

Ex. Union Cabinet Minister,  
Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, Govt. of India  
Former MoS (Independent Charge)  
Sports & Youth Affairs, Govt of India  
Former MoS Home Affairs, Govt. of India  
Former MoS Urban Development, Govt. of India



Former Speaker Delhi Assembly  
Former Cabinet Minister Govt. of NCT, Delhi  
Power, Transport & Tourism

## Ajay Maken

*Member of Parliament*

Member - Department - Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs (Govt. of India)  
Member, Consultative Committee for the ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (Govt. of India)

1 October 2026

Shri Arvind Wable  
President, WWF India Board of Trustees  
Member, Commission for Air Quality Management in NCR and Adjoining Areas

**Subject: Delhi's air in 2026: the months the Commission did not report, and four things to set right**

Dear Shri Wable,

The Commission's press release of 30 September 2026 told the people of Delhi that their air had improved in 2026. The daily bulletins of the Central Pollution Control Board show something quite different. I write to you because Parliament, under section 3(2)(h) of the Commission for Air Quality Management in National Capital Region and Adjoining Areas Act, 2021, placed Members from non-governmental organisations on the Commission, so that an independent public voice would sit inside it.

In 2025 the Commission published its cumulative air-quality statistics eight times, on 31 March, 1 June, 31 July, 1 September, 1 October, 31 October, 10 November and 30 November, and followed them with two annual reviews. In 2026 it has published such a release once, on 30 September. No statistics release was issued for any period from January to August. On CPCB's bulletins, four of those eight months were worse than the same months of 2025: February, March, July and August. July 2026 averaged an AQI of 117.8 against 78.4 a year earlier, and on the Commission's own published tables it was the worst July since 2019.

The September release also changed what it measures. The release of 1 October 2025 printed the average AQI for January to September, which was 164. This year that figure is missing. The CPCB bulletins put the average for January to September 2026 at 167.6 against 164.3 in 2025, so the year so far has been worse than the last. In 2025 the comparisons ran back to 2018, whereas this year they begin only at 2022. The release then speaks of the "lowest levels of PM2.5" while printing 69 micrograms per cubic metre for 2026 against 69 for 2025. Equal numbers are a tie, and the Press Information Bureau's own version of the same release calls it "joint-lowest". The two releases are at Annexures A and B.

Only 60 of the 273 days so far this year had Good or Satisfactory air, against 75 last year, so fewer than one day in four reached even Satisfactory on India's own index. On the 39 stations that reported in both years, PM2.5 alone held the index at 500, the top of its scale, for 719 station-hours in 2026, against 221 in 2025, which is more than three times as many. In those

hours PM<sub>2.5</sub> averaged 439 micrograms per cubic metre, which is 29 times the World Health Organization's 24-hour guideline. On 18 January, Anand Vihar recorded 614 micrograms over 24 hours, a level so high that the index can show it only as 500. The full check against CPCB's data is at Annexure C, and a press note in English and Hindi is at Annexure D.

Section 12(1) of the Act gives the Commission the duty to take measures "for protecting and improving the quality of air". Section 12(2)(viii) entrusts it with the "collection and dissemination of information" on air pollution, and section 13 requires an annual report that is laid before each House of Parliament. A Commission that publishes its good months and stays silent on its bad ones does not discharge that duty. It leaves parents, the elderly and the people who work outdoors without the warning they need, and in my view that is playing with the lives of the people of Delhi. This letter makes no charge against any Member.

I request you to raise four matters in the Commission and to insist that each of them is done:

1. Publish the month-by-month statistics for January to August 2026, in the same form as the 2025 releases.
2. Publish the average AQI for January to September 2026, as was done in 2025.
3. Restore the comparison window from 2018 that the 2025 releases used.
4. Correct "lowest levels of PM<sub>2.5</sub>" to what the Commission's own figure of 69 against 69 shows.

Your seat exists so that the people of Delhi have someone inside the Commission who answers to them. I ask you to read these annexures and to ask your own conscience one question: did the release of 30 September tell Delhi the truth? If your answer is no, then the families who breathed the air of the unreported months are owed your voice, and they are owed it now.

Yours sincerely,



**Ajay Maken**

Member of Parliament

#### **Annexures**

- A. CAQM press release dated 1 October 2025 (January to September 2025).
- B. CAQM press release dated 30 September 2026 (January to September 2026).
- C. Report: "CAQM's January to September 2026 claims, checked against CPCB's own data" (1 October 2026).
- D. Press note: "How Delhi's air worsened in 2026" (English and Hindi), 1 October 2026.

# **Commission for Air Quality Management in NCR and Adjoining Areas**

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17<sup>th</sup> Floor, Jawahar Vyapar Bhawan,  
Tolstoy Marg, New Delhi-110001

Dated: 01<sup>st</sup> October 2025

## **PRESS RELEASE ON AIR QUALITY IN DELHI (JANUARY - SEPTEMBER, 2025)**

- The improving trend in the overall air quality of Delhi-NCR continues and for the period between January - September during the current year, Delhi registers its best ever average AQI (Air Quality Index) during the 8 years i.e., from 2018 to 2025 (barring 2020 - the year of lockdown due to Covid);
- The average AQI of Delhi for the period January - September during the current year has been recorded as 164 as against 178 in 2024, 167 in 2023, 184 in 2022, 180 in 2021, 144 in 2020, 188 in 2019 and 193 in 2018 respectively, during the corresponding period;
- Aided by favourable meteorological conditions and efforts by stakeholders concerned, the average AQI for the monsoon season (July to September) of current year has also been the best during the 8 years i.e., from 2018 to 2025 (barring 2020 - the year of lockdown due to Covid); For the monsoon period (July - September), Delhi recorded an average AQI of 91 in 2025, 91 in 2024, 103 in 2023, 95 in 2022, 99 in 2021, 88 in 2020, 106 in 2019 and 109 in 2018 respectively;
- This period (January - September) in 2025 did not witness even a single day with average AQI more than 400 ('Severe' or 'Severe+' categories). There were 03, 03, 01, 06, 02, 07 and 06 such days during the years 2024, 2023, 2022, 2021, 2020, 2019 and 2018, respectively. Moreover, this period also witnessed highest number of 'Satisfactory' days i.e. 75 such days (barring 2020 - the year of lockdown due to Covid), as against 66 days in 2024, 59 days in 2023, 61 days in 2022, 69 days in 2021, 95 days in 2020, 54 days in 2019, and 53 days in 2018;
- The period from January - September (upto 28<sup>th</sup> September) has seen the lowest levels of PM<sub>2.5</sub> concentration in Delhi compared to the corresponding period since 2018 (barring 2020 - the year of lockdown due to Covid); Delhi has witnessed PM<sub>2.5</sub> average of 69 µg/m<sup>3</sup> in the current year as against 81 in 2024, 73 in 2023, 80 in 2022, 83 in 2021, 65 in 2020, 85 in 2019 and 89 in 2018 respectively;

