

Pollution curbs lifted in India's capital despite heavy pollution



An aerial view of residential buildings shrouded in smog in New Delhi [Altaf Hussain/Reuters]

New Delhi, November 8 (RHC)-- Primary schools will reopen in the Indian capital this week and curbs will be lifted on certain construction activities, authorities said, after pollution levels improved to the “very poor” category from “severe.”

A thick layer of smog envelops New Delhi in winter as cold, heavy air traps construction dust, vehicle emissions and smoke from crop stubble burning in neighbouring states, causing a surge in respiratory illnesses among its 20 million people.

The air quality index in nearly all monitoring stations in the city was between 300 and 400 – in the “very poor” category – on Monday, which experts say leads to respiratory illnesses on prolonged exposure. However, it was an improvement on last week’s reading of 400-500 in the index, which is described as “severe”.

“Directions for work from home amended and offices functioning at full capacity from today,” Gopal Rai, the environment minister of Delhi state, told reporters. The central and state governments ordered the closure of primary schools, banned the entry of diesel vehicles carrying non-essential goods and suspended most construction and demolition activity in the national capital region last week. Rai said private demolition and construction would remain banned, but public works relating to highways and power transmission will be permitted.

Air quality could worsen later this week, however, the System of Air Quality and Weather Forecasting and Research said on its website. Last year this time, schools were also ordered shut amid dangerous levels of air pollution.

A Lancet report in 2020 said almost 17,500 people died in Delhi in 2019 because of air pollution. Another report by Swiss organisation IQAir in 2020 found that 22 of the world’s 30 most polluted cities were in India.

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