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Pollution exceeds permissible limit in most Indian cities

Nearly three-fourths of Indian cities have particulate pollution (PM) levels exceeding permissible standards affecting the health of lakhs of people across the country, according to an analysis released Thursday.

The analysis is part of a book 'Good News Bad News: Clearing the air in Indian cities' by the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) which was released Thursday by senior Supreme Court advocate Harish Salve.

The book provides an assessment of the cities in India and how they fare on parameters such as air quality, public transport, walkability, parking policies and fiscal initiatives.

"About 78 percent of cities in India have particulate pollution levels that exceed the standards. Only two cities - both from Kerala - meet the clean air benchmark of the central pollution control authority," it said.

Citing the Global Burden of Disease report 2013, Sunita Narain, director general CSE said: "Air pollution has become the fifth largest killer and the seventh biggest illness burden in India. Data from the new cancer registry gives chilling evidence of the high incidence of lung cancer in cities."

"Rapid motorisation, the face of growth today, is also hurtling cities towards energy guzzling and heat trapping gases. It helps us understand how cities are moving ahead or stalling their progress and what could be a possible road map for progress," she added.

The worrying part is that smaller cities of India are experiencing more rapid shift to personal vehicles as they have not invested adequately in public transport.

"If two-wheelers are added to cars, the rate of personal motorisation in Indian cities has already exceeded that of the Western cities," said Anumita Roychowdhury, executive director-research and advocacy, CSE.

Taxes, fuel pricing and parking charges do not include the cost of damage cars impose on society.

On the contrary, mass carriers like buses are made to pay more taxes for carrying more people as the government treats it as a commercial business and not a matter of public good to be supported.

"We need measures to change urban design to make cities safe, more walkable and public transport friendly," added Roychowdhury.