- Likewise, the period January - September (upto 28<sup>th</sup> September) also witnessed the lowest levels of PM<sub>10</sub> concentration in Delhi compared to the corresponding period since 2018 (barring 2020 - the year of lockdown due to Covid), recording an average of 161 µg/m<sup>3</sup> in the current year as against 181 in 2024, 169 in 2023, 190 in 2022, 183 in 2021, 133 in 2020, 194 in 2019 and 208 in 2018;
- CAQM is working closely with various stakeholders concerned to take effective measures for prevention, control and abatement of air pollution and to improve the air quality in Delhi-NCR and efforts would be intensified with an endeavour to further improve upon the air quality scenario in Delhi-NCR in the coming days.

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# **Commission for Air Quality Management in NCR and Adjoining Areas**

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17<sup>th</sup> Floor, Jawahar Vyapar Bhawan,  
Tolstoy Marg, New Delhi-110001

Dated: 30<sup>th</sup> September 2026

## **PRESS RELEASE ON AIR QUALITY IN DELHI (JANUARY - SEPTEMBER, 2026)**

- The improving trend in the overall air quality of Delhi-NCR continues as Delhi registers its lowest monthly average AQI (Air Quality Index) for September during current year i.e. 2026, as compared to the corresponding period of last 05 years from 2022 to 2026;
- The monthly average AQI of Delhi for September during the current year has been recorded as 102 as against 105 in 2025, 105 in 2024, 108 in 2023 and 104 in 2022 respectively;
- The period (January - September) in 2026 witnessed the highest number of days with daily average AQI less than 200 ('Moderate' category) during last 05 years, i.e. 194 such days in 2026, as against 187 days in 2025, 188 days in 2024, 193 days in 2023 and 146 days in 2022;
- The period (January - September) in 2026 also witnessed the lowest 'Poor to Severe+' days during last 05 years, i.e. 79 days in 2026, 86 days in 2025, 86 days in 2024, 80 days in 2023 and 127 days in 2022 respectively;
- The period from January - September (upto 28<sup>th</sup> September) has seen the lowest levels of PM<sub>2.5</sub> concentration in Delhi compared to the corresponding period since 2022; Delhi has witnessed PM<sub>2.5</sub> average of 69 µg/m<sup>3</sup> in the current year as against 69 in 2025, 81 in 2024, 73 in 2023 and 80 in 2022, respectively;
- CAQM is working closely with various stakeholders concerned to take effective measures for prevention, control and abatement of air pollution and to improve the air quality in Delhi-NCR and efforts would be intensified with an endeavour to further improve upon the air quality scenario in Delhi-NCR in the coming days.

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## AN INDEPENDENT CHECK

# CAQM's January to September 2026 claims, checked against CPCB's own data

*The Commission for Air Quality Management says Delhi's air is on an improving trend and set four records this year. On PM<sub>2.5</sub>, the particles that people breathe, there is no record, and the other three are won by one day or two points.*

**69 = 69**PM<sub>2.5</sub>, 2025 and 2026, as CAQM prints it**70.7**PM<sub>2.5</sub> in 2026 on matched stations (69.2 in 2025)**79**

days of Poor or worse air in nine months

**13.8×**

the WHO guideline

SUMMARY

# What the release claims, and what the data show

On 30 September 2026 the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM) said that Delhi's air is on an "improving trend" and that January to September 2026 set records on four counts. Checked against CPCB's own station data, the record on PM2.5 does not exist, and the other three records are won by one day or two points.

69 = 69

CAQM's own table prints the same PM2.5 for 2025 and 2026, yet calls 2026 the lowest.<sup>1</sup>

70.7

PM2.5 in 2026 on the stations that reported in both years, against 69.2 in 2025 (µg/m³).<sup>2</sup>

167.6

average AQI for January to September 2026 on CPCB's bulletin, higher than 164.3 in 2025.<sup>3</sup>

79 days

of Poor or worse air in nine months, by CAQM's own count: more than one day in four.<sup>1</sup>

TABLE 1 The five claims and the verdicts of the AQI triads

Four AQI triads sat on the release on 1 October 2026 on Shri Ajay Maken's direction. Where two arbiters differed, the stricter ruling is printed here and the other is recorded in the annexure. CPCB's bulletin for January 2022 to September 2026 was fetched afterwards, and the figures in this table use it.

