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# India press freedom score fell over the last year: RSF

Index looks at freedom enjoyed by journalists globally; India is one of the countries where there's a perception of authorities participating in mass disinformation, says RSF director of campaigns

**Sriram Lakshman**

LONDON

India's score in the World Press Freedom Index fell over the last year, from 36.62 to 31.28, according to Reporters Without Borders (RSF for Reporters sans Frontières), which puts together an annual index on the freedom enjoyed by journalists in 180 jurisdictions. India's rank improved from 161 in 2023 to 159 in 2024, but this was because other countries had slipped in their rankings. The government has in the past dismissed international rankings of freedoms in India as misinformed and propaganda driven.

Norway and Denmark topped the RSF table while Eritrea was at the bottom, with Syria just ahead of it.

"Press freedom around the world is being threatened by the very people who should be its guarantors – political authorities," the RSF said, noting that press freedoms fell by



Press freedom fell by an average 7.6 points globally, according to the index put out by Reporters sans Frontières. FILE PHOTO

an average 7.6 points globally.

The press freedom questionnaire covers five categories – political context, legal framework, economic context, sociocultural context and security. Scores for India dropped (worsened) in all but the security indicator.

"India's media has fallen into an 'unofficial state of emergency' since Narendra Modi came to power in 2014 and engineered a

spectacular rapprochement between his party, the BJP, and the big families dominating the media," the RSF country file on India said. Reference is also made to "Godi media" as mixing populism and pro-BJP propaganda. Indian journalists who are very critical of the government are subjected to harassment campaigns by BJP-backed trolls, the India country report says.

"Yes, the elections con-

text matters massively in India. I think this is one of the countries where there's a perception of authorities participating in sort of mass disinformation and propaganda," Rebecca Vincent, director of campaigns at RSF, said at a briefing organised by the Foreign Press Association in London, to launch the index.

## U.S. slips in ranking

Ms. Vincent said that among the countries going to the polls this year, the U.S. was the most concerning in terms of press freedoms, including because of the global impact developments there had.

"We saw the catastrophic effects globally of the first the Trump presidency and his attitude towards media, who were labelled enemies of the state and treated as such on on the campaign trail," she said. The U.S. press freedom score fell from 71.22 to 66.59 and its rank deteriorated from 45 to 55.

**Category:**  
➤ GS-2

## News:

- "India's press freedom declines, says RSF index, citing concerns of political influence and harassment campaigns against critical journalists."

## **About RSF's World Press Freedom Index**

### **Findings:**

- India's press freedom score dropped from 36.62 to 31.28 in the past year, as per Reporters Without Borders (RSF).
- Despite a slight improvement in rank from 161 to 159, it's attributed to other countries' decline rather than India's progress.

### **Key Facts about Reporters Without Borders (RSF):**

- International NGO defending and promoting media freedom.
- Headquarters: located in Paris, France.
- Holds consultative status with the United Nations. Defines press freedom as journalists' ability to produce and disseminate news independently, without interference or threats to their safety.

### **About World Press Freedom Index 2024:**

- Annual report by Reporters Without Borders (RSF).
- They Compare media freedom in 180 countries.
- Ranking based on political, legislative, economic, sociocultural, and journalist safety categories.



# The paradox of India's global rise, its regional decline

One of the deeply perplexing paradoxes of contemporary Indian foreign policy is that a globally rising India is also a regionally declining power. While India's global rise is a function of growth in absolute power, peer accommodation and a conducive 'chaotic' international situation, its waning regional influence is caused by diminishing relative power (*vis-à-vis* China), loss of primacy in South Asia, and fundamental changes in South Asian geopolitics.

India's aggregate power has grown over the past two decades – evident in robust economic growth, military capabilities, and a largely young demography. Its inclusion in key global institutions such as the G-20, as an invitee at G-7 meetings, and active participation in multilateral groups such as the Quad, BRICS, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation further highlight its geopolitical significance and its powerful presence globally, even if it is not a member of the United Nations Security Council. There is a lot more peer accommodation of (except from China of course) of India's claims to be a globally significant power. India's global rise is also aided by growing international attention on the Indo-Pacific, a theatre that is pivotal to global strategic stability, where India has a central position, geographically and otherwise.

