

Mumbai snatches Delhi's most polluted city tag

**Malathy Iyer &
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Mumbai: Mumbai has trounced Delhi as India's most polluted city on two consecutive days starting Sunday.

The US embassy's air quality index (AQI) readings for the area around its embassy in New Delhi and consulate in Mumbai at 10am on Sunday showed that particulate matter in Mumbai stood at 183 as against 173 in Delhi. Monday's readings were 201 in Mumbai compared to 197 in Delhi.

But this "dangerous" reading is likely to be temporary as it was caused by the

remnants of a dust storm that originated in the Arabian peninsula and crossed the Arabian Sea into Mumbai. Experts say the resulting haze over the city most possibly contained PM2.5—the term for particulate matter, or particles, whose diameter is less than 2.5 micrometres.

PM2.5 is considered dangerous because it could worsen the plight of patients suffering from heart diseases, respiratory problems such as asthma, or lung cancer.

AQI has emerged in recent times as an indicator of a city's overall air quality. Last year, Beijing and New Delhi made headlines for their poor AQI (on Monday, Beij-

ing's AQI stood at a moderate 53).

Mumbai is likely to limp back to normalcy within a day, said experts. But anti-pollution activists such as Sumaira Abdulali said Monday's readings should make Mumbaikars realize that the sea cannot always drive away pollutants. "The sea does help in keeping air pollution low, but it can only help so much. The pollutants, moreover, come back in the form of water vapour or rain and get into our food chain," she said.

Indeed, air pollution is still an issue in Mumbai, but its levels have dropped since leaded petrol was banned almost two decades ago.