| #   | CAQM's claim                                               | Verdict             | What the data show                                                                                                                                              |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| C1a | September 2026 is the lowest September AQI of 2022 to 2026 | TRUE BUT MISLEADING | CPCB's bulletin gives 101.5, against 105.2 in 2025. CAQM's own earlier table printed 78 for September 2021 and 98 for September 2019.                           |
| C1b | The improving trend in Delhi's air quality continues       | NOT SUPPORTED       | On CPCB's bulletin, the average AQI for January to September was 167.6 in 2026, higher than 164.3 in 2025.                                                      |
| C2  | Most days with AQI below 200 in five years (194)           | TRUE BUT MISLEADING | The lead over 2023 is one day, and on the release's own words, 'less than 200', the two years tie at 192. Good or Satisfactory days fell to 60 from 75 in 2025. |
| C3  | Fewest Poor to Severe+ days in five years (79)             | TRUE BUT MISLEADING | The lead over 2023 is one day, and Delhi still had Poor or worse air on 79 of 273 days.                                                                         |
| C4  | Lowest PM2.5 since 2022 (69 µg/m³)                         | NOT SUPPORTED       | CAQM prints 69 for 2025 as well. On the same stations in both years, 2026 reads 70.7 against 69.2.                                                              |
| C5  | The gains come from CAQM's work with stakeholders          | NOT SUPPORTED       | After the weather is allowed for, PM2.5 for January to September 2026 shows no measurable change from 2025, so there is no gain to credit.                      |

<sup>1</sup> CAQM, Press Release on Air Quality in Delhi (January to September, 2026), dated 30 September 2026, bullets 1 to 5.

<sup>2</sup> CPCB station data (CREA raw hourly files), Delhi, 1 January to 28 September of each year; a station counts on a day with at least 16 valid hours; computed 1 October 2026. Stations reporting in both years: 38.

<sup>3</sup> CPCB 4 PM national AQI bulletin, Delhi city value: CPCB's daily bulletin PDFs (cpcb.gov.in archive) for 2022 to 2024 and from 1 April 2025, and the CCR yearly file for January to March 2025, which matches the bulletin on every day checked; fetched and counted 1 October 2026.

CLAIM C4

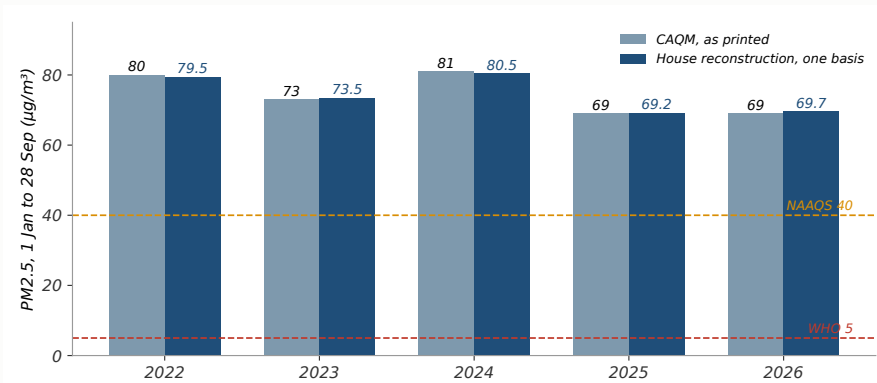
# PM2.5 did not fall: CAQM's own table shows a tie

The release says that January to 28 September 2026 has seen "the lowest levels of PM2.5" since 2022, and in the same sentence it prints 69 µg/m³ for 2026 and 69 µg/m³ for 2025.<sup>1</sup> Two equal figures cannot make one year the lowest, so the claim fails on CAQM's own page.

The house rebuilt the figure from CPCB's station data for all five years by one method. That method gives 79.5, 73.5, 80.5 and 69.2 µg/m³ for 2022 to 2025, which reproduces CAQM's printed 80, 73, 81 and 69. The same method gives 69.7 µg/m³ for 2026, which rounds to 70 and not to 69.<sup>2</sup>

CHART 1 PM2.5, 1 January to 28 September: CAQM's figures and the house reconstruction

The house method matches CAQM in every year from 2022 to 2025, and in 2026 it puts PM2.5 above 2025. Every year is still far above India's own standard of 40 µg/m³ and the WHO guideline of 5 µg/m³.



The comparison is fairest on the stations that reported in both years, because CPCB added stations in 2026 and the new ones sit in cleaner places. On the 38 stations common to 2025 and 2026, PM2.5 was **70.7 µg/m³ in 2026 against 69.2 µg/m³ in 2025.**<sup>2</sup> On those same stations, six of the nine months read higher in 2026 than in 2025, including January and September.<sup>3</sup>

TABLE 2 PM2.5 in µg/m³, 1 January to 28 September

The house column reproduces CAQM for four years, and it does not reproduce CAQM's 69 for 2026.

| Year | CAQM printed | House, all stations | Median stations a day |
|------|--------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| 2022 | 80           | 79.5                | 36                    |
| 2023 | 73           | 73.5                | 36                    |
| 2024 | 81           | 80.5                | 37                    |
| 2025 | 69           | 69.2                | 38                    |
| 2026 | 69           | 69.7                | 43                    |

<sup>1</sup> CAQM, Press Release on Air Quality in Delhi (January to September, 2026), dated 30 September 2026, bullets 1 to 5.

<sup>2</sup> CPCB station data (CREA raw hourly files), Delhi, 1 January to 28 September of each year; a station counts on a day with at least 16 valid hours; computed 1 October 2026.

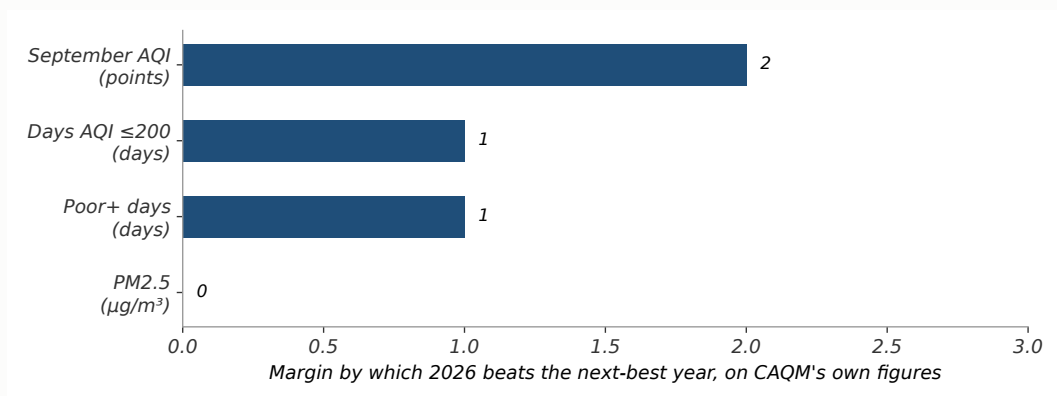
<sup>3</sup> Monthly means on the stations common to 2025 and 2026, CREA raw hourly files; red-team arbiter's run of 1 October 2026 (03\_Triad\_Review/2026-10-01\_CAQM\_PR\_redteam\_ARBITER.md).

