

# India to surpass China as most populous nation in '23: UN

India has opportunity to benefit from demographic dividend with nearly half of population below 25, say experts

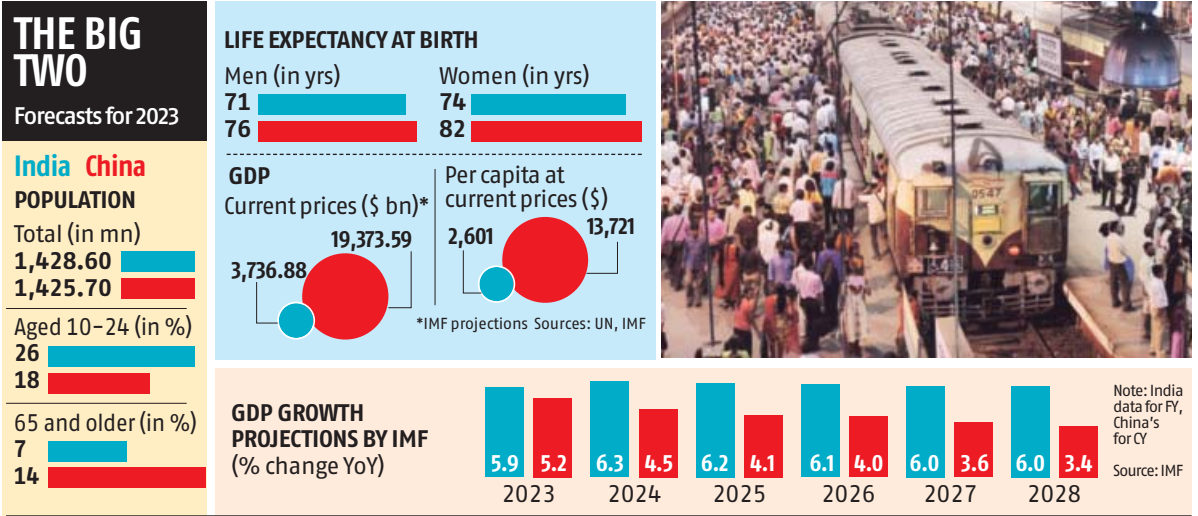
ASIT RANJAN MISHRA  
New Delhi, 19 April

India is set to become the most populous country in the world with 1.429 billion people by the middle of 2023, surpassing China at 1.426 billion, according to the latest report released by the United Nations (UN) Population Fund (formerly United Nations Fund for Population Activities, or UNFPA).

This is nearly 3 million more than its neighbour. The Asian nations have accounted for more than a third of the global population for over 70 years.

For statistical purposes, the data for China does not include Hong Kong and Macao, the Special Administrative Regions of China, and the Taiwan Province of China, the State of World Population report said.

However, China stands ahead of India on most socio-economic parameters. While the life expectancy at birth of women in India is 74 years, in China it stands at 82 years.



Similarly, the per capita income of China is projected to be 5x India's (\$2,601) in 2023 by the International Monetary Fund.

With close to 50 per cent of its population below the age of 25, India has a time-bound opportunity to benefit from the demographic

dividend, Andrea Wojnar, Representative of UNFPA India, said. "As the national fertility rate falls below 2.1 (the replacement level), India

is at a unique historical opportunity, witnessing a great demographic transition as a youthful nation, with a notable demographic diversity across states to convert the potential demographic dividend into economic benefits through additional investments in health, education, and quality jobs for young people — including targeted investments in women and girls," she said.

"India's demographic dividend can be further secured by incorporating the impact of megatrends such as climate change, urbanisation, migration, and ageing into policy initiatives," she added. Without the decadal Census of 2021, India lacks accurate estimates of its population.

According to report of the technical group of population projections under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare submitted in July 2020, India's total population was expected to be 1.388 billion in 2023 based on 2011 Census data.

# India...

“The youth population in the age group 15-24 years is expected to increase from 233 million in 2011 to 251 million in 2021 and then continue to decrease to 229 million in 2036. Its proportion to total population is expected to fall from 19.3 per cent in 2011 to 15.1 per cent in 2036,” it had said. Santosh Mehrotra, visiting professor, Centre for Development Studies, University of Bath (UK), said China’s demographic dividend is over but it rode the wave of its demographic dividend and grew fast.

But we are consistently not able to do that. We have not only made economic policy mistakes but social policy mistakes as well, with health and education remaining as neglected as ever,” he added.

However, China on Wednesday sought to downplay India overtaking it as the world’s most populous nation, saying it still has a “quality” workforce of close to 900 million people to provide strong impetus to development.

When assessing a country’s demographic dividend, we need to look at not just the size but also the quality of its population. Size matters, but what

## ■ INDIA ■ CHINA

### Population

Total fertility rate per woman

INDIA	2
CHINA	1.2

### Concerns over possible changes to India's population (in %)

Economic	63
Environmental	46
Sexual and reproductive health policies and human rights	30
Conflict and tensions	20

Source: UN survey

matters more is talent resources. Nearly 900 million of the 1.4 billion Chinese are of working age and on average have received 10.9 years of education,” Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin told reporters in a media briefing in Beijing.

Mehrotra said India’s economic growth has slowed at a time when more and more young people are joining the labour force.

We need to have an explicit cross-sectoral industrial policy, not production-linked incentive schemes confined to 13 sectors. We have to generate jobs in the micro, small and medium enterprises, while big companies are not investing to generate organised jobs,” he added.

(With inputs from PTI)