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SC-appointed pollution panel chief on odd-even: It takes political will, we welcome it

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Happy New Odd, Happy New Even Year

Most polluted city in the world wakes up today — to change. All eyes on 15-day Delhi pilot plan for odd and even cars on alternate days.

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Written by **Apurva** | New Delhi | Published: January 1, 2016 2:08 am



On New Year's Eve in Ghazipur, east Delhi. The odd/even plan is the most sweeping intervention to clean air since CNG was introduced in 1998. (Express Photo by: Praveen Khanna)

Friday, January 1 will signal the start of an unprecedented government intervention as an odd-even road rationing policy is rolled out to control air pollution amid mounting health concerns over air quality in the city.

For the next 15 days, the date will define whether you can drive on Delhi's roads.

On odd dates, only cars with registration plates that end with an odd number can ply while cars with plates that end in an even number can run on an even date. The rule does not apply on Sundays.

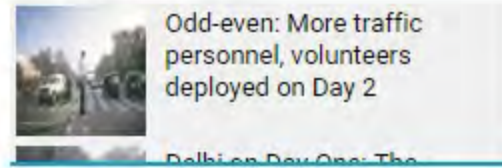
The government has exempted 25 categories from the policy, including VVIPs, emergency vehicles, two-wheelers and single women drivers with children younger than 12 years.

The intervention has come a little more than 17 years after the historic Supreme Court ruling to convert all public transport in the Capital to Compressed Natural Gas (CNG). And as in 1998, when other state capitals looked to Delhi to show the way in improving urban environment, several Indian metros will undoubtedly track the odd-even policy and its implications.

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On Thursday, Delhi's Anand Vihar monitoring station recorded an Air Quality Index (AQI) of 461 — the severe category and killer dust called respirable suspended particulate matter (RSPM) stood at 500 µg/m3, the highest available reading.

Look how other states lined up Thursday: Patna recorded an AQI of 489, Lucknow 367, Agra 407, Varanasi 472, Jaipur 288, Jodhpur 340, Hyderabad 265 and Mumbai 194. In fact, 13 of 20 most polluted cities in the world are in India, according to a 2014 World Health Organisation (WHO) report.

Arvind Kejriwal, the man at the helm, has walked a political tightrope for more than a month now after the dramatic announcement of the odd-even policy. Instead of his opponents, he has reached out to Delhi. Instead of making odd-even a diktat, he has appealed to one's conscience. There is a fine — Rs 2,000 — for violating the policy, but Kejriwal has asked volunteers and school children to instead educate errant commuters with flowers and a message instead.

In the run-up to January 1, the Delhi government has launched a blitzkrieg through social and outdoor media and through the radio. In one of the dozens of commercials on FM radio through the day, Kejriwal says, "I know it will be hard, but to reduce pollution, we have to suffer a little. We will do nothing against your wishes. Your safety, life, health and your convenience is our top priority." He has also invited suggestions from people.

Through this time, he has battled the Central government which is key to implementing the policy since it controls Delhi Police. His government's continuing tug-of-war with Lt Governor Najeeb Jung for administrative power saw nearly 200 bureaucrats going on mass leave Thursday, a day before the new beginning.

But in the end, everyone seems to agree that this policy needs to be given a chance. Consider this:

* Union Minister Prakash Javadekar called the odd-even policy a "crazy order" but said he will follow it while using his personal car.

* Delhi Police Commissioner B S Bassi initially expressed reservations but later promised full cooperation. He even quipped that difficult tasks are more enjoyable.

* Although exempted, Chief Justice of India T S Thakur offered that he would share cars with other judges of the Supreme Court.

* The Delhi High Court refused to stay the decision.

* The US and French embassies agreed to comply despite being exempted.

Whether this ambitious intervention works or not, whether Kejriwal's ratings soar or plummet, whether other cities choose to emulate or decry it, time will tell. But for a month now and preferably well into 2016, the odd-even policy has more people talking about air pollution and the environment than even the 1998 Supreme Court judgment. This year ended with air pollution and another begins with tackling it.

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RS 1280 Rachna Singh
Delhi's population is itself responsible for polluting the air but the govt. has to BEG for its cooperation. What about those of us who have only one car (a significant minority in affluent Delhi) and need to drive for an emergency or those of us who are non-residents of Delhi but need to go to hospitals, airports, train stations, etc. ? Why are VVIPs exempt? They have access to a fleet of cars.