## The day counts: records won by one day, and fewer clean days

CAQM counts 194 days with AQI below 200 in 2026 against 193 in 2023, and 79 Poor-to-Severe days against 80 in 2023.<sup>1</sup> Each record is won by a single day.

### CHART 2 The margin by which 2026 beats the next-best year, on CAQM's own figures

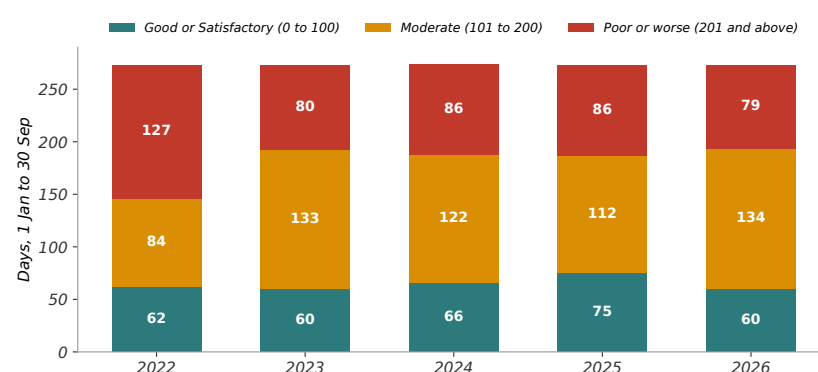
Every record in the release is won by two points, one day or nothing at all.



The release describes these days as "less than 200 ('Moderate' category)". CPCB's Moderate band runs from 101 to 200, so the count adds together Good, Satisfactory and Moderate days. On the release's own words, 2026 and 2023 each had 192 days below 200; the one-day lead comes from days at exactly 200, two in 2026 and one in 2023.<sup>2</sup> Inside that total, the cleaner days shrank. On CPCB's bulletin, Good or Satisfactory days fell from 75 in 2025 to 60 in 2026, while Moderate days rose from 112 to 134.<sup>2</sup>

### CHART 3 How Delhi's days split by AQI band, 1 January to 30 September

In 2026 Delhi had 15 fewer Good or Satisfactory days than in 2025, and 22 more Moderate days.



By CAQM's own count, Delhi had Poor, Very Poor, Severe or Severe+ air on 79 of the 273 days from 1 January to 30 September 2026. That is more than one day in every four, before the October to December smog season has begun.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> CAQM, Press Release on Air Quality in Delhi (January to September, 2026), dated 30 September 2026, bullets 1 to 5.

<sup>2</sup> CPCB 4 PM national AQI bulletin, Delhi city value: CPCB's daily bulletin PDFs (cpcb.gov.in archive) for 2022 to 2024 and from 1 April 2025, and the CCR yearly file for January to March 2025, which matches the bulletin on every day checked; fetched and counted 1 October 2026. Bands per CPCB National AQI: Good 0 to 50, Satisfactory 51 to 100, Moderate 101 to 200.

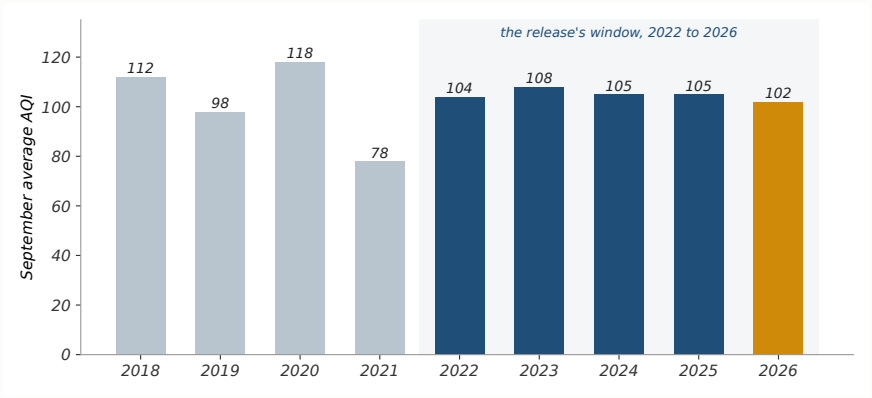
CLAIM C1

# September: a narrow band, and cleaner Septembers that CAQM itself published

The release says September 2026 had the lowest monthly average AQI "compared to the corresponding period of last 05 years from 2022 to 2026", at 102 against 105, 105, 108 and 104.<sup>1</sup> Those five Septembers sit inside a band of six points. CAQM's own release of 31 December 2025 printed September averages of **78 for 2021** and **98 for 2019**, and both are cleaner than the 102 now presented as the best.<sup>2</sup>

CHART 4 September average AQI, from CAQM's own published tables

The window chosen for the release begins in 2022, the year after September 2021 recorded 78. Of the nine Septembers CAQM has published, 2026 is the third-cleanest.



September's PM2.5 did not fall either. PM2.5 from 1 to 28 September was 37.0  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  in 2026 against 35.1  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  in 2025.<sup>3</sup> September is also the only month CAQM chose to compare. Across January to August, CPCB's bulletin gives Delhi an average AQI of 175.7 in 2026 against 171.7 in 2025, so those eight months averaged higher this year, as the next section shows.<sup>4</sup>

TABLE 3 September in five years

September PM2.5 in 2026 was higher than in 2025, although the AQI figure CAQM prints is lower.

| Year | CAQM September AQI | PM2.5, 1 to 28 Sep ( $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ) |
|------|--------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| 2022 | 104                | 37.6                                            |
| 2023 | 108                | 40.0                                            |
| 2024 | 105                | 43.4                                            |
| 2025 | 105                | 35.1                                            |
| 2026 | 102                | 37.0                                            |

<sup>1</sup> CAQM, Press Release on Air Quality in Delhi (January to September, 2026), dated 30 September 2026, bullets 1 to 5.

