

Pakistan province calls for ‘climate diplomacy’ with India as record smog chokes major city

By Lex Harvey and [Sophia Saifi](#), CNN

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Passengers wait for a train at a railway station amid smoggy conditions in Lahore on November 3, 2024.

Arif Ali/AFP/Getty Images

we need climate diplomacy, as a regional and global issue,” Anwar told CNN, just days after Punjab’s megacity of Lahore, roughly 25 kilometers (15 miles) from the Indian border, saw its highest-ever levels of air pollution.

“We are suffering in Lahore in a way due to the eastern wind corridor coming from India,” he said. “We are not blaming anyone, it’s a natural phenomenon.”



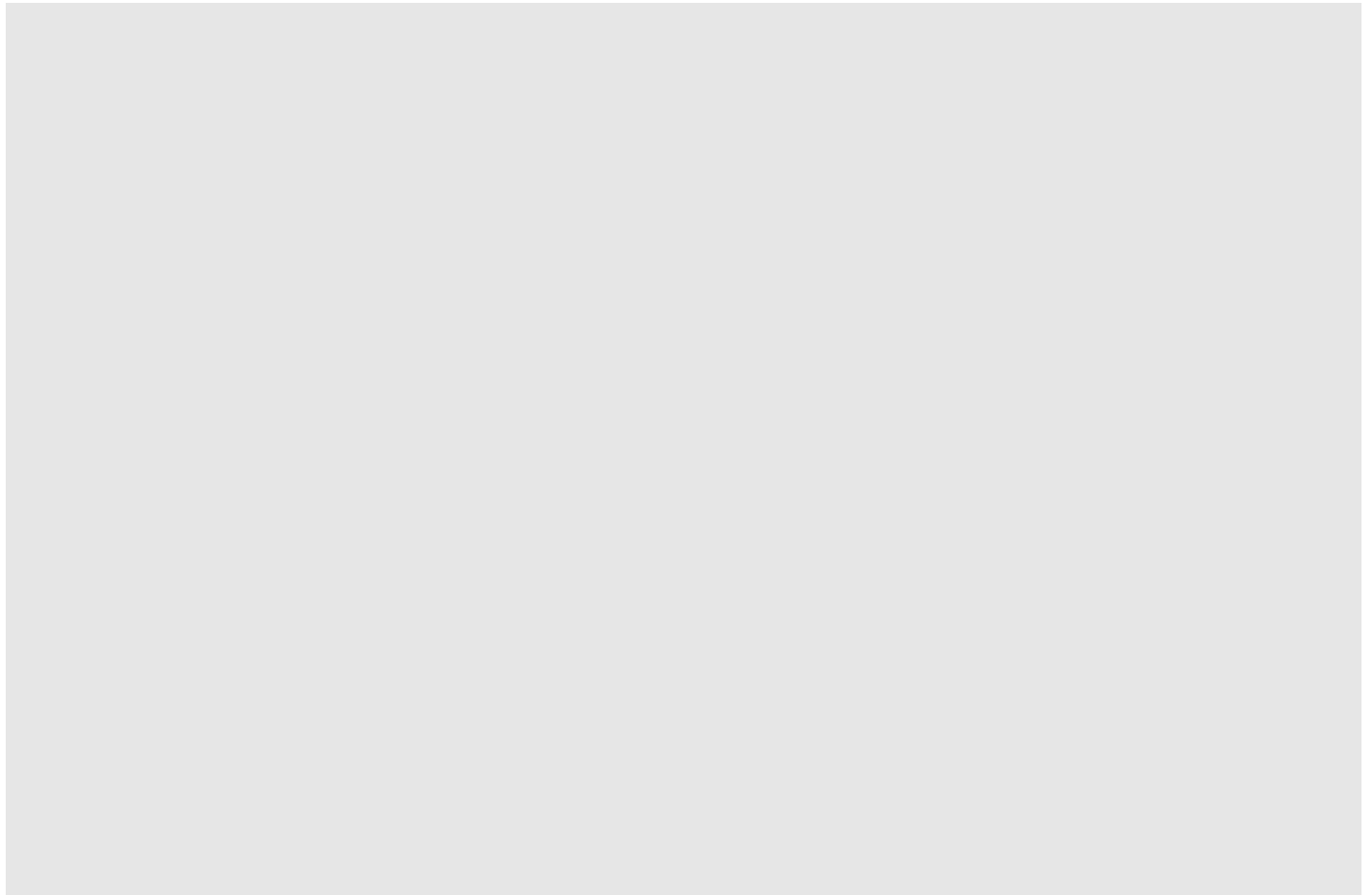
A metro train is pictured on an elevated track amid smoggy conditions in Lahore on November 3, 2024. Arif Ali/AFP/Getty Images

Pollution in northern India and eastern Pakistan ramps up each winter, when an ominous yellow haze blankets the skies due to a combination of farmers burning agricultural waste, coal-fired power plants, traffic and windless days.

India and Pakistan have for decades navigated fraught and at times hostile relations, but as the issue of toxic air worsens, the neighbors are being forced to confront their shared responsibility – and fate – when it comes to the climate.

Lahore, home to more than 14 million people, saw its air quality index surpass a record 1,900 in one part of the city on Saturday, according to IQAir, which tracks global air quality. That's more than six times the level considered hazardous to health.

The extreme pollution prompted Lahore officials to close primary schools for one week and place restrictions on barbecue restaurants, motorcycle rickshaws, and construction activities.



