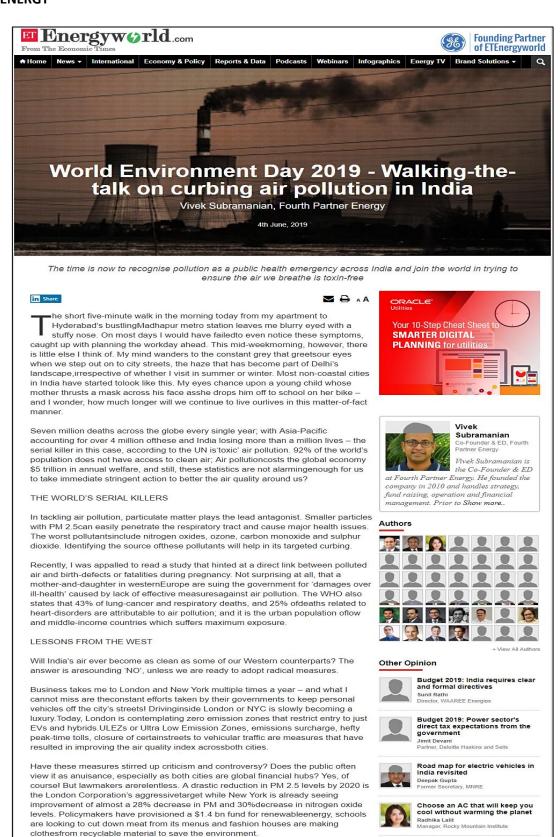
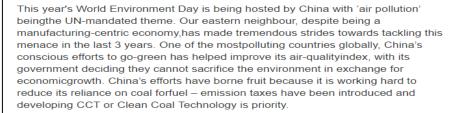
## WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY 2019 - WALKING-THE-TALK ON CURBING AIR POLLUTION IN INDIA

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## CURBING POLLUTANTS IN THE AIR, CHINA'S WAY



Meanwhile, their switch to renewables is on at break-neck speed, with China becoming the world'slargest solar market. The UN indicates it is home to over 50% of the world's electric vehicles and 90% of the world's electric buses today, no minor feat. There is a long way to go, but the journey is off toflying start. Can we borrow a leaf and attempt implementation of sweeping policy reforms as these countrieshave done?

## INDIA'S WAKE-UP CALL

Is India doing enough to address air pollution, or are we still hiding behind excuses like populationdensity and being a 'developing' nation dependent on manufacturing and industrialisation to boost its economy? It is undoubtedly harder for a country like ours, but there is absolutely no alternativeto cleaning up the air. Are we ready to risk asthma, cancer and other respiratory disorders just to be'comfortable'? Why is there not a zero-tolerance policy in place, especially when we are home to9 out of 10 of the world's most polluted cities?

We seem to be alright with harming the environment, sacrificing the planet and endangering ourchildren's future. What we tend to forget is that our choices can result in irreparable damage - asIndians, we cannot waste a moment longer; the time to act is now

Environmental agencies must work in-tandem with the government and corporates to make adifference. More importantly, individuals need to gear up to be inconvenienced as action towardscleaner air will impact everyday routine. India announced a bold vision to adopt of EVs but did notback this up with an air-tight Renewable Energy Policy. Cities like Hyderabad, Lucknow and Delhihave begun trials of e-Buses for intra-city commute; but for EVs to be effective in reducing pollution, the charging infrastructure must depend on renewable energy and not coal.

We need to implement comprehensive, strategic and long-term policy changes. A switch torenewable sources of energy is no longer an option, it is imperative.

## WAKING UP TO A CLEANER, GREENER ENVIRONMENT

The launch of the NCAP or National Clean Air Program is a good initiative. It aims at reducing PM(particulate matter) in air by 20-30% across hundred worst-affected Indian cities by 2024. Effectivesector-wise implementation of key measures, targeted expenditure of its Rs 300 crore corpus and provision for legal action against non-execution is mandatory.

Empowering SPCBs or State Pollution Control Boards is essential. We have to consider emissiontaxes, impounding vehicles that default norms, cordoning off streets, introducing peak-time tolls asmeasures that will yield results.

Trees clean the air — we must move beyond symbolism and plant trees instead of flowering shrubs. We cannot allow the encroachment of open green spaces which help purify the toxic city air. It isimperative to improve the cost-effectiveness and reliability of public transport. Businesses can lendtheir support by offering 'work-from-home' as an option to employees at least once a week. Restricting the use of wood/kerosene/dung as cooking-fuel and increasing awareness on agriculturalwaste and segregation is crucial. Another simple but effective step is adopting cutting-edgetechnology and eco-friendly measures to reduce cement and concrete dust at construction sites.

So much to do! Individuals and organisations like Shweta Narayan's campaign for clean air inCuddalore, NEERI's action plan for Nagpur, the Serum Institute's aid to Pune's municipality,Umendra Dutt's 'Kheti Viraasat' mission in Punjab are leading this charge towards battling toxic air.A few weeks ago, it was heartening to see that environment and air-pollution had finally emerged aspoll-promises and mainstream electoral issues in the country. The time is now to recognise it as apublic health emergency across India and join the world in trying to ensure the air we breathe istoxin-free

