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AFP

■ Tourists at the Taj Mahal in Agra pose before the barely visible white marble monument.

## Delhi's 'death trap' smog 60 times over WHO's daily limit

India's capital shuts schools as pollution also chokes Agra and Pakistan's Lahore

**NEW DELHI**

India's capital New Delhi switched schools to online classes yesterday until further notice as worsening toxic smog surged past 60 times the World Health Organisation's recommended daily maximum.

Pollution extended across a swathe of northern India — with the tourists at the Taj Mahal in Agra snapping photographs of the barely visible white marble monument —

and choked residents of Lahore in neighbouring Pakistan.

A report by *The New York Times* this month, based on samples collected over five years, revealed dangerous fumes also spewing from a power plant incinerating rubbish from landfill garbage mountains.

Levels of PM2.5 pollutants — dangerous cancer-causing microparticles that enter the bloodstream through the lungs — peaked at 921 micrograms per cubic metre at midday yesterday.



**Photos:** The toxic haze — Delhi's struggle with severe air pollution

terday, according to IQAir pollution monitors, with a reading above 15 in a 24-hour period considered unhealthy by the WHO. Dense grey and acrid smog smothered New Delhi, with IQAir listing conditions as "hazardous".

**Shocking sight**

Long-time Delhi resident William Dalrymple said he was shocked to "find the city embalmed in an all-enveloping burial shroud of pollution", he wrote on social media. "I've never seen anything like this in 40 years of living here," the Scottish historian wrote, saying the "most fascinating of cities" was "currently a tragic, choking death trap". — AFP

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## UAE to be crucial hub for global gold trade

Country leapfrogged UK to become world's second-largest gold trade hub last year

**DUBAI**

**BY MANOJ NAIR**  
Business Editor

Dubai Multi Commodities Centre (DMCC) yesterday released a special edition of its *Future of Trade 2024: Decoupled and Re-configured* thought leadership report focused on the precious metals industry and the key trends shaping the global market for precious metals.

The report notes that the UAE is emerging as a key player in the global precious metals market, leveraging its strategic location, robust regulatory framework, and advanced infrastructure to bridge East and West and reshape the gold trade.

DMCC's findings forecast

the UAE becoming one of the most important hubs for the gold trade in coming years. This position was significantly bolstered by the UAE leapfrogging the United Kingdom in 2023 to become the second-largest gold trade hub worldwide, with over \$129 billion in total trade — a rise of 36 per cent on the past year.

**Dubai at the centre**

Ahmed Bin Sulayem, Executive Chairman and CEO, DMCC, said, "We are seeing a new gold corridor form across Asia, with Dubai at its centre — exemplified by the UAE's rise to become the world's second-largest gold trading hub last year. Our latest Future of Trade report underscores Dubai's pivotal role in this transformation, as we strengthen its position as the world's leading precious metals hub, attract key industry players and support our members to unlock new growth opportunities."

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## G20: US seeks more pressure on Hamas

BIDEN URGES LEADERS AT RIO SUMMIT TO FORCE GROUP INTO CEASEFIRE DEAL

**DUBAI**

**BY STEPHEN N. R.**

Senior Associate Editor

US President Joe Biden called on G20 leaders yesterday to step up pressure on Hamas for a ceasefire with Israel. "I ask everyone here to increase their pressure on Hamas, which is currently refusing this deal," Biden said in his opening remarks to the G20 summit in Rio de Janeiro.

With no sign of the wars in Gaza and Lebanon abating, Biden vowed to "keep pushing" for a deal in his last weeks before Donald Trump returns to the White House. The health ministry in Gaza said that at least 43,922 people have been killed in more than 13 months of war between Israel and Palestinian militants, including 76 deaths in the previous 24 hours.

**Schools closed in Beirut**

After rare Israeli strikes on central districts of Beirut killed six people, including Hezbollah's spokesman Mohammad Afif, Lebanon's education ministry closed schools and universities for two days.

Hezbollah confirmed the deaths of four members of its media office, apart from Afif, the latest senior figure slain by Israel. Lebanon's health ministry said Israel struck a densely packed Beirut neighbourhood yesterday, killing at least four people, in the third attack in two days on the city's central districts.

In Geneva, Philippe Lazzarini, head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, said there was "no plan B" after Israel banned the agency from operating in Gaza.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, in his final meeting with the EU's foreign ministers in Brussels, expressed frustration at the bloc's failure to impact the Middle East crisis, saying, "I have exhausted the words to explain what's happening in the Middle East." **SEE ALSO P9**

**In Geneva, Philippe Lazzarini, head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, said there was 'no plan B' after Israel banned the agency from operating in Gaza.**



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