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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Breaking the Silence on Noise Pollution

 THE HINDU

12 May 2026

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Breaking the Silence on Noise Pollution

 The Hindu

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"Should the right to silence -- already implicit in Article 21 -- be elevated to an explicit enforceable right rather than a politely ignored convention?"

EDITORIAL SUMMARY:

The Hindu argues that noise pollution is India's most neglected environmental hazard – producing hearing loss, sleep disruption and cardiovascular harm at a scale comparable to air pollution, yet attracting a fraction of the regulatory attention. The Noise Pollution (Regulation and Control) Rules, 2000 remain weakly enforced, cultural normalisation entrenches the problem, and the burden falls disproportionately on the dense urban poor. The editorial calls for decentralised, ULB-level monitoring and a renewed reading of Article 21 that places quiet at the centre of dignified life.

A HAZARD THE STATISTICS CANNOT MASK

India's urban soundscapes routinely register well above the World Health Organization's recommended environmental noise [threshold](#) of 53 dB(A) Lden. Sustained exposure at these levels is linked in WHO and Lancet reviews to noise-induced hearing loss, sleep fragmentation, hypertension and ischaemic heart disease. The Indian Council of Medical Research has flagged urban noise as a rising contributor to non-communicable disease burden, yet noise pollution rarely features in mainstream public-health discourse the way air pollution does.

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) operates the National Ambient Noise Monitoring Network across seven metro cities – Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Lucknow – with 70 continuous monitoring stations. CPCB data over the past decade show day and night limits being exceeded in residential and silence zones with grim regularity.

THE REGULATORY ARCHITECTURE AND ITS GAPS

The Noise Pollution (Regulation and Control) Rules, 2000, framed under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, set ambient noise limits across four zones: industrial (75 dB day, 70 dB night), commercial (65 dB day, 55 dB night), residential (55 dB day, 45 dB night) and silence zones (50 dB day, 40 dB night). The Rules also restrict loudspeaker use between 10 pm and 6 am, with state governments empowered to grant limited relaxations during festivals.

The architecture is sound; the enforcement is not. Three failures recur:

- **Jurisdictional confusion:** noise straddles environment, police, transport and municipal departments, with no single accountable authority.
- **Cultural normalisation:** festivals, political rallies, religious congregations and weddings have come to assume a right to amplification, treating decibel limits as suggestions.
- **Traffic mainstreaming:** honking is structurally embedded in Indian driving culture; horn-not-OK policy campaigns have produced negligible enforcement.

ARTICLE 21 AND THE RIGHT TO SILENCE

The Supreme Court in *In Re: Noise Pollution (V)* (2005) read the right to a noise-free environment as flowing from Article 21. The Calcutta High Court in *Burrabazar Brick & Pipe Traders Association v. Tax Recovery Officer* held that no citizen has a fundamental right to impose noise on another in the name of religion or commerce. These judgments lay the constitutional foundation; what is missing is administrative will and citizen recourse.

WHAT DECENTRALISATION SHOULD LOOK LIKE

CPCB's seven-city monitoring grid cannot police the soundscape of a country of more than 4,000 statutory urban local bodies. The editorial argues for a decentralisation model with three pillars:

- 1 **ULB-level enforcement:** municipal commissioners must be designated nodal noise authorities, with dedicated staff and budget heads, and quarterly reporting to state pollution control boards.
- 2 **Affordable distributed monitoring:** low-cost noise sensors – modelled on the air-quality citizen-sensor movement – can extend coverage to neighbourhoods and silence zones around hospitals and schools.
- 3 **Grievance redressal at the ward level:** a 24-hour municipal noise helpline with statutory response timelines is more effective than CPCB-routed complaints.

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Key arguments:

- Noise pollution is an under-regulated environmental and public-health hazard with measurable contribution to NCDs.
- Noise Pollution Rules, 2000 are sound on paper but fail in enforcement because of jurisdictional confusion and cultural normalisation.
- Decentralised, ULB-level enforcement – not centralised CPCB monitoring alone – is the credible path forward.
- The right to a noise-free environment is part of Article 21; the gap is administrative, not constitutional.

Counterarguments:

- Stringent enforcement risks cultural backlash around festivals and religious practice.
- ULB capacity is severely constrained; adding noise enforcement without finances may produce paper compliance.
- Distributed sensors raise data-quality and calibration questions that CPCB-grade equipment does not.

Keywords: Noise Pollution (Regulation and Control) Rules 2000, CPCB, National Ambient Noise Monitoring Network, WHO Lden 53 dB(A), Article 21, *In Re: Noise Pollution (V) 2005*, *Burrabazar Brick & Pipe* (Calcutta HC), silence zone, urban local bodies, 74th Amendment.

The Hindu's view is that India's neglect of noise pollution is a failure of imagination, not regulation. The Rules exist; the constitutional protection exists; what is missing is the recognition that quiet is a public good. Until municipal authorities, citizens and courts treat ambient silence as part of the right to life, India's cities will keep paying for it in lost sleep, lost hearing and lost years.

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