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SA 640 Sahim Ahmed
Modi's new year SwachhBharat Pledge will be successful only when the AIR IS SWACHH and clean by this KEJRIWAL's odd-even campaign..... good to see it successful.....

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V 740 Vikas
All the best Delhi! Make it happen

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A 415 Anthony
Wishing the people in Delhi the very best and hope this ushers a mass movement in clean pollution free public transport system.

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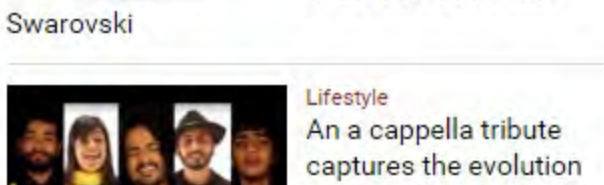
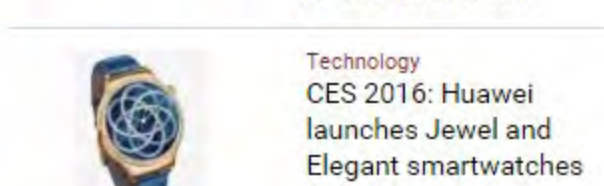
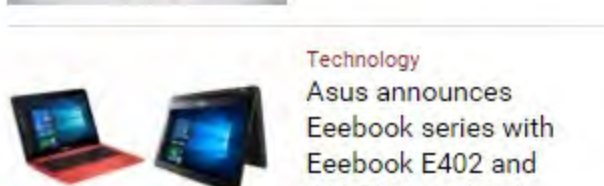
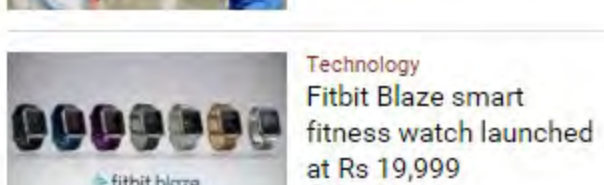
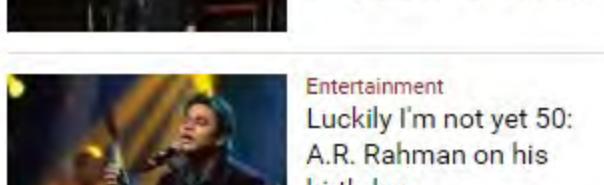
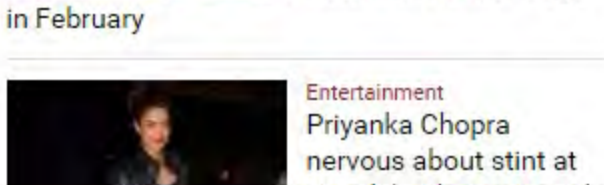
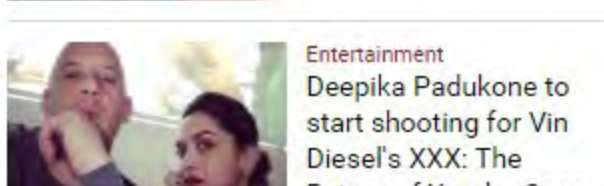
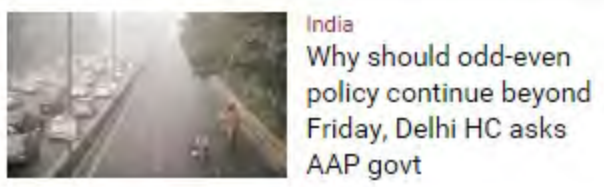
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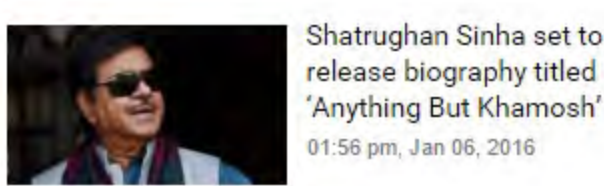
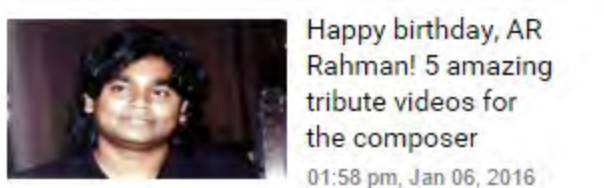
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