<sup>2</sup> CAQM, Press Release of 31 December 2025, monthly average AQI table (caqm\_pr\_monthly\_aqi.csv).

<sup>3</sup> CPCB station data (CREA raw hourly files), Delhi, 1 January to 28 September of each year; a station counts on a day with at least 16 valid hours; computed 1 October 2026.

<sup>4</sup> CPCB 4 PM national AQI bulletin, Delhi city value: CPCB's daily bulletin PDFs (cpcb.gov.in archive) for 2022 to 2024 and from 1 April 2025, and the CCR yearly file for January to March 2025, which matches the bulletin on every day checked; fetched and counted 1 October 2026.

THE MONTHS CAQM DID NOT COMPARE

# January to August: 2026 was worse than 2025 on CPCB's own bulletin

CAQM compared a single month, September, and two counts of days. CPCB's own 4 PM bulletin gives the average AQI for every month. Across January to August, Delhi averaged **175.7 in 2026 against 171.7 in 2025**. Across January to September it averaged 167.6, against 164.3 in 2025.<sup>1</sup>

**CHART 5** Monthly average AQI, 2025 and 2026, CPCB bulletin

Four months were worse in 2026 than in 2025, by 7 to 39 points: February, March, July and August, shown in red. July 2026 averaged 118 on CPCB's bulletin, the worst July since 2019.<sup>2</sup>

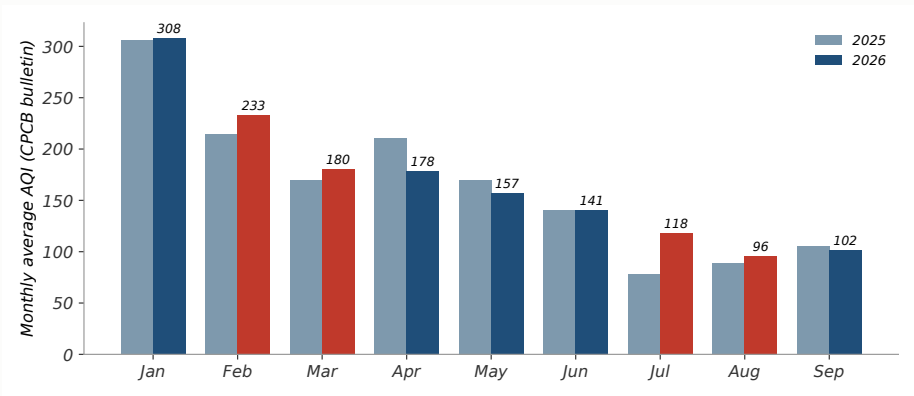


**TABLE 7** Average AQI on CPCB's bulletin

The average for January to September is higher in 2026 than in 2025.

| Year | January to August | January to September | September |
|------|-------------------|----------------------|-----------|
| 2022 | 194.2             | 184.4                | 104.4     |
| 2023 | 174.2             | 166.9                | 107.8     |
| 2024 | 187.3             | 178.4                | 105.4     |
| 2025 | 171.7             | 164.3                | 105.2     |
| 2026 | 175.7             | 167.6                | 101.5     |

<sup>1</sup> CPCB 4 PM national AQI bulletin, Delhi city value: CPCB's daily bulletin PDFs (cpcb.gov.in archive) for 2022 to 2024 and from 1 April 2025, and the CCR yearly file for January to March 2025, which matches the bulletin on every day checked; fetched and counted 1 October 2026.

<sup>2</sup> CPCB 4 PM national AQI bulletin, Delhi city value: CPCB's daily bulletin PDFs (cpcb.gov.in archive) for 2022 to 2024 and from 1 April 2025, and the CCR yearly file for January to March 2025, which matches the bulletin on every day checked; fetched and counted 1 October 2026. July 2019 read 134.0 on the CCR file of the bulletin, and CAQM's own table prints 134 for 2019, 84 for 2020 and 110 for 2021.

THE TYPICAL DAY

# In 2026, fewer than one day in four reached Satisfactory air

An average can hide how the days themselves moved. On CPCB's bulletin, Delhi had Good or Satisfactory air on **60 of the 273 days** from 1 January to 30 September 2026, against 75 in 2025. This means that fewer than one day in four reached Satisfactory air in 2026, where more than one day in four did in 2025. The lower quartile, which is the reading that three days in four were worse than, was 107.5 in 2026 against 95.0 in 2025, so a day at that point had moved out of Satisfactory air into Moderate.<sup>1</sup>

CHART 6 The cleaner half of Delhi's days, 1 January to 28 September

The lower quartile was 107.5 in 2026, against 95.0 in 2025.

