

Delhi's Newly Elected Government: Environmental Challenges

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Summary

In its 2025 Delhi Assembly election manifesto, the newly elected Bhartiya Janta Party promised to improve the capital city's air quality, clean the Yamuna River and tackle the problem of waste landfills. The manifesto looks promising, but its effective implementation depends on how much priority the new government gives to environmental issues.

After a gap of 27 years, the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) has returned to power in Delhi. The party won [48 out of total 70 seats](#) dislodging the incumbent-Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) from power after 10 years. The AAP won the remaining 22 seats while the Indian National Congress drew a blank for the third time in a row.

The government elect may have many priorities, but one that calls for serious political attention is the city's environment. In 2024, Delhi's air quality was poor or even worse for [155 days](#). In November 2024, some parts of the Delhi-National Capital Region turned into a gas chamber with the [Air Quality Index \(AQI\)](#) crossing 700. In an article published in *The Lancet Planetary Health* in July 2024, [Jeroen de Bont et al](#), claimed that about 7.2 per cent of all deaths in India were attributable to particulate matter (PM) 2.5 concentrations higher than 15 microgrammes per cubic metre of air recommended by the World Health Organization. The authors applied a time-series analysis to 10 cities in India (Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Hyderabad, Kolkata, Mumbai, Pune, Shimla and Varanasi) between 2008 and 2019. The study observed that the total number of deaths connected to air pollution every year in the 10 polluted Indian cities was 33,267. Among them, Delhi topped the list, with [11,964 deaths annually](#) connected to air pollution. To improve the city's air quality, the BJP, in its [election manifesto](#), promised to launch 'Delhi Clean Air Mission' to halve the city's average AQI by 2030 and reduce the number of days with poor AQI. The party has also promised to reduce PM2.5 and PM10 levels by 50 per cent. The manifesto also promised to deploy additional road sweeping and water sprinkling machines in highly polluted areas like Anand Vihar, Ram Krishna Puram and Mundka. It talked about giving priority to paving 500 kilometres of unpaved roads to control dust on streets, installing wind augmentation purifying units at intersections for maximum dust control and incentivizing the transition of 50 per cent vehicles to electric/hybrid vehicles and installing public electric vehicle charging points in the city. It also called for the expansion of the city's green cover.

Despite many measures promised and taken, Yamuna River in Delhi remains polluted. During the Assembly elections, the AAP and the BJP traded charges on the quality of water in Yamuna River. Earlier, Delhi's former water minister, Satyender Jain, advanced the Yamuna River cleaning deadline to 2023 from 2025. Former Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal pushed it again to 2025. Finally, Delhi's Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena extended

the [deadline to 2026](#). The BJP's election manifesto talked about developing Yamuna River front, on the lines of the Sabarmati River front in the Indian state of Gujarat. It also talked about setting up a Yamuna Kosh to revitalise the river. Under the Yamuna Kosh, wastewaters from drains like Barapullah, Shahdara and Ghazipur will be fully treated before they flow into the Yamuna; water from all drains flowing into the Sahibi River, which has turned into a sewer, will also be fully treated; sewage treatment plant capacity will be expanded to 1,000 million gallons per day and common effluent treatment plant capacity to 220 million litres per day; and, it will ensure zero industrial emissions into the Yamuna River.

Waste management is a major concern for Delhi. On average, it generates over 11,000 tonnes of solid wastes per day but its waste processing plants have a [daily capacity of only 8,073 tonnes](#). The non-processed wastes end up at landfill sites. One of the major landfill sites is at Ghazipur, which, in 2019, was 65 metres high, only eight metres short of [iconic Qutub Minar](#). Due to landfills, cough, fever and other respiratory diseases are year-round health problems for people living near the [Ghazipur site](#). The AAP promised to clean the landfill but not much was done in the last 10 years. The BJP has promised to make Delhi the cleanest city in the country. It has made a promise to increase treatment capacity to eliminate the garbage mountains at Ghazipur, Okhla and Bhalswa, and redevelop them along the lines of Baansera Park. It also promised to prevent the formation of garbage mountains in the city, enhancing waste collection capacity in the city and setting up new [waste-to-energy plants](#).

The BJP's election manifesto looks promising, but the effective implementation of policies remains a challenge in India. The success of any policy depends on the people's active participation. Civic behaviour such as throwing garbage anywhere, unplanned and unregulated construction works, and the use of large numbers of firecrackers during marriages and religious festivals, among others, have to be checked and self-censored by Delhi's residents. Like past governments, raising environmental concerns among a large section of city's residents and dealing with uncivil behaviour will be a challenge for the BJP.

Politically, unlike in the past, as the BJP is in power at the Centre and elected in Delhi, the governance of the national capital should be less cumbersome. The new government may also get the funds needed to build efficient infrastructures to improve Delhi's air quality, clean Yamuna River and eliminate the mountains of garbage. However, environmental governance highly depends on how much priority the new government gives to environment-related issues.

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