

Key Delhi air monitor went dark in peak farm fire week

NEW DELHI, Agency: The government model that tracks pollution sources in Delhi went quiet for four days during the first week of November—historically, some of the period when smoke from agricultural burning contributes most heavily to the capital's toxic air—and was updated only after HT asked authorities about the missing data.

The Decision Support System (DSS), which estimates how much different sources contribute to Delhi's PM 2.5 levels, last provided data on Friday. When the system finally updated late on Tuesday evening, it revealed no stubble burning contribution data for November 1 and 2.

Past data shows stubble burning's contribution to Delhi's air has historically surged above 35% during the first week of November, reaching as high as 48% on a single day in 2021. This year's readings show just 4.06% on Monday and 1.74% on

Tuesday.

Last year on November 1, farm fires accounted for 35.1% of Delhi's PM 2.5 pollution. The contribution remained at 35% till November 3 in both 2023 and 2022, according to DSS records.

The Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology in Pune, which operates the model, and the Commission for Air Quality Management did not respond to queries on Tuesday about the data gap.

Harvesting and farm fires are likely delayed this year following widespread floods in Punjab, but burning has been rising in recent days. Punjab recorded 256 fires on Sunday while Haryana logged a season-high 23 fires the same day.

To be sure, the region appears to have mostly been spared of an air pollution crisis also due to more active weather conditions that usual.

"We have seen wind speeds remain high so far—the speed is enough for dispersion. At the same time, Diwali was earlier



than usual this year and farm fires are low, so we are not seeing the kind of emissions we usually see in early November," said Dipankar Saha, former head of CPCB's air laboratory. But he warned that if wind speeds drop again, it will eventually lead to accumulation of pollutants over time.

The DSS typically provides daily source contribution estimates along with a two-day forecast. It calculates pollution contributions from Delhi's own emissions and 19 neighbouring NCR towns, with stubble burn-

ing percentages updated later based on actual fire counts.

The system showed Delhi's transport sector contributed 19.91% to Tuesday's PM 2.5 levels, followed by emissions from Jhajjar at 6.54% and Gautam Buddha Nagar at 6.15%.

The DSS blackout is part of a broader pattern of monitoring failures this year. On Diwali night, nine of Delhi's 39 air quality monitoring stations stopped recording data entirely during critical hours between 11 p.m. and 4 a.m. —

the second-highest number of such failures since 2021.

"Transparency is important when we talk about fighting pollution," said Sunil Dahiya, founder and lead analyst at environmental think tank Envirocatalysts.

Dahiya, however, pointed to other problems with the DSS. "With an outdated emissions inventory, it seems none of the agencies and bodies which should be using this data are utilising it, which explains the semi-frequent updates in between."

The model continues to run on an outdated 2021 emissions inventory, officials have acknowledged, raising doubts about forecast accuracy. The system was operationalised on October 5 ahead of the winter pollution season—the same inventory issue that prompted CAQM to halt it last year and request improvements from IITM.

During last winter, DSS data was available from the start of October till November

29 before going dark until December 9. CAQM said at the time it would not use the system for pollution-related decisions because the emissions inventory was too old, though the model would continue sharing information.

At least three major real-time source identification studies have been halted or rendered obsolete in the past four years. In 2021, the Delhi government stopped a study by Washington University before its data was made public, citing "unsatisfactory" results. The work was reassigned to IIT Kanpur the same year, but that two-year study ended in November 2023 with the government again dissatisfied with methodologies and results. No replacement system has been established.

"It is a model which ticks a lot of boxes, but eventually, is turning out to be a waste of funds, unless our data is running on a new emissions inventory and is updated regularly," Dahiya said.

At UNESCO meet, India calls for ethical AI education access, heritage cooperation

New Delhi, Agency: India outlined its agenda on ethical artificial intelligence, digital education, and cultural heritage at the 43rd General Conference of UNESCO, where Ambassador Vishal V Sharma said the country's focus was on "education, ethics, and equity" as part of its *Viksit Bharat* vision for 2047.

The 43rd General Conference, being held in Uzbekistan from October 30 to November 13, is UNESCO's highest decision-making body, setting the agency's programmes and budget for 2026-2027.

Sharma, India's Permanent Delegate to UNESCO, said India is working with UNESCO on the Readiness Assessment Methodology (RAM) to map national preparedness for ethical and responsible AI, and pointed to a sequence of India-based consultations held with the ministry of electronics and information technology (MeitY) and IndiaAI Mission. The RAM initiative is designed to help countries assess strengths and gaps for deploying AI in line with UNESCO's

at building digital self-reliance.



Recommendation on the Ethics of AI. He said India's National Quantum Mission and a \$29 billion AI sector "are expected to create over one million professionals by 2026", alongside a \$10 billion semiconductor mission aimed

Referring to India's education reforms, Sharma said the National Education Policy promotes online learning through platforms such as SWAYAM, DIKSHA, Bhashini, and PM eVidya, developed under the G20 and UNESCO frameworks.

Six killed after being hit by train while crossing tracks in UP's Mirzapur



New Delhi, Agency: Six passengers were killed after being hit by a train while crossing the railway tracks at Chunari Junction in Uttar Pradesh's Mirzapur district on Wednesday morning, barely a day after another major train accident in Chhattisgarh claimed 11 lives.

