PRESS RELEASE

ICAS
India Clean Air Summit

INDIA CLEAN AIR SUMMIT 2019

22-23 August 2019

The Chancery Pavilion

23 Aug 2019, Bengaluru:

"Inhalation of particulate matter is leading to thickening of blood, with patients often show clinical behaviours of a smoker although they are non-smokers," said Dr Rahul Patil, an interventional cardiologist at Jayadeva Institute of Cardiovascular Sciences and Research. Speaking at the India Clean Air Summit 2019 (ICAS19), hosted by the Centre for Air Pollution Studies (CAPS) at CSTEP, he said that there is indication that air pollution was contributing to premature deaths due to cardiovascular disease in people under 40.

A flagship event of CAPS, ICAS19 aims to initiate a conversation that directly addresses the elephant in the room when it comes to air pollution: how are we going to find solutions when we do not know exactly what pollutes and by how much? The summit was organised in partnership with Karnataka State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) and the Department of Forest, Ecology and Environment (Government of Karnataka).

"Cases of cardiovascular disease and diabetes are increasing and India is extremely vulnerable," said Dr D Prabhakaran, Vice President, Research and Policy, Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI). He was speaking at a training session on the health impacts of Air Pollution at the summit. "While most studies have confirmed effects of bigger particulate matter, more data is required on the health impact of smaller particulate matter such as PM2.5. Maintaining medical reports of patients is essential to collect data and track health impact of the environment. In this regard, both indoor and outdoor studies, especially exposure studies, should be conducted especially with the vulnerable population," he said.

On Day 2 of the summit, discussions revolved around communicating the seriousness of air pollution and its impact, especially on personal health.

According to Avijit Michael of Jhatkaa.org, more than data and numbers, what can convince citizens to be proactive is something tangible. He was sharing Jhatkaa.org's experience of installing lung-shaped air filters in major cities of India, including Bangalore. "When the lungs turned opaque black in just a matter of three days in Bengaluru, citizens and administrative officials were convinced about both the state of air and its impact on their lungs. Following this, traffic police began wearing air masks while managing signals in the city," he said.

"It is important to reach out to people in a way that people can relate to it. Thus, to reach more policymakers, it would be interesting to have policy recommendations in vernacular languages," said Nitin Sethi, Associate Editor at Business Standard.

On day one of the summit, K Sudhakar, Chairman of KSPCB lamented, "Till a few years ago, Bengaluru was known as the garden city but is increasingly becoming a concrete jungle. Urbanisation is costing us dear, and this is reflected in the quality of the environment we live in," he said, adding, "To solve this, different government departments and policymakers not only need to work continuously, but in collaboration with each other."

He also said that the funding currently available for conducting studies on air pollution is inadequate, given that the equipment for monitoring and measurement is expensive. However, "technology can be a game changer in this case; developing efficient low-cost sensors significantly expand monitoring and measurement capabilities across the country. Industrial units (pharma, cement, etc.), should invest in monitoring equipment to track air quality levels in their premises," he said.

The two-day summit brought together practitioners (scientists, researchers, students and experts) and policymakers to discuss challenges, opportunities and the way forward, to achieve India's targeted reductions in air pollution.

Welcoming participants at the summit on Thursday, Padma Vibhushan Dr VS Arunachalam, Founder-Chairman, CSTEP, and former Scientific Advisor to the Defense Minister, said, "Numerous cities in India do not fall within acceptable standards for air quality. But it is never too late. Our history shows that we have taken responsibility for our actions and contributed towards environmental well-being."

Stressing on the need for science and technology for solving prevailing complex and global issues in energy and environment, including air pollution, Dr Arunachalam said, "Earlier, people thought that India would not have enough food to feed its population, but we are exporting today. I believe that India will grow out of its current challenges to become a world leader across sectors."

Experts from IIT Madras, IIT Kanpur, IIT Delhi, TERI, JNU and IITM, policymakers (including members from the Karnataka and Gujrat pollution control board as well as officials from the transport and forest departments) participated in the discussion. .

Ideas that emerge from ICAS19 will provide inputs for policy recommendations at the state and central level.

About CSTEP:

The Center for Study of Science, Technology and Policy (CSTEP) is one of India's leading think tanks, aiming to inform policy through scientific evidence. Our young and dynamic research team works in critical areas such as climate and environment, energy, urban planning, and air pollution. We are currently involved in cutting-edge research that incorporates Artificial Intelligence for development. We leverage the power of technology through socially relevant and innovative ideas to understand and solve current and projected developmental issues. Our research aims to enable the building of an inclusive and sustainable world. With a 125-plus workforce drawn from all across India, CSTEP operates from Bengaluru and the National Capital Region.

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About CAPS:

The Centre for Air Pollution Studies (CAPS) at CSTEP was set up in April 2019 with the idea of conducting interdisciplinary, holistic, scientific studies on air pollution. We work in three verticals: measurement & monitoring, modelling & analysis, and policy engagement. We collaborate with other scientists to generate scientific evidence on air pollution and build on the existing knowledge base. This evidence enriches our recommendations for policy changes.

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