

Centre promises law to check stubble burning

Not consulted, says Agriculture Ministry

SC withholds order on committee head

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NEW DELHI

The Centre will bring in a law to address air pollution and check stubble burning in Delhi as well as the surrounding National Capital Region, the Supreme Court was informed on Monday.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said a draft legislation would be ready this week.

"The new law is for tackling air pollution in NCR and the adjoining areas. It's an ordinance," Secretary in the Ministry of Environment R.P. Gupta told *The Hindu*.

However, no consultation seems to have been undertaken so far with the Ministry

The Supreme Court on Monday decided to "keep in abeyance" its pre-Dussehra order appointing former Supreme Court judge Justice Madan B. Lokur to a one-man committee to prevent stubble-burning in

U.P., Haryana and Punjab.

On October 16, the court had asked Justice Lokur with the help of student volunteers from NCC, NSS and Scouts and Guides to protect Delhi-NCR from air pollution. ▶ PAGE 10

of Agriculture on this.

With an increase in stubble burning – the burning of rice straw by farmers to clear fields for winter sowing in Punjab and Haryana – the Ministry has in recent years been tasked with funding the use of subsidised combine harvesters and machin-

ery to dissuade the farmers.

"The ordinance is coming from the Environment Ministry and so far no consultations have been held with Agriculture Ministry officials," said a person in the Ministry.

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The Delhi NCR already has a Graded Response Action Plan, which is overseen by the Environment Pollution Authority, that has specified a number of measures that governments must take – from banning diesel gensets to restricting vehicle movement – depending on the degree of pollution.

Punjab efforts

To check stubble burning this kharif (summer) season, the Punjab government has appointed 8,000 nodal officers in villages that grow paddy. Over 23,000 crop residue management machines are being given to farmers for on-site management of straw.

Chief Minister Amarinder Singh last week appealed to farmers not to burn crop residue because the practice

could aggravate conditions leading to the spread of COVID-19, besides causing pollution.

He said the State was taking measures to sensitise the farmers and had been pressing the Centre to give ₹100 per quintal to farmers for managing the paddy straw without burning.

However, Executive Director, Centre for Science and Environment Anumita Roychowdhury said new legislation was not the need of the hour.

"We don't yet know what this proposed law will be about. There are strong laws in place for checking pollution but inadequate infrastructure at the level of State and municipal bodies to implement them...what we need now is better enforcement," she told *The Hindu*.