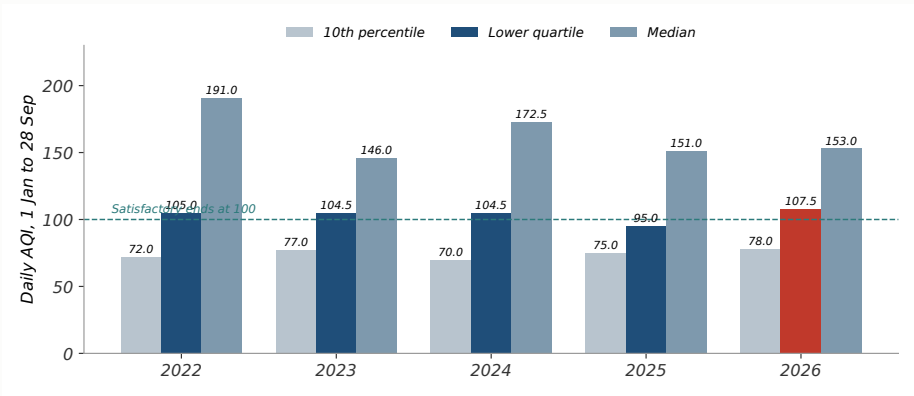


TABLE 8 The cleaner half of Delhi's days, CPCB bulletin

In 2026 the lower quartile sat in the Moderate band, and in 2025 it sat in the Satisfactory band.

| Year | 10th percentile | Lower quartile | Median |
|------|-----------------|----------------|--------|
| 2022 | 72.0            | 105.0          | 191.0  |
| 2023 | 77.0            | 104.5          | 146.0  |
| 2024 | 70.0            | 104.5          | 172.5  |
| 2025 | 75.0            | 95.0           | 151.0  |
| 2026 | 78.0            | 107.5          | 153.0  |

<sup>1</sup> CPCB 4 PM national AQI bulletin, Delhi city value: CPCB's daily bulletin PDFs (cpcb.gov.in archive) for 2022 to 2024 and from 1 April 2025, and the CCR yearly file for January to March 2025, which matches the bulletin on every day checked; fetched and counted 1 October 2026.

# No improvement that anyone can take credit for

The release credits the numbers to an "improving trend" and to CAQM's work with stakeholders. The house tested this by allowing for the weather: a model trained on ERA5 weather and the Safdarjung inversion record predicted each year's PM2.5 from its weather alone, and the observed figure was set against that prediction.<sup>1</sup>

*After the weather is allowed for, Delhi's PM2.5 for January to September 2026 shows no measurable change from 2025.<sup>1</sup>*

A change that cannot be measured is not a trend, and it is not an achievement that any agency can claim. On the stations that reported in both years, Delhi's PM2.5 from 1 January to 28 September was 70.7 µg/m³ in 2026 against 69.2 µg/m³ in 2025.<sup>2</sup>

| TABLE 4 What the release says, set beside what the station data show     |                                                       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| Each line on the right is a finding of the AQI triads of 1 October 2026. |                                                       |
| The release says                                                         | The station data show                                 |
| An improving trend continues                                             | PM2.5 on matched stations: 70.7 in 2026, 69.2 in 2025 |
| Lowest PM2.5 since 2022                                                  | CAQM prints 69 for both 2025 and 2026                 |
| Gains from CAQM's work                                                   | No measurable change after the weather is allowed for |
| Air quality of Delhi-NCR                                                 | Every figure in the release is for Delhi alone        |

The release also speaks of "the overall air quality of Delhi-NCR", but every figure it prints is for Delhi. It gives no figure for Gurugram, Faridabad, Noida, Ghaziabad or any other NCR district.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Weather-adjusted PM2.5, 1 January to 28 September 2022 to 2026: random-forest model on ERA5 hourly weather and the Safdarjung inversion record, meteorology arbiter's ruling of 1 October 2026 (03\_Triad\_Review/2026-10-01\_CAQM\_PR\_met\_ARBITER.md).

<sup>2</sup> CPCB station data (CREA raw hourly files), Delhi, 1 January to 28 September of each year; a station counts on a day with at least 16 valid hours; computed 1 October 2026. Stations reporting in both years: 38.

<sup>3</sup> CAQM, Press Release on Air Quality in Delhi (January to September, 2026), dated 30 September 2026, bullets 1 to 5.

# A record year that is still 14 times the WHO guideline

13.8×

WHO's annual PM2.5 guideline of 5 µg/m³, at CAQM's own nine-month figure of 69.<sup>1</sup>

1.7×

India's own annual PM2.5 standard of 40 µg/m³, at the same figure.<sup>1</sup>

96.6

µg/m³: Delhi's full-year PM2.5 in 2025, which is 19.3 times the WHO guideline.<sup>2</sup>

The figure CAQM calls a record covers January to September and leaves out October, November and December, Delhi's three worst months. In CAQM's own 2025 table, those months averaged AQI 223, 354 and 351, against 105 for September.<sup>3</sup> Across the whole of 2025 Delhi's PM2.5 averaged 96.6 µg/m³, which is 2.4 times India's own annual standard.<sup>2</sup>

TABLE 5

Delhi's PM2.5 against the yardsticks

Even the best nine months CAQM can point to leave Delhi's air far outside both the national and the WHO limits.

| Period                 | PM2.5 (µg/m³) | Times WHO annual (5) | Times India's annual standard (40) |
|------------------------|---------------|----------------------|------------------------------------|
| Jan to Sep 2026, CAQM  | 69            | 13.8                 | 1.7                                |
| Jan to Sep 2026, house | 69.7          | 13.9                 | 1.7                                |
| Full year 2025, house  | 96.6          | 19.3                 | 2.4                                |

<sup>1</sup> CAQM, Press Release on Air Quality in Delhi (January to September, 2026), dated 30 September 2026, bullets 1 to 5. WHO Global Air Quality Guidelines 2021; CPCB National Ambient Air Quality Standards 2009.

<sup>2</sup> CPCB station data (CREA raw hourly files), Delhi, 1 January to 31 December 2025; computed 1 October 2026 by the exposure arbiter.

<sup>3</sup> CAQM, Press Release of 31 December 2025, monthly average AQI table (caqm\_pr\_monthly\_aqi.csv).

