gurugram, Faridabad, Ghaziabad and Gautam Buddh Nagar. Delhi and NCR State governments may decide on running offices with 50% staff in person. CAQM blamed unfavourable weather that stopped pollutants from dispersing.

Key facts for the exam

Point	Details
Invoked by	Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM)

Point	Details
Date	6 Nov 2026
GRAP stage	Stage III (Stages I & II continue)
AQI	382 (CAQM, 6 Nov); 364 (CPCB, 7 Nov a.m.) – 'very poor'
Schools	Hybrid (in-person/online) up to Class 5, from 7 Nov
School order by	Delhi Directorate of Education
Vehicle curbs	BS-III petrol, BS-IV diesel four-wheelers
Construction	Dust-raising construction & demolition banned
CAQM law	CAQM in NCR and Adjoining Areas Act, 2021

Background

- CAQM: set up by an ordinance in October 2020, it became a permanent statutory body under the 'Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas Act, 2021'. Its jurisdiction covers Delhi and the adjoining areas of Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. When it was formed, the EPCA (Environment Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority), which had worked under Supreme Court directions since 1998, was dissolved.
- GRAP: an emergency action plan notified in 2017 following Supreme Court orders and now enforced by CAQM. Four stages: I – Poor (AQI 201–300), II – Very Poor (301–400), III – Severe (401–450), IV – Severe+ (above 450). Stages can be invoked in advance on the basis of forecasts; this time Stage III came in at an AQI of 382.
- Science and geography: in winter, a 'temperature inversion' – warm air lying over cold, dense air near the ground – stops pollutants from rising. Low wind speed, post-harvest stubble burning in Punjab–Haryana, vehicle exhaust, construction dust and Delhi's landlocked position in the Indo-Gangetic plain add to the problem. PM2.5 particles, smaller than 2.5 micrometres, reach deep into the lungs.
- Constitution: the 69th Amendment (1991) inserted Article 239AA, making Delhi the 'National Capital Territory' (NCT) with a legislature and council of ministers (on the Balakrishnan Committee's advice); public order, police and land remain with the Centre. The National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) was launched in 2019 by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change; it covers over 130 cities that do not meet national air-quality standards.

Tamil Nadu link: Under NCAP, four Tamil Nadu cities – Chennai, Madurai, Tiruchirappalli and Thoothukudi – are listed as 'non-attainment cities' (Lok Sabha reply). In coastal Chennai, the sea breeze disperses pollutants, so AQI is usually lower than Delhi's; but burning of old articles during the Bhogi festival temporarily worsens Chennai's air quality.

Frequently asked questions

What is this news about?

As air quality worsened in Delhi–National Capital Region (NCR), the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) invoked Stage III of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) with immediate effect on 6 November 2026.

What are the key facts to remember for the exam?

Invoked by: Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM); Date: 6 Nov 2026; GRAP stage: Stage III (Stages I & II continue); AQI: 382 (CAQM, 6 Nov); 364 (CPCB, 7 Nov a.m.) – 'very poor'.

What is the background to this news?

CAQM: set up by an ordinance in October 2020, it became a permanent statutory body under the 'Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas Act, 2021'.

Practice questions (with answers)

1. Which body, working under Supreme Court directions on Delhi-NCR pollution, was dissolved when CAQM was set up in 2020?

A) EPCA

B) CPCB

C) National Green Tribunal

D) SAFAR

Answer: A – Explanation: EPCA (Environment Pollution (Prevention & Control) Authority) – set up in 1998 under the Environment Protection Act, 1986, chaired by Bhure Lal. A 2021 Act made CAQM permanent.

2. Under GRAP for Delhi-NCR, Stage III corresponds to which AQI category?

A) Poor

B) Very Poor

C) Severe

D) Severe+

Answer: C – Explanation: Severe (AQI 401–450). Stage I – Poor, II – Very Poor, IV – Severe+ (above 450). Stages can also be invoked in advance on forecasts.

3. Which atmospheric phenomenon traps pollutants near the ground in Delhi during winter?

A) El Niño

B) Temperature inversion

C) Western disturbance

D) Monsoon trough

Answer: B – Explanation: Temperature inversion – warm air sits over cold air near the ground, blocking vertical mixing. Low wind speed and stubble burning add to it.

4. Which Tamil Nadu city is listed as a 'non-attainment city' under the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)?

A) Thoothukudi

B) Udhagamandalam

C) Ramanathapuram

D) Dharmapuri

Answer: A – Explanation: Thoothukudi – one of Tamil Nadu's four NCAP cities, with Chennai, Madurai and Tiruchirappalli. NCAP was launched in 2019 by the Environment Ministry (MoEFCC).

5. Article 239AA, giving Delhi special status as the National Capital Territory, was inserted by which Amendment?

A) 42nd Amendment

B) 61st Amendment

C) 69th Amendment

D) 74th Amendment

Answer: C – Explanation: 69th Amendment (1991) – on the Balakrishnan Committee's advice it created a legislature and ministry; public order, police and land stay with the Centre. 61st – voting age 18.

Sources: Business Today; Outlook India; Lok Sabha reply on NCAP cities; CAQM. © Shanmugam IAS Academy.