

Foggy thinking — on SC restoring ban on cracker sales in Delhi

For the second time since November 2016, the Supreme Court has temporarily banned the sale of firecrackers in the National Capital Region. The idea is to test whether it cuts the deadly pollution levels seen in Delhi during and after Deepavali. In other words, to see whether they can be collapsed from the astronomical 1,000-plus micrograms per cubic metre of fine particulate matter seen in 2016 to merely life-threatening levels of a few hundred micrograms/cu.m that Delhi usually sees in winter. But that is a big if. Given that it came just about 10 days before the festival, it will be tough to impose the ban on an industry that has already produced stocks to order. Nor will it be easy to rein in revellers unconvinced by the court order. More importantly, despite delivering a big blow to the industry and incurring the displeasure of many, it offers too piecemeal a solution, akin to the even-odd licence number scheme of the Delhi government in 2015. North India needs a more holistic solution to the toxic air that residents breathe at the onset of winter. The major sources of pollution in the NCR have been clear enough to drive policy changes. While their relative contributions are still indeterminate, these include construction dust, vehicular pollution, waste burning, generators and crop residue burning in the Indo-Gangetic plains.

To tackle each of these will take decisive and persistent policy actions, not panic-driven and ill-considered bans. Take the 2015 ban on crop-residue burning in Punjab and Haryana for example. Two years later, farmers continue to violate it, because the State governments have still not taken the steps required to solve the underlying problem — the high cost of cleaning the paddy stubble instead of burning it to prepare the field to sow wheat. Though the government has offered subsidies on a machine called Happy Seeder, which doesn't require a stubble-free field to plant wheat, farmers haven't taken to it as burning remains cheaper. Another option is biomass-energy plants that buy paddy straw from farmers for use in generating power. Yet, government incentives for biomass-energy plants haven't been enough to galvanise industry. This, in turn, leaves farmers wary. The only answer is for the Punjab and Haryana governments to move purposefully on the solutions they know will work — just as the only option for the Delhi government is to raise awareness on the impact of firecrackers, while also tackling vehicular pollution, construction dust and other pollution sources. In the absence of these less dramatic, but more feasible solutions, it is unlikely a firecracker sale ban will avert the kind of health emergency that struck Delhi last year.

Rajasthan's ordinance shields the corrupt, threatens the media and whistle-blowers

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com