## Extraneous factors

Despite this global rise, paradoxically and worryingly, India's influence is declining in South Asia. When compared to India's influence in the region during the Cold War or in comparison to China's influence in the region today, India's power and influence in the region has sharply declined. This comparative decline, not an absolute one, caused by several extraneous factors, will have an impact on India's global position over time.

Paradoxically, again, some of the factors that have led to the decline of Indian influence in the region are also the reasons behind India's global prominence. Consider the following. The American withdrawal from the region and China filling that power vacuum have been disadvantageous to India. But that is, at the same time, a major reason why the United States and its allies are keen to accommodate India's global interests including in order to push back China in the region. In the case of the Indo-Pacific, while interest in the Indo-Pacific has increased, India's global prominence as an indispensable Indo-Pacific power, New Delhi's focus on the great power balance in the Indo-Pacific may have stretched New Delhi a bit too thin in the continental neighbourhood.

If India's global rise stems from the growth in



**Happymon Jacob**

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This dichotomy has profound implications for New Delhi's global aspirations

absolute power and the geopolitical choices made by the leading powers of the contemporary international system, India's regional decline is a product of the dynamics of comparative power, and geopolitical choices made by the region's smaller powers. To that extent, overlooking the balancing acts by the region's smaller powers to focus on the great power balancing might become counterproductive.

## The rise of China and what India must do

But the rise of China explains India's regional decline more than anything else. Today, India is more powerful than it has ever been in nearly two centuries. And, yet, it is, comparatively speaking, the weakest it has ever been in history *vis-à-vis* China. Paced with a rising superpower next door for the first time, India is facing stiff geopolitical competition for influence in South Asia. China's rise will, therefore, mean that India may no longer be the most consequential power in the region.

The arrival of China in South Asia, the withdrawal of the U.S. from the region, and India's tilt to the Indo-Pacific have shifted the regional balance of power in Beijing's favour. Sensing this new power equation, South Asia's smaller powers, India's neighbours, are engaged in a range of strategies: balancing, bargaining, hedging and bandwagoning. India's smaller neighbours seem to find China as a useful hedge against India, for the moment at least. It is also important to keep in mind that a great deal of this regional balancing results from shifts in the regional balance of power, not merely from insufficient Indian outreach to the neighbourhood.

While the presence of a rising superpower at its doorstep for the first time is at the heart of this paradox, the growing obsolescence of South Asia as a geopolitical construct adds to India's diminishing hold on the region. For India, meeting the challenge posed by this paradox is essential as China's rise in South Asia will mean that India may no longer be the most consequential power in the region.

To begin with, New Delhi must revisit some of its traditional conceptions of the region, 'modernise' its primacy in South Asia, and take proactive and imaginative policy steps to meet the China challenge in the region.

First of all, we must accept the reality that the region, the neighbours and the region's geopolitics have fundamentally changed over the decade-and-a-half at the least. Not willing to acknowledge there is a problem will only make matters worse.

Second, New Delhi must focus on its strengths rather than trying to match the might of the

People's Republic of China in every respect – the latter is a fool's errand. Fashioning a new engagement with the region that reflects India's traditional strengths and the region's changed realities is essential. Reclaiming the Buddhist heritage is one such example.

Third, India's continental strategy is replete with challenges whereas its maritime space has an abundance of opportunities for enhancing trade, joining multilaterals, and creating new issue-based coalitions, among others. New Delhi must, therefore, use its maritime (Indo-Pacific) advantages to cater to its many continental handicaps. Doing so could involve including India's smaller South Asian neighbours to the Indo-Pacific strategic conversations. Many of them are maritime states but not serious players within the Indo-Pacific project. India and its partners (the U.S., Japan, Australia, the European Union, and others) must find ways of engaging and partnering with Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Bangladesh as part of their larger Indo-Pacific strategy. In other words, New Delhi should try to wean them away from the China-led regional grand strategy by making them a key part of the Indo-Pacific grand strategy where India and its partners hold significant advantage over China.

