News: The odd-even scheme for automobiles plying in Delhi has begun. Due to a steep deterioration in the air quality index or AQI in the city, the Environmental Pollution (Prevention and Control) Authority (EPCA) had to declare a public health emergency as a desperate measure to contain the silent killer.

Mains Focus: Odd-Even scheme; Delhi’s air pollution - reasons

About Odd-Even scheme

- **Innovative idea** – The odd-even scheme was first introduced three years ago. It is an out-of-the-box idea with unproven claims on containing AQI levels.
- **Limited to 4 wheelers** – It is terrific to focus attention on air pollution caused by automobiles. It exempts two-wheelers and does not allow privately-owned hybrids and CNG vehicles.
- **Need for rains** – Unless the rains turn up, and the cross winds regain momentum, Odd-Even is unlikely to bring down AQI below the prevailing hazardous levels.

Crisis

- **Annual event** – For three years now, NCR has seen the pollution saga every winter.
- **Beyond one cause** – There is a need to take the debate beyond the single causes like stubble burning.

Understanding the problem

**Topography** – NCR pollution problem is partly because of the nature of its topography.

- It is shaped like a saucer and hence is hugely dependent on a cross breeze.
- This breeze serves it for most of the year, except in winter—to keep its AQI under control.
- This is the reason why the stubble burning that happens in the early part of the year does not harm Delhi as much.

Growing vehicles

- Vehicular pollution has been growing very sharply.
- The emissions of PM by automobiles have surged by 40% in the eight years that ended 2018.
- According to the Economic Survey put out by the Delhi government, there were 10.9 million vehicles in NCR at the end of 2018.
- In the absence of winds, stubble burning and bursting of crackers send the pollution problem over the tipping point.
Need for a comprehensive solution

- **Public transport** – Metro Rail has been critical in addressing transport woes of NCR’s working population. This has to be dovetailed with a robust public bus network.
- **Road design** – government should focus on building and maintaining good roads and implementing laws to ensure only road-worthy vehicles ply.
- **Need for a public movement** – the residents of Delhi have to force a public debate.