According to officials, the victims had just alighted from the Gomti-Prayagraj Express around 9.15 am and were attempting to cross the tracks from the wrong

side when they were struck by the Kalka Mail passing through platform number three. Follow Mirzapur train accident live updatesThe identities of the deceased, said to be devotees, are yet to be confirmed. Eyewitnesses described the scene as horrific, with bodies mutilated in the impact. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath took cognizance of the incident and expressed condolences to the families of the deceased.

Paratrooper injured in gunfight between terrorists and security forces in J&K's Kishtwar



NEW DELHI, Agency: A paratrooper was injured and air-lifted to a hospital in Jammu and Kashmir's Udhampur after a gun battle broke out between terrorists and security forces on Wednesday in the Kishtwar district.

Officials said that the encounter started after the Jammu and Kashmir Police, with help from the Indian Army, launched a joint operation in the Chhatri area based on intelligence about terrorists in the region.

The search operation began in the early morning, after which security forces came under fire, resulting in an exchange of gunfire.

The White Knight Corps posted on X, "In an intelligence-based operation, launched in coordination with the Jammu and Kashmir Police early this morning, alert troops of the White Knight Corps established contact with terrorists in the general area of Chhatri."

"The operation is in progress," the post added.

The security forces are closely monitoring terrorist movements

in the mountainous district, leading to several encounters along the border of Doda and Udhampur districts.

Notably, Kishtwar has witnessed six encounters over the past seven months as troops continue searching for Pakistan-based terrorists hiding in the hills.

On September 21, a group of terrorists clashed with forces in the Chhatri area. On September 13, two army personnel, including a junior commissioned officer, died and two others injured in an encounter in the Naidgram area of Chhatri.

Violent confrontations also happened in the Dul and Chhatri belts on August 11 and July 2, though the terrorists managed to escape.

On May 22, one soldier and two terrorists died during a clash in Chhatri. Further, on April 12, three terrorists were killed in Kishtwar, while the army prevented an infiltration attempt along the LoC in the Akhnoor sector.

Woman, her partner get 180-year jail term for assault of minor girl in Kerala

NEW DELHI, Agency: A couple convicted for repeated sexual assault of a minor girl was sentenced with 180 years of imprisonment each by a Special Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) court in Kerala's Manjeri on Tuesday. The accused in the case was a woman, who reportedly had eloped with her lover and her 11-year-old daughter to Malappuram, where they resided in a rented cottage. There, with the aid and help of the mother, her lover sexually assaulted the little girl for two years, from 2019-2021. He not only raped her, but also forced her into oral sex," Somasundaram said.

The couple has also been fined with ₹11.75 lakh each and failure to pay the fine would lead to an added prison sentence of 20 years, according to an ANI news agency report.

the court has convicted both of the accused—180 years of rigorous imprisonment and ₹11.75 lakh," Special

Public Prosecutor Somasundaram told the news agency.

This case was registered by Malappuram Police against the mother and her lover. Originally living in Thiruvananthapuram, the mother eloped with her lover and her 11-year-old daughter to Malappuram, where they resided in a rented cottage. There, with the aid and help of the mother, her lover sexually assaulted the little girl for two years, from 2019-2021. He not only raped her, but also forced her into oral sex," Somasundaram said.

The verdict was given by Special POCSO Court Judge Ashraf AM under various sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, and the Juvenile Justice Act (JJ



Act). The prosecution said the girl's stepfather intimidated her by claiming a hidden camera had been implanted in her head and that any attempt to reveal the abuse would be detected. She was also given alcohol before being assaulted.

According to the prosecution, the first accused, from Palakkad, repeatedly assaulted the child between 2019 and 2021 at rented houses in Anamangad and Vallikkapattu.

The second accused, the

girl's mother from Thiruvananthapuram, is accused of aiding, abetting and encouraging the abuse.

The abuse began after the woman left her husband and started living with her partner in 2019. The two accused also committed sexual intercourse in the presence of the girl. They committed offences as per the POCSO Act, as well as the Juvenile Justice Act. The Court has now convicted both the accused to 180 years of rigorous imprisonment as well as ₹11.75 lakh as fine," the Prosecutor said. If the accused submits the amount before the Court, it will be given to the minor child...

They have been sent to 180 years of rigorous imprisonment, but they have to remain in jail for 40 years," Prosecutor added.

Four militants killed, one arrested in Churachandpur gunfight

Manipur, Agency: In an early morning operation on Tuesday, security forces killed at least four insurgents of banned Kuki outfit United Kuki National Army (UKNA) killed and arrested one in Manipur's Churachandpur district.

An Assam Rifles spokesperson confirmed that the incident occurred at around 6 am while conducting an intelligence-based operation in Khanpi village, Churachandpur, Henglep subdivision which is approximately 80 km west of Churachandpur town. The 21 Para SF were also part of the operation.

Officials in security forces said that the militant group resorted to unprovoked firing on the security forces, and added that forces were searching adjoining areas for more insurgents.

In a statement, UKNA condemned the action of the security forces; some Kuki Zo civil society organisations also expressed condemnation of the incident.

The security officials cited above said the operation came in the week of recent incidents involving UKNA insurgents, including the killing of a village chief, intimidation of locals and attempts to disrupt peace and stability

in the region.

Successful neutralisation of these terrorists highlights the Indian Army and Assam Rifles commitment to protecting innocent civilians, mitigating all threats and ensuring peace and security in Manipur," the Assam Rifles spokesperson said in a press note.

Other security officials said that during the gunfight, at least three Assam Rifles personnel also sustained injuries.

The bodies of the insurgents have been moved to Churachandpur district hospital.