Fourth, there is today an openness in New Delhi to view the region through a non-India centric lens. This also means that New Delhi is no longer uneasy about external powers in its neighbourhood as it used to be during the Cold War. As a consequence, there is a desire to join hands with external friendly partners both in the Indian Ocean and South Asia so as to deal with the region's common challenges. This openness in New Delhi, and the desire of the external actors to engage the region, must be utilised to address the difficulties arising out of New Delhi's regional decline.

## Tap soft power

Finally, New Delhi should make creative uses of its soft power to retain its influence in the region. One way to do that is to actively encourage informal contacts between political and civil society actors in India and those in other South Asian countries. For instance, there is a need to encourage informal and unofficial conflict management processes in the region especially when and where the Indian state is hesitant about being involved directly in a conflict – Myanmar is a case in point.

The dichotomy between India's global rise and regional decline has profound implications for India's global aspirations. It is a legitimate question to ask whether a country that is unable to maintain primacy in its periphery will be able to be a pivotal power in international politics.

## Category:

➤ GS-3

## Context:

- India is witnessing the simultaneous global rise and regional decline of its power.

## India's Global Rise vs. Regional Decline:

### Global Rise:

- India's growing absolute power, peer accommodation, and active participation in global institutions like the G-20 and multilateral groups such as the Quad showcase its increasing geopolitical significance on the global stage.
- Regional Decline: Despite its global rise, India's influence in South Asia is diminishing due to factors like comparative power loss vis-à-vis China, changes in South Asian geopolitics, and the rise of China's influence in the region.

### Impact of China's Rise:

- Shift in Regional Balance of Power: China's ascent in South Asia, coupled with the US withdrawal from the region and India's focus on the Indo-Pacific, has tilted the regional balance of power in Beijing's favor, prompting smaller South Asian powers to adopt strategies like balancing, bargaining, and hedging.
- Challenges for India: India must acknowledge the changing regional dynamics, focus on its strengths, and adopt proactive policies to counter China's influence in the region, including engaging in maritime opportunities, revisiting traditional conceptions of the region, and utilizing soft power diplomacy.

### Utilizing Soft Power and Adaptability:

- Soft Power Utilization: India should leverage its soft power through informal contacts and conflict management initiatives to retain influence in the region, fostering dialogue and cooperation among political and civil society actors across South Asia.
- Adaptability and External Partnerships: New Delhi's openness to engaging with external partners and viewing the region through a non-India centric lens provides opportunities for addressing regional challenges and maintaining influence despite the dichotomy between global rise and regional decline.

## Electronics, telecom, electrical products

# China, Hong Kong account for 56 pc of India's total imports

NEW DELHI, May 2: India's imports of electronics, telecom, and electrical products soared to USD 89.8 billion in 2023-24 and over half of these imports are sourced from China and Hong Kong, economic think tank GTRI said in its report.

China dominates with a commanding 43.9 per cent share of India's imports in electronics, telecom, and electrical sectors, the Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said.

The data highlights a deep-seated dependency on these two countries that has seen a dramatic escalation over the years, it added.

It said that reducing this dependency is crucial, not merely to boost economic resilience but to safeguard India's digital and technological sovereignty in a world that is becoming ever more interconnected.

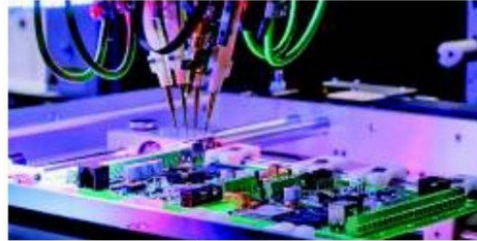
"These sectors are integral to the daily lives of millions, enhancing communication, commerce, and information access. However, India's heavy dependence on imports, especially from China, presents formidable challenges to the nation's strategic autonomy and economic security," the report said.