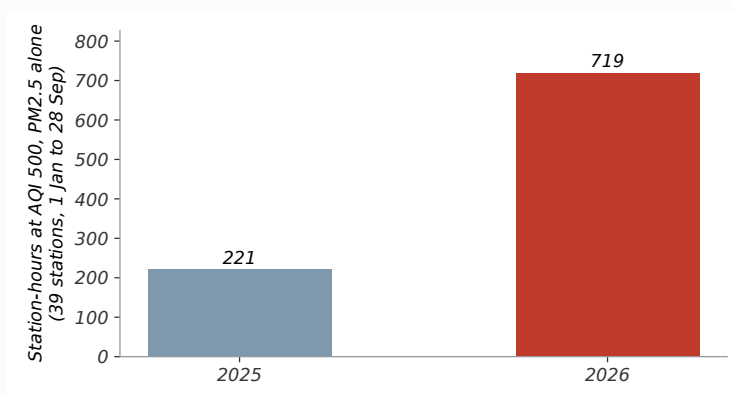
## The AQI cannot go past 500, and PM2.5 alone held 2026 there for more than three times as many hours as 2025

CPCB's AQI stops at 500. Once a station's 24-hour PM2.5 passes 380  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ , or its PM10 passes 510  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ , the index reads 500 however much worse the air becomes. An average of AQI values therefore counts every such hour as 500, however bad the air was. Delhi had more of those hours in 2026 than in 2025, and they ran deeper, so the cap takes more away from 2026's AQI averages than from 2025's. The PM2.5 figures in  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  on page 3 have no cap.<sup>1</sup>

On the 39 stations that reported in both years, PM2.5 alone held the AQI at 500 for **719 station-hours** from 1 January to 28 September 2026, against 221 in 2025, which is more than three times as many. Counting the hours that PM10 also drove to the ceiling, the totals were 1,303 against 572. Between 13 and 20 January 2026, the 24-hour PM2.5 at 22 of Delhi's stations went past the top of the index, and 20 of them were there together at 10:00 on 18 January. In those PM2.5 hours the 24-hour PM2.5 averaged 439  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ , which is 29 times WHO's 24-hour guideline of 15  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ . At Anand Vihar, the 24-hour PM2.5 to 11:00 on 18 January 2026 reached 614  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ , 41 times that guideline, which the index can show only as 500.<sup>2</sup>

### CHART 7 Station-hours at AQI 500 driven by PM2.5 alone, 39 stations reporting in both years, 1 January to 28 September

PM2.5 alone held the AQI at 500 for 719 station-hours in 2026 against 221 in 2025.



<sup>1</sup> CPCB, AQI Calculator (cpcb.nic.in, created 28 January 2015): above 250  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  the PM2.5 sub-index is  $400 + (C \text{ minus } 250) \times 100/130$ , reaching 500 at 380  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ; above 430  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  the PM10 sub-index is  $400 + (C \text{ minus } 430) \times 100/80$ , reaching 500 at 510  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ . CPCB, "How is AQI calculated?", paragraphs 1, 2 and 4: each sub-index uses a running 24-hour average with at least 16 hours of data.

<sup>2</sup> CPCB station data (CREA raw hourly files), Delhi, 1 January to 28 September of each year; a station counts on a day with at least 16 valid hours; computed 1 October 2026. A station-hour is at the ceiling when its 24-hour running mean passes the top breakpoint, with at least 16 of the 24 hours valid. WHO Global Air Quality Guidelines 2021.

# Method, data and the triad record

**Data.** Four sources were used. The first is CPCB's own hourly station data for Delhi from 2022 to 2026, taken from the CREA raw files, with a station counted on a day only when it had at least 16 valid hours. The second is the CPCB 4 PM bulletin, which the house now holds to 30 September 2026. The third is the house's daily recomputation of city AQI. The fourth is ERA5 weather and the Safdarjung radiosonde record.<sup>1</sup>

**The triads.** Four AQI triads sat on 1 October 2026 on Shri Ajay Maken's direction: statistics, exposure science, meteorology and the accountability red team. Each has a proponent, a sceptic and an arbiter, and all twelve reports are filed in 03\_Triad\_Review with a ledger row in INDEX.md.<sup>2</sup>

| TABLE 6 Where two arbiters differed                                      |                                      |                                                               |                                                                                                                                     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The stricter reading of the evidence is printed, as the arbiters agreed. |                                      |                                                               |                                                                                                                                     |
| Claim                                                                    | Printed in this report               | Other ruling                                                  | Why the printed ruling governs                                                                                                      |
| C1                                                                       | Split into C1a and C1b               | NOT SUPPORTED (exposure);<br>TRUE BUT MISLEADING (statistics) | CPCB's bulletin, fetched after the triads sat, confirms the September figure and shows the January to September average was higher. |
| C4                                                                       | NOT SUPPORTED (statistics, red team) | FALSE (exposure)                                              | NOT SUPPORTED holds on every averaging method the triads tried.                                                                     |

**Added after the triads sat.** CPCB's daily bulletin for January 2022 to September 2026 was fetched on 1 October 2026 and read for Delhi. CAQM's printed September averages and day counts reproduce on it in every year, so every day-count comparison in this report is made on CAQM's own basis. The pages on the months CAQM did not compare, the typical day and the hours at the ceiling were computed after the first sitting, and the four triads checked them the same day. **Open items.** CAQM's unrounded PM2.5 figures and its station list should be requested. A full January to September weather-adjusted run on a fixed set of stations should be made in the house de-weathering pipeline.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> CPCB station data (CREA raw hourly files), Delhi, 1 January to 28 September of each year; a station counts on a day with at least 16 valid hours; computed 1 October 2026. CPCB 4 PM national AQI bulletin, Delhi city value: CPCB's daily bulletin PDFs (cpcb.gov.in archive) for 2022 to 2024 and from 1 April 2025, and the CCR yearly file for January to March 2025, which matches the bulletin on every day checked; fetched and counted 1 October 2026.

<sup>2</sup> AQI triad rulings of 1 October 2026, AQI\_Analysis/CAQM\_PR\_2026-09-30\_Check/03\_Triad\_Review/.

