

## Don't put public health at risk by junking the environment index data

The 2018 Environmental Performance Index report, a biennial report by Yale and Columbia universities along with the World Economic Forum (WEF), [has put India among the bottom five countries in the world](#). The country has slipped from 141 in the last ranking in 2016 to 177 among 180 countries this year. India's low scores are because of its poor performance in the environmental health policy objective: Deaths attributed to PM2.5 (particulate matter of a diameter of 2.5 micron) have risen over the past decade and are estimated at 1,640,113, annually (Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, 2017). India's annual prescribed standards of PM 2.5 and PM 10 are 40 and 60 micrograms per cubic metre (ug/m<sup>3</sup>). The corresponding 24-hour standards are 60 and 100 respectively. "Despite government action, pollution from solid fuels, coal and crop residue burning, and emissions from motor vehicles continue to severely degrade the air quality," the report said of India.

The results are not surprising: Air pollution is a mega crisis in India and several reports have indicated that the country's future looks grim if serious measures are not taken to fix the problem. A [report by Centre for Science and Environment](#) (CSE) in 2017 said that air pollution is responsible for 30% of premature deaths in India. Every third child in Delhi has impaired lungs.

Here's what *is* surprising. Despite data, the Indian government continues to go on the defensive whenever such scientific analyses come out. Last year, the then environment minister, Anil Madhav Dave, made headlines for denying there was proof that air pollution was singularly responsible for a significant number of deaths in India. Dave conceded that air pollution "could be one of the triggering factors for respiratory associated ailments and diseases", but he blamed the negative health effects on other issues: poor diet, occupational hazards, socioeconomic status, and genetics. His successor, Harsh Vardhan, who is a trained physician, had a similar reaction to the Environmental Performance Index report. "These are just rankings," he said on Wednesday at a conference. "We have been doing our work sincerely and will continue to do so. The rankings will take care of themselves."

No government likes negative reports on its performance. Every government is quick to accept reports that give it a pat on the back — as the Indian government was after the latest ease of doing business report. But when it comes to negative human rights reports or one on the environment, it rubbishes them. This kind of behaviour isn't going to solve the problem. Instead of contradicting, ignoring, or dismissing such reports, the Centre must take the Environmental Performance Index seriously and use it to strengthen its green policies and environmental governance structure.

END

Downloaded from [crackIAS.com](#)

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com