

SC ban on firecrackers : Ruling in favour of a vast majority of citizens against commercial interests of a few

Diwali, this year may be celebrated truly as festival of lights in the National Capital Region (NCR) of New Delhi and its adjoining areas. The Supreme Court on Monday banned the sale of firecrackers in the city for the next 20 days.

It is an extraordinary step that the top court has taken to deal with an equally urgent condition arising from alarming air pollution levels in the city.

Last year, Delhi woke up to distressing levels of pollution after Diwali, when the average PM (particulate matter) 2.5 level reached an unprecedented levels of over 700 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ — one of the highest recorded the world over and 29 times above WHO standards. The court calls this a health emergency.

It is not in dispute that during the festival season of October- November in Delhi, bursting of fireworks not only releases a deadly concoction of fumes into air causing extreme air pollution but also causes severe noise pollution.

Medical evidence suggests that severe air pollution in NCR is leading to multiple diseases and other health related issues among the people. The city has seen an increase in respiratory diseases like asthma, lung cancer, bronchitis primarily attributable to the worsening air quality in the NCR. The damage being caused to people is irreversible.

What makes matter worse for the city is also the fact that the festival season coincides with the setting in of winters in north India which reduces wind speed, the marriage season and the burning of crop residue by farmers of Punjab and Haryana at the same time.

In passing the ban order, the court may have departed the time-honoured way of celebrating the festival, but the choice for it was not a difficult one to make - when it concerned the lives of people.

Justifying the ban on sale of firecrackers, the court says that it needs to test, if banning sale of firecrackers during Diwali will have a positive effect on air quality in Delhi.

The court feels, as far as adverse effects of burning of crackers during Diwali are concerned; those have been witnessed year after year. The air quality deteriorates alarmingly and the city chokes on the foul air.

However, the court needs to be lauded not just recognising and protecting the health needs of future generations but also tilting the balance in favour of a vast majority of citizens against the commercial interests of a few.

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