

SC bans sale of crackers in Delhi

10th October, 2017



The Supreme Court has suspended the sale of firecrackers in Delhi and NCR till November 1, 2017 in a bid to test whether a Deepavali without firecrackers this year will have a “positive effect” on the health of citizens and a steadily deteriorating air quality.

Background:

There are evidences of deterioration of air quality at alarming levels in Delhi. Burning of these firecrackers during Deepavali in 2016 had shot up pm [particulate matter] levels by three times, making Delhi the worst city in the world, insofar as air pollution is concerned. Direct and immediate cause thereof was burning of crackers during Deepavali.

Opposing view:

Few experts see court’s decision to re-impose a ban on the sale of firecrackers in Delhi and surrounding towns till November 1 as extreme, unjustified and, perhaps, inadequately thought move.

- To begin with, the ban is on the sale of firecrackers, not their use. So those who already have firecrackers, or, presumably, are able to obtain them from outside Delhi would be free to let them off.
- Equally importantly, the Supreme Court decision only applies to Delhi and nearby towns. The rest of India is exempt. For now Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad are not of equal concern.
- Also, has the court considered what this will do to the firecracker industry and, more importantly, to the livelihood of thousands of shopkeepers and traders, many of whom are small roadside vendors or corner shops? It could very well bankrupt and impoverish them.
- This raises the moral question: Is the court right to experiment with Diwali? Firecrackers do create an environmental and health hazard. For those with asthma and other breathing problems, this can be very serious. Therefore, the case for controlling and restricting is undeniable. But the Supreme Court has gone further and attempted a ban.

Why not have a blanket ban on firecrackers’ sale in Delhi?

However, a total ban on firecrackers’ sale in Delhi NCR is too “radical a step” and a graded, gradual approach to a complete ban should be adopted would be effective from November 1.

What can be done?

The problem of firecrackers in Delhi has been around for decades. That’s ample time for the Court to have devised a more thoughtful response than a last minute arbitrary ban. It could have imposed a stricter timeframe, reducing the 10 pm limit to 9 or even 8 pm. It could have asked the government to stage firework displays in a handful of strategic locations, broadcast by TV channels, so people can do without their own. London does this on New Year’s Eve. Finally, it could have asked the government to pay for those who suffer from firecracker displays to leave the city for 48 hours and add the cost as an additional tax on firecrackers.

To be looked in UPSC Paper 3 Topic: Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment.