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## Punjab orders week-long school closure amid Lahore smog crisis



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The Punjab government has announced a one-week closure of schools for primary classes in Lahore due to severe smog conditions. Senior provincial minister Maryam Aurangzeb made the announcement during a press conference, emphasising the urgent need to protect children and vulnerable populations from the hazardous air quality. Maryam Aurangzeb indicated that the prevailing wind patterns bringing air from India are expected to persist, complicating efforts to

control the smog. “We cannot stop or redirect the Indian air, and the only solution is dialogue,” she stated, urging cooperation to tackle the environmental crisis. In addition to the school closures, the government has advised that 50% of the workforce should work from home to reduce exposure to the polluted air. Parents are being encouraged to provide masks for their children and to keep them indoors as much as possible. The minister also highlighted measures being taken to mitigate the effects of the smog, including a ban on certain vehicles within a one-kilometre radius of green zones. Maryam Aurangzeb mentioned that the technology for artificial rain, previously acquired from the UAE, is now locally available, and plans for implementation will proceed when conditions are suitable. The government aims to address the immediate health risks posed by the deteriorating air quality while seeking longer-term solutions to combat smog in the region. Air pollution in Lahore reached alarming heights on Saturday, with officials reporting that the city’s air quality is nearly 40 times higher than the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) recommended limits. The level of PM2.5 pollutants, which pose significant health risks, peaked at 610. The city has been engulfed in smog for several days, a mixture of fog and pollutants exacerbated by low-quality diesel emissions, agricultural burning, and winter weather. The air quality index (AQI) surged to 1,067, far exceeding the ‘dangerous’ threshold of 300, according to IQAir data. Winds blowing from India have further deteriorated Lahore’s air quality, placing the city third on the

global air pollution index, following Delhi and Kinshasa. Reports indicated that regions near the Indian border recorded AQI levels between 1500 and 1800, with Lahore itself facing hazardous conditions marked by an AQI score of 1000.