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NGT Directs Six Southern States to Submit Air Quality Action Plans — NCAP Fund Misuse Flagged

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NGT Directs Six Southern States to Submit Air Quality Action Plans — NCAP Fund Misuse Flagged

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WHY IN NEWS

The **National Green Tribunal’s (NGT) South Zone Bench, Chennai**, directed six southern states and UTs — **Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, and Puducherry** — to prepare **sector-wise plans within 6 months** to cut PM2.5 and PM10 levels under the **National Clean Air Programme (NCAP)**. The order followed evidence of a severely skewed spending pattern: **86% of NCAP funds** in southern states had been spent on **road dust control** while **vehicular emissions** received only **6.6%** and **biomass burning** just **4.1%** of funds — even though vehicles and biomass are the dominant pollution sources in urban India.

THE NGT ORDER — WHAT WAS DIRECTED

FEATURE	DETAIL
Tribunal	National Green Tribunal (NGT) — South Zone Bench, Chennai
Petitioner	Dharmesh Shah (Chennai-based researcher; Senior Technical Advisor, Lawyers Initiative for Forest and Environment — LIFE, New Delhi)
Original petition	Filed 2021; alleged failure by MoEFCC, CPCB, and southern states to implement NCAP State Action Plans
States directed	Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Puducherry
Direction	Submit sector-wise plans within 6 months to cut PM2.5 and PM10 levels
Warning	Fines/penalties if NCAP funds not “fully and effectively utilised”

THE PROBLEM — SKEWED NCAP SPENDING

By September 2025, **76% of total NCAP funds** released to southern states had been utilised — but the breakdown revealed a critical misallocation:

SOURCE OF POLLUTION	SHARE OF NCAP FUNDS SPENT
Road dust control	86%
Vehicular emissions	6.6%
Biomass burning	4.1%
Other sources	~3.3%

The problem: Road dust is the easiest and most visible intervention — it requires sweeping machines and water tankers. But in major Indian cities, **vehicular emissions and biomass burning** (crop stubble, wood fuel, garbage burning) contribute far more to PM_{2.5} — the fine particles that penetrate the lungs and bloodstream.

Karnataka Specific Data (Confirmed)

- Karnataka received **₹597.54 crore** under NCAP between 2019–20 and 2023–24.
- Of this, **Bengaluru alone received ₹541.1 crore.**
- Yet Bengaluru had **used only 13% of its allocation by October 2024** — massive non-utilisation alongside a severe air quality crisis.

ABOUT NCAP — NATIONAL CLEAN AIR PROGRAMME

FEATURE	DETAIL
Full name	National Clean Air Programme
Launched	January 2019
Ministry	Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC)
Cities covered	131 non-attainment cities (cities exceeding National Ambient Air Quality Standards — NAAQS — for 5+ consecutive years) across 24 states
Target (original)	20–30% reduction in PM _{2.5} /PM ₁₀ by 2024 vs 2017 baseline
Target (revised)	40% reduction in PM₁₀ or achieve national standard (60 µg/m ³) by 2025–26
Total funds released	~₹9,650 crore (FY 2019–20 to 2023–24)
Funding mechanism	Performance-based grants to cities; also via 15th Finance Commission grants
Monitoring portal	PRANA (Portal for Regulation of Air-pollution in Non-Attainment cities)

State Action Plans (SAPs)

Under NCAP, each state must prepare **State Action Plans** identifying state-specific pollution sources and time-bound interventions across: road dust, vehicular emissions, domestic fuel combustion, industrial emissions, MSW burning, and construction dust. The NGT found southern states had not adequately prepared or implemented their SAPs.

ABOUT THE NGT

FEATURE	DETAIL
Full name	National Green Tribunal
Established	2010 under the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010
Type	Specialised quasi-judicial body for environmental disputes
Benches	Principal Bench: New Delhi; Zonal Benches: Bhopal (Central), Pune (Western), Kolkata (Eastern), Chennai (Southern)
Jurisdiction	Covers disputes arising from environmental laws (Environment Protection Act, Water Act, Air Act, Forest Act, Biodiversity Act)
Composition	Chairperson (retired judge, Supreme Court or HC) + Judicial Members + Expert Members
Powers	Can award compensation, impose penalties, direct restoration of environment

NGT is NOT a civil court — it is a statutory tribunal with expert members (scientists, engineers) alongside judicial members.

NATIONAL AMBIENT AIR QUALITY STANDARDS (NAAQS)

POLLUTANT	NAAQS ANNUAL STANDARD (INDIA)	WHO GUIDELINE
PM _{2.5}	40 µg/m ³	5 µg/m ³
PM ₁₀	60 µg/m ³	15 µg/m ³
NO ₂	40 µg/m ³	10 µg/m ³
SO ₂	50 µg/m ³	40 µg/m ³

India's PM_{2.5} standard (40 µg/m³) is **8× higher** than WHO's guideline (5 µg/m³) — many cities still exceed even India's own lax standard.

UPSC RELEVANCE

PAPER	ANGLE
GS2 — Polity/Governance	NGT structure, jurisdiction, quasi-judicial bodies, environmental tribunals
GS3 — Environment	NCAP, air pollution, PM _{2.5} /PM ₁₀ , NAAQS, non-attainment cities
GS2 — Governance	Fund utilisation accountability, Centre-State environmental governance, PRANA portal

Mains Keywords: NGT, NCAP, National Clean Air Programme, non-attainment cities, PM_{2.5}, PM₁₀, State Action Plans, PRANA portal, road dust vs vehicular emissions, Bengaluru air quality, NAAQS, environmental governance

Prelims Facts Corner

ITEM	FACT
NGT established	2010; National Green Tribunal Act, 2010
NGT South Zone Bench	Chennai
States directed	Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, AP, Telangana, Puducherry
NCAP launched	January 2019; MoEFCC
NCAP cities	131 non-attainment cities (exceeding NAAQS for 5+ consecutive years)
NCAP revised target	40% PM ₁₀ reduction or 60 µg/m ³ standard by 2025–26
PRANA portal	For monitoring NCAP implementation in non-attainment cities
NCAP fund misuse	86% on road dust; only 6.6% on vehicular emissions; 4.1% on biomass
Bengaluru allocation	₹541.1 crore under NCAP; used only 13% by October 2024
PM _{2.5} India standard	40 µg/m ³ (annual); WHO guideline: 5 µg/m ³
PM ₁₀ India standard	60 µg/m ³ (annual); WHO guideline: 15 µg/m ³

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