GTRI founder Ajay Srivastava said that this profound reliance on Chinese imports exposes severe vulnerabilities within India's supply chain and underscores the pressing necessity for strategic diversification of sources and enhancement of do-

mestic production capabilities.

In the electronics segment, the report said that integrated circuits have experienced a significant import growth from USD 166.1 million during 2007-2010 to USD 4.2 billion in 2020-2022.

These circuits are critical for powering a wide range of electronic devices, from com-



puters to smartphones, illustrating a deepening technological dependency on China, with their market share increasing from 19.2 per cent to 33.4 per cent.

Similarly, communication devices, including phones and other wireless devices, have also seen a significant increase in imports, rising to USD 3.691 billion with over half of the market now dominated by China.

"Diodes, transistors, and similar semiconductor devices have seen their imports skyrocket from USD 113.3 million to USD 2,334.8 million, with the Chinese market share jumping to 67.5 per cent, indicating a significant dependency on Chinese semiconductor technology," it said.

In the electrical sector, the report said that electric accumulators, including batteries for diverse applications, saw their imports surge from USD 254.2 million to USD 1.40 billion, with China securing a significant portion of this booming market for portable and renewable energy solutions.

Electric motors and generators have also witnessed

an uptick in imports.

The report suggested that to reduce reliance on China and cut imports, a comprehensive strategic approach is essential. This would involve both bolstering domestic manufacturing capabilities and diversifying import sources to mitigate risks and enhance technological sovereignty, it said.

With the imports of phones and other wireless communication devices reaching USD 3.69 billion, it is crucial for India to enhance its domestic manufacturing of these devices, he said, adding supporting local manufacturers through tax breaks, easier access to capital, and infrastructure development can help minimize dependency on Chinese components. – PTI

Pharma, digital trade, payment systems

# India, New Zealand look to boost collaboration

NEW DELHI, May 2: India and New Zealand are looking to increase collaboration in goods and services sectors like pharmaceuticals, digital trade, and cross-border payment systems to promote bilateral trade.

Issues to promote trade through these collaborations were discussed during the recent visit of Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal to New Zealand from April 26-27.

The commerce ministry said that huge potential is there in both economies to further promote bilateral trade. "The meetings reviewed progress on market access issues, economic cooperation projects and explored opportunities for new initiatives," it said. Both sides discussed the establishment of robust bilateral economic di-

alogue architecture and the creation of working groups in sectors like Agriculture, Food Processing, Storage and Transportation, Forestry and Pharmaceuticals to facilitate ongoing collaboration on key trade and economic issues.

Deliberations also included increasing cooperation in kiwi fruit as well as the dairy sector.

The meetings addressed bilateral trade matters of mutual interest, including issues related to market access, non-tariff barriers, and sanitary (human and animal health) and phytosanitary (plant health) measures on products like grapes, okra and mangoes.

Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA) in organic products, and simplified homologation, including through mutual recognition of comparable domestic

standards for vehicles, also figured in the discussions.

"Both parties reaffirmed their commitment to resolve these issues through constructive dialogue and cooperation," the ministry said.

Further, it said that collaboration in the areas of pharmaceuticals and medical devices was discussed at length, including the adoption of fast-tracking of regulatory processes and quality assessment of manufacturing facilities.

"Greater sourcing of medicines from India and cooperation in the medical device sector was also discussed," it said, adding that "both parties briefly explored opportunities for collaboration in digital trade, meeting nationally determined contributions, cross-border payment systems, among others". -PTI

# NPCI to develop UPI-like payment system for Namibia

NEW DELHI, May 2: NPCI on Thursday said its overseas arm has signed a pact with the Bank of Namibia (BoN) for developing a UPI-like instant payment system for Namibia.

By leveraging technology and experiences from India's UPI, the partnership seeks to help Namibia modernize its financial ecosystem. This includes improving accessibility, affordability and connectivity with both domestic and international payment networks, and interoperability.

NPCI International Payments Ltd (NIPL) has signed an agreement with the Bank of Namibia (BoN) to support them in developing an instant payment system like Unified Payment Interface (UPI) for

Namibia, a statement said.

This strategic partnership aims to enhance digital financial services and bolster real-time person-to-person (P2P) and merchant payment transactions (P2M) in the African nation.

Through this collaboration, BoN will gain access to best-in-class technology and insights from NIPL, enabling the creation of a similar platform in Namibia for the digital welfare of its citizens, the statement added.

NPCI International CEO Ritesh Shukla said, "By enabling this technology, the country will gain sovereignty in the digital payments landscape and stand to benefit from enhanced payment interoperability and im-

proved financial access for underserved populations."

Bank of Namibia Governor Johannes Gawaxab said, "Our objective is to enhance accessibility and affordability for underserved populations, achieve full interoperability of payment instruments by 2025, modernize the financial sector, and ensure a secure and efficient national payment system."

Once live, the platform will facilitate digital transactions in Namibia, driving financial inclusion and reducing cash dependency by catering to underserved populations. This collaborative effort seeks to offer essential and affordable financial services to all, with a particular focus on rural and informal sectors. – PTI



# ‘Illegal’ attempt to alter situation on ground, says India

NEW DELHI, May 2: India today said it has lodged a strong protest with China for carrying out construction activities in the **Shaksgam Valley** in an “illegal” attempt to alter the situation on the ground.

Spokesperson in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) Randhir Jaiswal said the **Shaksgam Valley** is a part of India and New Delhi never accepted the so-called China-Pakistan boundary pact of 1963 through which Islamabad “unlawfully” attempted to cede the area to Beijing.

He said India reserves the right to take necessary measures to safeguard the country’s interests.

Jaiswal’s comments at his weekly media briefing came in response to a question on reports of China building infrastructure in **Shaksgam Valley**, a strategically located region that is now part of the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

The Chinese construction activities in the region are taking place amid the over three-and-a-half-year-old



border row between India and China in eastern Ladakh.

“The **Shaksgam Valley** is a part of the territory of India. We have never accepted the so-called China-Pakistan boundary agreement of 1963 through which Pakistan unlawfully attempted to cede the area to China,” Jaiswal said.

“We have consistently conveyed our rejection of

## China’s construction activities in Shaksgam Valley

the same. We have registered our protest with the Chinese side against illegal attempts to alter facts on the ground,” he said.

“We further reserve the right to take necessary measures to safeguard our interests,” he added. Jaiswal said India has always taken a “very strong” stand on the **Shaksgam Valley**.

“**Shaksgam Valley** is our territory. We have been protesting as and when required and we have always taken a very strong stand on it,” he said.

Asked about the lingering

eastern Ladakh border row, Jaiswal said the next round of talks will be held “very soon to take things forward”.

“We have ongoing talks between India and China at diplomatic and military levels. These issues are serious and therefore they take time,” he said.

“We will have next round of engagement very soon to take things forward,” the MEA spokesperson added.

The Indian and Chinese troops are locked in a stand-off in certain friction points in eastern Ladakh even as the two sides completed disengagement from several areas following extensive diplomatic and military talks.

India has been maintaining that its ties with China cannot be normal unless there is peace in the border areas.

The last round of military talks between the two sides had taken place in February. In the talks, both sides agreed to maintain “peace and tranquillity” on the ground but there was no indication of any breakthrough. – PTI

# NABARD, IKSL collaborate to aid small tea growers in Nagaon dist

## CORRESPONDENT

NAGAON, May 2: As a part of its developmental initiative and to disseminate the utility of Artificial Intelligence (AI) as well as other technological advancements in the agri-horticulture sector, NABARD has been implementing various pilot projects across the country. Continuing the tradition, NABARD Assam, in collaboration with IFFCO Kisan Suvidha Ltd (IKSL), has initiated a unique project titled 'Climate Resilient Tea Cultivation and AI-based Pest Management for Small Tea Growers (STGs)'.

The beneficiaries of this pilot project will be the 64 STGs under Sewjyoti Tea

Federation located at Chapanalala under Barham-pur development block in Nagaon district.

In this connection, an interactive awareness cum sensitization meet with the STGs was organised here recently. During the meet, Suraj Kumar Sinha from the agriculture business services wing of IKSL made a detailed presentation regarding the utility of various equipment like automated wireless weather stations, soil moisture sensors, smart ravagers, pest vision with image recognition, etc., which will be installed in the tea gardens of the identified beneficiaries.

He informed the participants that geo-fencing of the



farm land of all the 64 STGs will be undertaken in the pilot project so that they can receive voice messages at regular intervals based on the satellite images of the fields, tea leaves, soil moisture, weather conditions, etc. He also informed the participants that it will be a

first-of-its-kind pilot project across India.

Speaking on the occasion, DDM of NABARD Rajendar Perna informed that NABARD has been supporting the implementation of similar projects like integrated watershed development with climate proofing interventions (IWDCPIs), integrated tribal development programmes (ITDPs), UPN-RM and climate change projects, etc., across India.

The secretary of Sewjyoti Tea Federation, Sanjeeb Bora, offered the vote of thanks and expressed gratitude to NABARD and IKSL for sanctioning the pilot project for the development and betterment of the STGs, stated a press note received here.

FRIDAY, MAY 3, 2024

**NORTH**

## 1st phase of deportation of Myanmar nationals completed in Manipur

SOBHAPATI SAMOM

IMPHAL, May 2: The first phase of deportation of illegal immigrants from Myanmar was completed in Manipur on Thursday with the exit of 38 persons belonging to the neighbouring country via Moreh, a border town.

Sharing photographs of the formal deportation of illegal immigrants on X, Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh wrote, "Without any discrimination, we have completed the first phase of deportation of illegal immigrants from Myanmar with 38 more immigrants leaving Manipur, India today through Moreh. A total of 77 illegal immigrants have been deported in the first phase."

One Indian national was also brought back from Myanmar during a handover ceremony.

Meanwhile, the Manipur Government is continuing the process of identification of illegal immigrants, along with recording of biometric data. "Let us keep our borders and

### AT A GLANCE

6,746 refugees detected in Manipur between May 3, 2023 and Feb 27, 2024

A total of 77 illegal immigrants had been sent off from State in first phase

Process on to identify and record biometric data of refugees



**Exit:** Illegal immigrants from Myanmar being deported from border town Moreh in Manipur on Thursday. – Photo: Correspondent

country secure," the Chief Minister added.

In March this year, seven Myanmar nationals, including women, were airlifted from

the Imphal airport to Moreh in Tengnoupal district bordering Myanmar.

In the last State Assembly session, the Chief Minister, in

reply to a question, stated that the presence of 6,746 Myanmar nationals was detected in the State from May 3 last year till February 27 this year.

## Muddled melancholy

RITURAJ BARUAH

*The number of unemployed youths is increasing every passing year. India cannot create jobs for all of them. Consequently, a question arises: What should be done with this surplus of young individuals?*

The revelation that the country's political parties have garnered over Rs 14,000 crore in donations from corporates over the past five years left us in awe. This money is claimed to be legitimate, but we are not sure if there is any illegitimate part as well. Given the bonhomie between the political parties and corporates in India, one cannot help but wonder if this is only the tip of the iceberg.