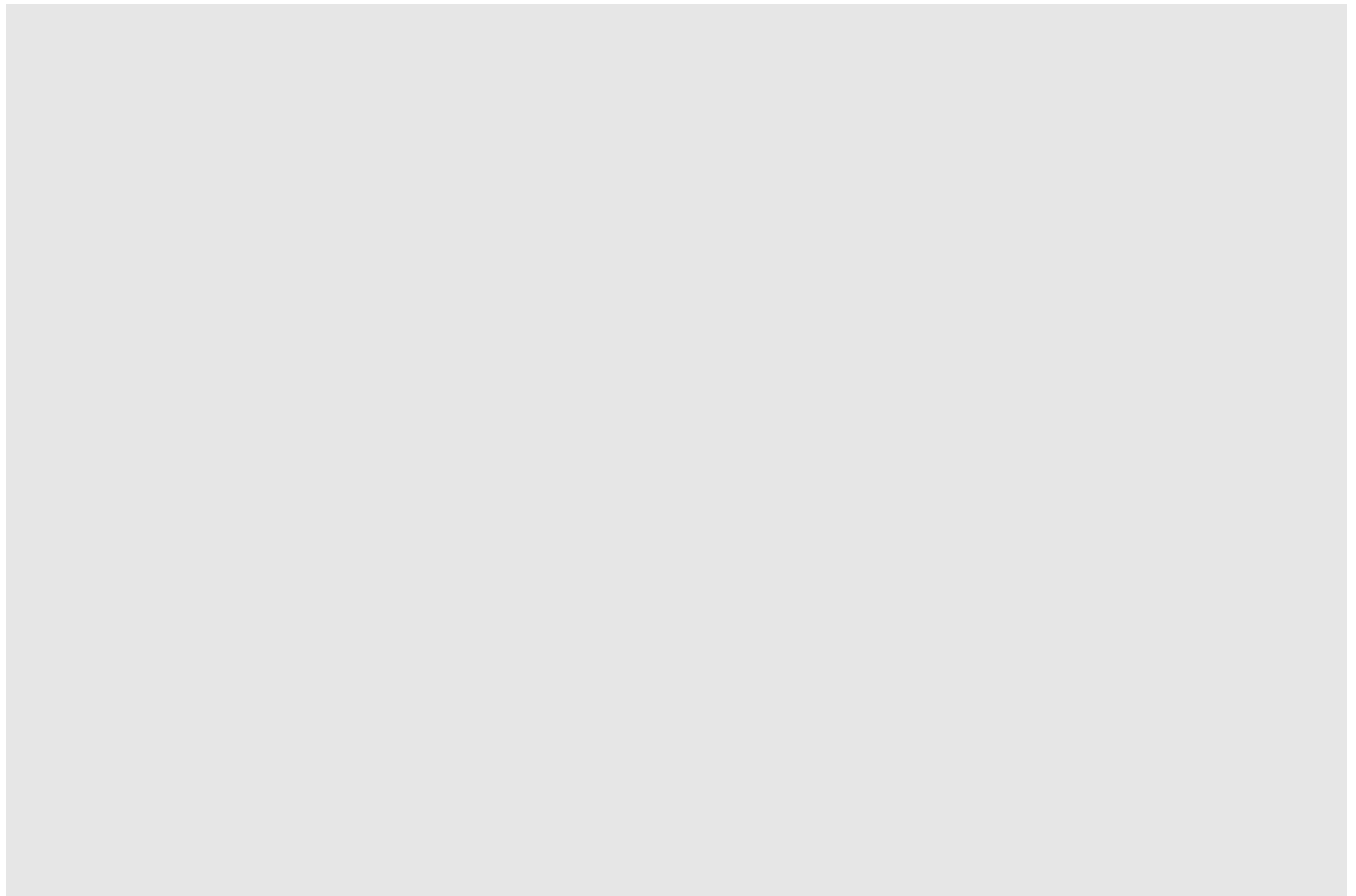
Vehicles move on the Delhi Meerut Expressway amid low visibility due to smog a day after Diwali festival celebrations in Ghaziabad, India on November 2, 2024. Sakib Ali/Hindustan Times/Getty Images

In India, air quality in Delhi – which frequently trades places with Lahore as the most polluted city in the world – hit hazardous air quality levels above 500 Saturday and Sunday, partly due to people disregarding a local fireworks ban as they celebrated Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights. However, warmer, breezier weather helped to mitigate the smog.

Breathing polluted air leads to increased risk of a host of diseases, including lung cancer, stroke, and heart disease, according to the World Health Organization. Experts say India's air pollution is so bad that smog could take years off the lives of hundreds of millions of people.

“This is not just a political issue, this is a humanitarian issue,” Punjab’s Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz said last week. “The winds don’t know there’s a border in the middle.”

Air quality worsens in the winter because colder and drier air traps pollution, rather than whisking it away, as warm air does.



A woman cycles through the smog in Gurgaon, India, on November 2, 2024. Parveen Kumar/Hindustan Times/Getty Images

The beginning of winter also coincides with stubble burning season, a time when farmers intentionally set fire to crop debris to clear their fields, sending smoke billowing in the skies.

Both India and Pakistan have tried to clamp down on the practice, but it is still widespread.

Last month, India's Supreme Court condemned the governments of India's Punjab and Haryana states for failing to crack down on illegal stubble burning. Local officials claim they have reduced the practice significantly in recent years.

Pakistan's Punjab is providing subsidized super-seeders to farmers to offer alternative methods for disposing of crop residue.

CNN's Esha Mitra in New Delhi, India contributed reporting.

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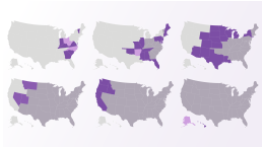


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