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'Shirking your responsibility': Delhi HC to govt over students' plea to defer sports events amid peak winter pollution

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Eleven school students, who actively participate in sports, have approached the HC, seeking directions to the Directorate of Education (DOE) — which schedules zonal, interzonal and state-level tournaments, coaching camps and selection trials — and the SGFI. (Express photo)



“I’m sorry to say you are shirking your responsibility” — this was the oral remark of the Delhi High Court to the Delhi government on Wednesday, while hearing a petition filed by students seeking rescheduling of the outdoor sports and tournament calendar of schools to avoid the months of November to January, when the [Capital experiences severe air pollution](#).

Justice Sachin Datta issued notice to the [Delhi](#) government and the School Games Federation of India (SGFI) — which sets the calendar for national tournaments— seeking their response to the contentions being raised in the petition. The HC also sought a status report from the Delhi government on the steps taken this year, as well as those planned for the next year, to address the issue of students taking part in sports tournaments amid bad air quality in Delhi-NCR



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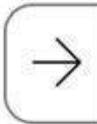
Highlighting that sports tournaments are predominantly held between October and January — a period marked by toxic air in Delhi — the students argued that such scheduling forces them and thousands of others to choose “between their fundamental right to life and education.”

The students maintained that the past decade has seen a “repeated cycle of toxic air pollution in Delhi in this period,” which is “increasingly becoming a major health issue for children participating in such events.” Further, they urged the court to direct rescheduling of the sports calendar from next year.

Senior advocate Shyel Trehan, appearing for the students, cited expert medical opinion from Dr Arvind Kumar, a practising pulmonologist, and referred to images of lungs of patients from polluted cities, including those of a 14-year-old boy. Trehan submitted, “Let them start in April, when the air is better.”

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Delhi government’s standing counsel Sameer Vashisht, however, told the court that it is for SGFI to plan its calendar, which it does taking pan-India into account. He added, “Summers are extremely hot...these are the best months in Delhi...if SGFI will schedule the dates (avoiding the months of high air pollution in Delhi), certainly Delhi will follow...They cannot be deprived of it (participation in sports).” 

Justice Datta orally retorted, “They cannot be deprived of damage to lungs, is it? I’m sorry to say, you are shirking your responsibility. Do you recognise there’s a problem (in the air quality) in these months (from November to January)? You recognise that...You plan in a way from the future year, that there is minimal

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The petition will now be heard on January 13.