

PM Modi to launch air quality index

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NEW DELHI: Next week, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will formally launch the country's first air quality index which rated Delhi's air, this winter, as being polluted enough to earn it the dubious distinction of being world's most polluted city.

The air quality index is a global standard based on the national ambient air quality standard. India will be adopting the index at a time when the quality of air in most cities is fast deteriorating in the absence of a national policy to combat rising pollution.

Despite this move, the Centre may not be able to help states reduce air pollution as the budgetary allocations for the environment ministry have been cut and it does not have extra funds for pollution abatement.

The environment ministry had expressed its inability to help state governments with the execution of air quality standards.

While the index will become the basis for state pollution control boards to issue advisories on cities' air quality and forecast air pollution, the government is yet to devise a strategy on how to ensure that the advisories reach every resident in a city.

"Percolation of information is a challenge," admitted a senior

AIR MONITORS

Good: Air pollution within the permissible limit

Moderate: About 50% higher than the permissible limit

Poor: Double the limit

Very Poor: Three to five times the limit

Severe: More than five times the limit

CPCB official.

In Beijing, whenever a high air pollution advisory is issued for an area, industries are forced to close down and restrictions are imposed on the number of personal vehicles that can ply.

"The advisory will work only if local administrations act on them," the CPCB official added.

With the launch of the index on April 7 at an environment conference, the Centre hopes the state governments will focus on introducing and promoting greener means of public transport to clean their air.

Environment minister Prakash Javadekar will discuss the issue of air quality with state ministers in a special session on air quality. "We will be proposing some action plans which will be discussed," a senior ministry official said.