Ex. Union Cabinet Minister,  
Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation, Govt. of India  
Former MoS (Independent Charge)  
Sports & Youth Affairs, Govt of India  
Former MoS Home Affairs, Govt. of India  
Former MoS Urban Development, Govt. of India



Former Speaker Delhi Assembly  
Former Cabinet Minister Govt. of NCT, Delhi  
Power, Transport & Tourism

## Ajay Maken

*Member of Parliament*

Member - Department - Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs (Govt. of India)  
Member, Consultative Committee for the ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (Govt. of India)

### PRESS NOTE: HOW DELHI'S AIR WORSENERD IN 2026 (JANUARY TO SEPTEMBER)

Dated: 1st October 2026

#### **On CPCB's own data, Delhi's air got worse in 2026.**

- On the same 39 stations, PM2.5 alone held the AQI at 500, the top of the scale, for 719 station-hours in 2026 against 221 in 2025, which is more than three times as many (a station-hour is one hour at one station, on the 24-hour running average).
- In those hours PM2.5 averaged 439  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ , 29 times WHO's 24-hour guideline of 15  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ , and at Anand Vihar on 18 January 2026 it reached 614  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  over 24 hours, more than 40 times that guideline, which the index can show only as 500.
- The average AQI from January to September was 167.6 against 164.3 in 2025, and from January to August it was 175.7 against 171.7.
- February (232.9 against 214.3), March (180.5 against 170.0), July (117.8 against 78.4) and August (95.5 against 88.6) were each worse than a year before, and July was Delhi's worst July since 2019.
- Only 60 of the 273 days had Good or Satisfactory air (AQI up to 100), fewer than one day in four, against 75 in 2025, while Moderate days (AQI 101 to 200) rose from 112 to 134.
- From 1 January to 28 September, the AQI was above 107.5, in the Moderate band, on three days in every four, where in 2025 that mark was 95.0, in the Satisfactory band.
- On 79 of the 273 days, more than one day in four, the air was Poor or worse, with an AQI above 200.
- On the 38 stations that reported in both years, PM2.5 from 1 January to 28 September averaged 70.7  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  against 69.2  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ , and from 1 to 28 September it averaged 37.0  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  against 35.1  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ .
- The PM2.5 average of 69  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  that CAQM's own release of 30 September prints for 2026 is 13.8 times WHO's annual guideline of 5  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  and 1.7 times India's annual standard of 40  $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ .

#### **For nine months, Delhi breathed PM2.5 at nearly 14 times the WHO guideline.**

Sources: CPCB 4 PM AQI bulletins and CPCB station data, January 2022 to September 2026; CAQM press releases of 31 December 2025 and 30 September 2026; WHO Global Air Quality Guidelines 2021.

Ajay Maken



## Ajay Maken

Member of Parliament

Member - Department - Related Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs (Govt. of India)  
Member, Consultative Committee for the ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (Govt. of India)

### प्रेस नोट: 2026 में दिल्ली की हवा कैसे बिगड़ी (जनवरी से सितंबर)

दिनांक: 1 अक्टूबर 2026

#### **CPCB के अपने आँकड़ों पर, 2026 में दिल्ली की हवा पिछले साल से बदतर रही।**

- दोनों साल चालू रहे उन्हीं 39 स्टेशनों पर अकेले PM2.5 ने AQI को 500, यानी पैमाने के आखिरी अंक, पर 719 स्टेशन-घंटे रखा, जबकि 2025 में ऐसे 221 स्टेशन-घंटे थे, यानी तीन गुना से ज्यादा (एक स्टेशन पर एक घंटा, 24 घंटे के चलते औसत पर)।
- इन घंटों में PM2.5 का औसत  $439 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  रहा, जो WHO की 24 घंटे की guideline ( $15 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ) का 29 गुना है, और 18 जनवरी 2026 को आनंद विहार में 24 घंटे का PM2.5  $614 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  पहुँचा, जो इस guideline का 40 गुना से ज्यादा है, पर AQI इसे सिर्फ 500 ही दिखा पाता है।
- जनवरी से सितंबर तक औसत AQI 167.6 रहा, जो 2025 में 164.3 था; जनवरी से अगस्त तक यह 175.7 रहा, जो पिछले साल 171.7 था।
- फरवरी (232.9, पिछले साल 214.3), मार्च (180.5 और 170.0), जुलाई (117.8 और 78.4) और अगस्त (95.5 और 88.6), चारों महीने पिछले साल से खराब रहे, और यह जुलाई 2019 के बाद का सबसे खराब जुलाई रहा।
- 273 में से सिर्फ 60 दिन हवा अच्छी या संतोषजनक रही (AQI 100 तक), यानी चार में एक दिन भी नहीं, जबकि 2025 में ऐसे 75 दिन थे; मध्यम हवा (AQI 101 से 200) के दिन 112 से बढ़कर 134 हो गए।
- 1 जनवरी से 28 सितंबर तक हर चार में से तीन दिन AQI 107.5 के पार रहा, जो मध्यम श्रेणी है, जबकि 2025 में यही अंक 95.0 था, जो संतोषजनक श्रेणी है।
- 273 में से 79 दिन, यानी चार में एक दिन से ज्यादा, हवा खराब या उससे भी बदतर रही, जब AQI 200 के पार था।
- दोनों साल आँकड़े देने वाले 38 स्टेशनों पर 1 जनवरी से 28 सितंबर तक PM2.5 का औसत  $70.7 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  रहा, जो 2025 में 69.2 था; 1 से 28 सितंबर के बीच यह 37.0 रहा, जो पिछले साल 35.1 था।
- CAQM की 30 सितंबर की अपनी press release 2026 के लिए PM2.5 का जो  $69 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$  छापती है, वह WHO की सालाना guideline ( $5 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ) का 13.8 गुना और भारत के सालाना मानक ( $40 \mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ ) का 1.7 गुना है।

#### **नौ महीने दिल्ली ने WHO की guideline से करीब 14 गुना PM2.5 में साँस ली।**

स्रोत: CPCB के शाम 4 बजे के AQI bulletin और CPCB स्टेशन डेटा, जनवरी 2022 से सितंबर 2026; CAQM की 31 दिसंबर 2025 और 30 सितंबर 2026 की press release; WHO Global Air Quality Guidelines 2021।

अजय माकन