COMMISSION FOR AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT: THE POTENTIAL AND THE PITFALLS - EDITORIALS - HINDUSTAN TIMES

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Pollution - Air, Water, Soil & E-waste

Nov 02, 2020-Monday
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Last week, the Centre issued an ordinance to put in place a new anti-pollution agency to tackle the crisis in the Delhi-National Capital Region area. The Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) will have the power to formulate rules, set emission standards and impose fines up to 1 crore or send violators to prison for up to five years. CAQM will have members from the Centre, Delhi, Haryana, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, and non-governmental organisations. By setting up CAQM, the Centre has acknowledged that air pollution is indeed a major challenge; it has health, economic and political implications; and the problem of multiplicity of authorities was a key reason why it could not be tackled effectively.

Many have raised questions — rightly so — about the way the ordinance was passed with no consultation, and the possible overriding powers the Centre may have; whether a top-down implementation approach (without third-party monitoring and citizen-driven enforcement) will work; and the lack of a time-bound commitment to clean the air. The Centre could also have come up with the framework before this year's pollution season began rather than wait for judicial prodding.

While CAQM is welcome, it alone cannot clean the air. Its success will depend on how it tackles different interest groups; outlines a time-bound commitment to achieving the set standards; ensures adequate personnel and funds for pollution control bodies, and stricter monitoring systems. All of this will require tremendous political will and support.

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