Press release

Half of monitored Indian cities breached air quality standards in January 2026

New Delhi, 6 February 2026 – According to the January 2026 Monthly Air Quality Snapshot by the [Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA)](), half (124 out of 248) of Indian cities with more than 80% data coverage from continuous ambient air quality monitoring stations (CAAQMS) recorded monthly average $PM_{2.5}$ concentrations above India's National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) of 60 µg/m³. Not a single city complied with the World Health Organization's (WHO) daily safe guideline of 15 µg/m³.

Among National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) cities, air quality remained widely non-compliant. Of the 97 NCAP cities with sufficient data, 47 exceeded India's daily NAAQS for $PM_{2.5}$, while all 97 breached the WHO guideline. A similar pattern was observed among non-NCAP cities: all 151 non-NCAP cities with adequate data recorded $PM_{2.5}$ levels above the WHO guideline, and 77 cities exceeded India's standard.

Ghaziabad ranked as the most polluted city in India in January 2026, recording a monthly average $PM_{2.5}$ concentration of 184 µg/m³ and breaching the daily NAAQS on every day of the month. The city experienced 24 'Very Poor' days, four 'Severe' days, two 'Poor' days, and one 'Moderate' day. Delhi ranked as the second most polluted city, with a monthly average $PM_{2.5}$ concentration of 169 µg/m³. During January, Delhi recorded 24 'Very Poor' days, three 'Severe' days, two 'Poor' days, and two 'Moderate' days.

Noida, Gurgaon, Greater Noida, Dharuhera, Gangtok, Singrauli, Bhiwadi, and Narnaul completed the list of the ten most polluted cities. Uttar Pradesh and Haryana accounted for three cities each in the top ten, followed by one city each from Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Sikkim along with Delhi.

At the state level, Rajasthan recorded the highest number of cities exceeding the $PM_{2.5}$ NAAQS, with 23 of 34 cities breaching the standard in January. Haryana followed with 19 of 25 cities exceeding the limit. Bihar (15 of 24 cities), Odisha (13 of 15 cities), and Uttar Pradesh (13 of 20 cities) also saw widespread exceedances.

Across India, air quality categories remained skewed toward unhealthy levels. In January 2026, 21 cities fell in the 'Good' category and 103 in the 'Satisfactory' category. A further 92

cities were classified as 'Moderate', while 21 cities recorded 'Poor' air quality and 11 cities fell in the 'Very Poor' category.

Damoh in Madhya Pradesh was the cleanest city in India in January 2026, with a monthly average $PM_{2.5}$ concentration of 17 μg/m³. The ten cleanest cities included five from Karnataka and one each from Jammu & Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Nagaland, and Punjab.

Among India's megacities, Delhi (169 μg/m³) and Kolkata (92 μg/m³) exceeded the NAAQS in January 2026, while Chennai (49 μg/m³), Mumbai (48 μg/m³), and Bengaluru (44 μg/m³) recorded monthly average $PM_{2.5}$ concentrations below the national standard.

'*To mitigate this recurring and year-long pollution, the revision of the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP) presents a key opportunity to strengthen India's air quality management. This revision must focus on prioritising $PM_{2.5}$ and its precursor gases (SO_2 and NO_2) over PM_{10}, revising the list of non-attainment cities, setting stricter emission standards for industries and power plants, and adopting an airshed-based approach to address air pollution at a regional scale,*' said Manoj Kumar, India Analyst, CREA.

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Note: All cities included in this snapshot are those with more than 80% of the days in January 2026 with recorded $PM_{2.5}$ data available.

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Notes to editors

- The January 2026 Ambient Air Quality Snapshot can be found here.
- Previous India monthly air quality snapshots can be found here.
- The Daily Air Quality Dashboard can be found here.

About CREA

The Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) is an independent research organisation focused on revealing the trends, causes, and health impacts, as well as the solutions to air pollution. We use scientific data, research and evidence to support the efforts of governments, companies and campaigning organisations worldwide in their efforts to move towards clean energy and clean air. www.energyandcleanair.org.