



AGRA, INDIA: This file photograph taken on April 16, 2016, shows the Taj Mahal reflected in the Yamuna river. — AFP

## YELLOWING TAJ MAHAL TO GO UNDER SCAFFOLD FOR 'MUD PACK'

### EFFECTS OF SMOG

AGRA, INDIA: Scaffolding will cover the Taj Mahal's main dome next year while a "mud pack" is applied to its yellowing marble, authorities said yesterday as they battle the effects of smog on the country's top tourist attraction.

The famed monument to love, which attracts millions of visitors, has for years been acquiring a yellow tinge

despite a ban on coal-powered industries in the area. Authorities have been applying "mud packs" around the side walls and towers since last year to draw the impurities out of the stone, but have not yet touched the main central dome.

"This is a part of the cleaning process through mud-pack therapy and

is presently being undertaken at (the eastern wall of main mausoleum of Taj," said Bhuvan Vikram of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), a state body. "This would be followed by cleaning of other three walls (and) thereafter it would be the turn of the (main) dome of Taj Mahal."

The mud-pack therapy involves covering the surface with fuller's earth and leaving it to dry before removing it with soft brushes and distilled water. The Times of India said the scaffolding could be up for around six months. ASI official M.K. Bhatnagar said the scaffold would go up around the main dome sometime next year, but would not say how long it would be there. "The time for cleaning cannot be ascertained in advance as it depends on work required on the dome," he said.

"It (the therapy) would take time but we will make all efforts to minimize it." The Taj Mahal was built by Mughal emperor Shah Jahan as a tomb for his beloved wife Mumtaz Mahal, who died giving birth in 1631.

It has attracted world leaders and royalty including former US President Bill Clinton. Diana, the late British princess, was famously photographed alone on a marble seat there in 1992. In May, authorities had ordered an investigation after green-tinged patches began appearing on the back wall of the monument, which stands on the banks of the heavily polluted Yamuna river. India has some of the world's worst pollution and is the third biggest carbon emitter. — AFP

## PAKISTAN PASSES LONG-AWAITED ANTI-HONOR KILLING LEGISLATION

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's National Assembly passed legislation yesterday closing a loophole that allowed people who killed in the name of "honor" to go free, mandating life imprisonment even if the victim's relatives forgive the murder.

Honor killings "claim the lives of hundreds of victims every year", the bill stated, adding that the legislation was "essential in order to prevent these crimes from being repeatedly committed". Rights groups and politicians have for years called for tougher laws to tackle perpetrators of violence against women in Pakistan and the move follows a slew of high-profile killings in the country.

The perpetrators of so-called honor killings—in which the victim, normally a woman, is killed by a relative—often walk free because they can seek forgiveness for the crime from another family member.

A 2005 amendment to the law pertaining to honor killings prevented men who kill female relatives pardoning themselves as an "heir" of the victim. But punishment was left to a judge's discretion when other relatives of the victim forgive the killer—a loophole which critics say is exploited.

The amendments passed yesterday and published on the National Assembly website mandate judges to sentence someone who kills in the name of "honor" to life imprisonment, even if they have been forgiven, said senior opposition lawmaker Farhatullah Babar.

The assembly also passed a bill boosting the punishments for some rape offences. Rape conviction rates are close to zero percent, largely due to the law's reliance on circumstantial evidence and a lack of forensic testing. — AFP

## BATTLE WITH TALEBAN FORCING AFGHAN CIVILIANS TO FLEE KUNDUZ

KABUL: Afghan civilians were increasingly leaving the northern city of Kunduz yesterday to escape fighting between government forces and the Taliban, a battle now in its fourth day, officials said.

The United Nations warned of a rapid deterioration of conditions for those "trapped in the city," as food and fresh water become difficult to find. The fighting in Kunduz, located on a key national crossroads, has raised concerns of a repeat of last year's scenario, when it briefly fell to the Taliban. Insurgents at the time held Kunduz for three days, then resisted Afghan and US forces for almost three weeks before the city was brought fully back under government control.

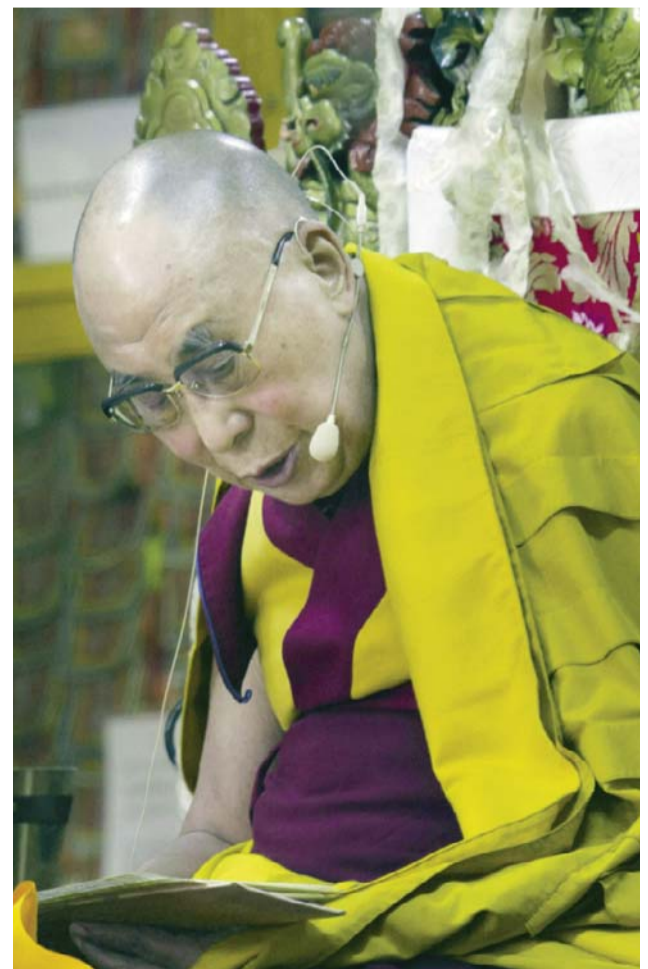
This time, the insurgents, who launched a multi-pronged attack early on Monday, have been pushed back from the city's south, said Gen. Qasim Jungalbagh, the police chief for Kunduz province. One Afghan soldier was killed and another three wounded in overnight fighting, he added.

The US military spokesman in Afghanistan, Brig. Gen. Charles Cleveland, said Afghan commandoes were clearing "isolated pockets of Taliban resistance" within the city yesterday.

Dominic Parker, head of the UN's Kabul office for the coordination of humanitarian affairs, said thousands of people have been forced to leave their homes in recent days. Clinics and other health facilities have shut down or are understaffed, reducing access to health care.

OCHA's information officer in Kabul, Danielle Moylan, said "up to 10,000 people have fled their homes."

Since Wednesday, about 1,200 people have arrived from Kunduz in neighboring Takhar province, said provincial refugee official, Murtaza Hamdard. "Most of them are staying in school buildings or with other families, but some are living out in the open," Hamdard said and appealed for urgent aid. — AP



DHARMSALA, INDIA: Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama reads from Buddhist scriptures during a religious talk at the Tsuglakhang temple. — AP