Be that as it may, political parties require these funds to either retain their power or seize it from others. They need huge amounts of money to participate in elections annually in different locations, lure elected members of other parties to come to their fold, dispatch elected members to remote locations to prevent defection, and also to mobilize individuals on the ground to manage activities like poll campaigning, advertising, public relations, managing IT cells, media cells, and financing the party workers. This not only enhances business growth but also generates employment opportunities for a multitude of people, directly or indirectly, leading to an increase in their purchasing power and benefiting the economy. It can be viewed as an industry. So, here is a point to ponder: Will it be prudent to reduce the frequency of elections to once every five years? Earnings will suffer for many businesses and individuals, impacting the overall economy.

Conversely, by donating to political parties, entrepreneurs secure licences to establish and operate businesses, thereby creating employment opportunities and contributing to the overall economy. Yes, the cost of production or services rises due to these donations, which are passed on to the general consumers. Yet, these

dynamics are considered to be inherent components of a democratic and capitalist system.

The Income Tax department recently discovered that about 10,000 corporate employees were making false claims for tax benefits on house rent allowances using the same PAN for multiple claims. Although this revelation is disconcerting, it is not entirely surprising; corruption has become deeply entrenched in our society and culture.

In our country, only 2.2 per cent of the electorate pay income tax, whereas the figures in countries like France, Germany and the United Kingdom stand at 78.3 per cent, 61.3 per cent, and 59.9 per cent, respectively. While these corporate executives in question fall under the tax-paying category, it raises concerns about the remaining 97.8 per cent who do not contribute to the tax system at all. We take pride in being the fifth-largest economy, yet this fact highlights the glaring wealth disparity in our nation.

India's vast population makes it a lucrative market, attracting businesses from all over the world. Salesmen naturally gravitate towards areas with high footfall. With India's vast population, it is not surprising that foreign companies are setting up offices in our country to sell their products and services and establishing manufacturing facilities in order to reap the benefits of cheap labour. However, do we want to bracket ourselves with Vietnam, Bangladesh, Indonesia, etc? One can well imagine the fate of others when IIT graduates are offered CTC in the range of Rs 3.6 lakh to Rs 10 lakh. We are targeting to dethrone the top economies like Japan and Germany immediately to dominate the world econo-

my. If it is so, we must veer away from the narrative of being a hub for cheap labour to prevent further widening of the wealth gap. We need to strive to make our country a developed one as well.

We know Finland is the happiest country in the world; it has been on top for the last six years in various surveys. While examining, it was found that one of the key reasons behind this achievement is the minimal wealth gap within that country. Even those at the lower end of the economic spectrum can comfortably access top-quality products and services. And where are we? That is why our happiness ranking is 136 out of 146 countries.

Our economy is doing very well. It has already become the fifth-largest economy in the world, trailing only the United States, China, Germany, and Japan in terms of gross domestic product (GDP). It is projected to ascend to the third position within a few years. On the other hand, the country is faced with a huge challenge in the form of a large pool of unemployed youngsters. Many perceive this as a demographic dividend yet to be harnessed. Experts warn that if we fail to utilise this potential workforce now, it will gradually become a burden on our society.

It is a peculiar situation. We have been actively involved in the process of capturing the world economy, while a substantial portion of its youth remains idle, indicating that this surplus of young individuals is not required in the current scheme of things. A hysteria is created over the fact that these youngsters do not possess the necessary skills demanded by the country's industries. However, the hard truth is that they are not needed at all, regardless of their skill set. With-

out a sufficient number of skilled human resources, the country's economy would not have achieved such remarkable heights. Industries are rapidly moving to automation, with artificial intelligence (AI) playing a major role in it. Moreover, they are resorting to extended working hours and clubbing roles for their existing workforce, thus minimising the demand for human resources. The number of unemployed youths is increasing every passing year. India cannot create jobs for all of them. Consequently, a question arises: What should be done with this surplus of young individuals? They have already become a source of concern for the Prime Minister, as the Opposition parties seize every opportunity to corner the government.

It is a common practice to make use of surplus resources in areas where there is a deficit – if not within our country, then in other countries. This is the only way out. Numerous developed nations are grappling with a shortage of labour due to factors such as an ageing population, a lack of necessary skills, or high local labour costs. Countries like Japan, Israel, Taiwan, Russia, the US, the UK, and various European countries are prime examples. India should capitalize on this situation. Israel and Taiwan have already issued requisitions. The Government of India must explore these possibilities to enter into agreements with different countries for the supply of manpower and groom the identified categories by imparting the basic skills required for each country.

We are optimistic that the new government to be installed shortly will pull us out of this melancholy and take us down the path of happiness.

## Grave issue

Almost hundred schools across Delhi-NCR received bomb threats via email on Wednesday morning, inducing them to close for the day and the Delhi Police to send bomb squads and conduct thorough searches in each of the institutions. Since nothing was found, the authorities have concluded that the bomb threats were hoaxes and requested people not to panic. However, far from being merely the handiwork of pranksters, there appears to be graver dimensions to the episode, thus the police have rightly responded with appropriate measures. Immediately after the bomb threats, the Special Cell of Delhi Police has registered an FIR against unknown people under section 120B, 506 of IPC. The authorities have also announced a thorough probe to be done by the Counter Intelligence Team Special Cell, which has already formed a dedicated team to investigate this grave issue. Given the fact that the preliminary examinations have raised the suspicion of a conspiracy at an international level, it is heartening to learn that the episode is being taken seriously. Reportedly, the investigators have discovered that the email ID from which the Delhi NCR schools were sent the bomb threat letter is sawariim@mail.ru. 'Sawariim' (clashing of the swords) is an Arabic word, which has been used by the Islamic State (IS) to spread Islamist propaganda, thus imparting a sinister motive to the actions of the unknown elements that sent the email!

Though the email address used for the mails had a Russian domain, it is not yet certain whether the email originated from that country. Also, reportedly, the counter-terrorism team is probing the possibility of a joint conspiracy between the ISI and China, the motive being to spread panic in India's capital at a time when the nation is in the midst of a general election. Hopefully, with the tools in their command, the team would be able to establish the nefarious force or forces behind this hoax and take appropriate action to neutralize their insidious designs. However, such an episode has once again revealed how easy it has become, in this internet era which has witnessed such rapid advances in communication technology, for hostile elements to engage in nefarious acts. Whether it be computer-savvy cheats who are constantly on the lookout for opportunities to deprive people of their hard-earned money through fake mails or links, or hackers attempting to purloin sensitive data from organizational networks, technological advances have made contemporary society increasingly vulnerable to heinous malpractices. The sole antidote for the common citizens seems to be to remain vigilant against the wiles of such cheats and scamsters and the related agencies like banking institutions to educate them. As for the country, considering that it has numerous enemies, constant vigilance is the price of national security, and cooperation between inter-governmental agencies in order to thwart their designs.

Which town received Zonal Clean City Awards in Swachh Survekshan in population category between 15,000-25,000 and less than 15000

- A. Jorhat and Mohanpur
- B. Dibrugarh and Lunglei
- C. Nagaon and Lakhimpur
- D. Golaghat and Jiribam

**Solution: Correct Answer D**

The cities which stood out in the Zonal Clean City Awards include **Golaghat**, with a population between 15,000-25,000 (Golaghat in Assam) **Jiribam** with a population of less than 15,000 (Jiribam in Manipur), **Lunglei** with a population between 50,000 to 1,00,000 (Lunglei in Mizoram), **Mohanpur** with less than 1,00,000 population (Mohanpur in Tripura)



Find this missing character:

4	3	2
6	9	10
9	27	?

- A. 30
- B. 20
- C. 50
- D. 54

**Correct Answer: C.**

- In the first column,  $4 \times 9 = 36 = 6^2$
- In the second column,  $3 \times 27 = 81 = 9^2$
- Therefore, in the third column, the multiplication of 2 and the missing number (say Y) is equal to the square of 10 =  $10^2 = 100$
- Hence,  $Y = \frac{100}{2} = 50$