

India’s population will pass China’s soon, but when exactly?

By Mike Schneider and Sibi Arasu
The Associated Press

India should surpass China’s population midway through this year, according to the latest projection from the United Nations.

That’s of course unless it’s happened already — or happens later in the year.

Demographers are unsure exactly when India will take the title as the most populous nation in the world because they’re relying on estimates to make their best guess. The latest projection from the United Nations in April put it at midyear, though that remains an estimate.

China has had the most people in the world since at least 1950, the year United Nations population data began. Both China and India have more than 1.4 billion people, and combined they make up more than a third of the world’s 8 billion people.

“Actually, there is no way we can know exactly when India will surpass China,” said Bruno Schoumaker, a demographer at Université catholique de Louvain in Belgium. “There is some uncertainty, not only about India’s population, but also China’s population.”

Still, when is it happening?

The U.N. said in a report in mid-April that India will have about 2.9 billion people more than China sometime in the middle of this year — an estimated 1.4286 billion for India, 1.4257 billion for mainland China. But demographers have said the limits of population data make it impossible to calculate an exact date.

Mathematical calculations are made from data including a range of surveys, as well as birth and death records.

“It’s a crude approximation, a best guess,” said Patrick Gerland, chief of the population estimates and projections section at the U.N. in New York.

Not long ago, India wasn’t expected to become most populous until later this



POPULATION PROJECTION. People eat street food as shoppers crowd a market in New Delhi, India, in this November 12, 2022 file photo. India should surpass China’s population midway through this year, according to the latest projection from the United Nations. That’s of course unless it’s happened already — or happens later in the year. Demographers are unsure exactly when India will take the title as the most populous nation in the world because they’re relying on estimates to make their best guess. (AP Photo/Altat Qadri, File)

government seven years ago retreated from a one-child policy, and just two years ago said couples could have three children.

India has a much younger population, a higher fertility rate, and a decrease in infant mortality over the last three decades.

India has more babies born each year than in any other country, while China has joined many European countries in having more deaths each year than births, said Dudley Poston, Jr., an emeritus professor of sociology at Texas A&M University.

Why does this matter?

There’s more than bragging rights at stake over which nation is the world’s most populous — there are social and economic consequences. In India, that means a growing labor force and growth that sparks economic activity. In China, that means fewer working-age adults able to support an aging population.

Once a country hits a low fertility level, it’s often hard to recover population growth, even with changes in government policy to encourage more births, said Toshiko Kaneda, technical director of demographic research at the Population Reference Bureau in Washington.

“Psychologically, it will be tough for China, especially given the rivalry in other areas between the two countries,” Gietel-Basten said. “It is a big moment in human history as the baton is passed to India.”

Arasu reported from Bengaluru, India.
Schneider reported from Orlando, Florida.

decade. But the timing has been sped up by a drop in China’s fertility rate, with families having fewer children.

How is it calculated?

Demographers at the U.N. Population Division make estimates based on projections from a wide variety of data sources to get what they believe are the most up-to-date demographic numbers. The last update to the data used for these calculations for both India and China was July 2022, said Sara Hertog, a U.N. population affairs officer in New York.

The demographers then use a statistical technique to infer when India’s population has surpassed that of China, according to Stuart Gietel-Basten, a professor at Khalifa University of Science and Technology in Abu Dhabi.

“The reality, of course, is that these estimates are just that,” Gietel-Basten said. “But at least they are based on a relatively solid and consistent methodology.”

Where do the numbers come from?

The foundations of both nations’ numbers are censuses, or head counts, conducted every decade.

China’s last census was in 2020. Demographers used birth and death records, along with other administrative data, to calculate how the population has grown since then.

India’s last census was in 2011. Its scheduled 2021 census was postponed by COVID-19. Without an actual door-to-door count for more than a decade, sample surveys have filled in the gaps to help demographers and India itself understand its population, said Alok Vajpeyi of the New Delhi-based non-government organization, Population Foundation of India.

Among the most important is the Sample Registration System, India’s large-scale demographic survey that gathers data on such things as births, deaths, fertility, and more.

Andrea Wojnar, the United Nations Population Fund’s representative for India, said the agency is confident in the survey’s numbers “because it uses a very robust methodology.”

Why is India moving ahead?

China has an aging population with stagnant growth even after the

In India, mangrove trees make way for booming city of Kochi

Continued from page 2

planet-warming carbon dioxide out of the air, Varghese explained, effluents and pollutants in the soil hamper how good of a sink for carbon the soil can be.

With record amounts of carbon dioxide being pumped into the air by human activity, maintaining ecosystems like mangrove forests can counteract some of the harms of

warming.

The potential of the forest to store carbon “is actually in the state of deterioration,” said Varghese.

A. Anil Kumar, who’s mayor of the city’s administrative body, the Kochi Corporation, said while they cannot do anything about wastewater runoff immediately, the area will continue to be studied.

In the meantime, property companies use what’s left of the squeezed forests as a selling point for extravagant homes and office buildings in the area.

Signs outside new developments boast about their luxury apartments’ untouched green views from properties’ multiple balconies. Long, plastic advertising boards line nearby roads with images of thick forests.

The apartments give residents spectacular sights of backwaters merging with the Arabian Sea and, for a premium, Mangalavanam’s last green stronghold in the form of the bird sanctuary, which is surrounded by construction and scaffolding.

K. Krishnankutty, a nearby resident, comes for a morning walk every day on the surrounding road, where mangrove branches hang overhead, lining wide pavements. He said he loves the shade and chirping birds but laments how much the lush space has slimmed in recent years.

“All around this Mangalavanam used to be open with no tall buildings,” Krishnankutty said. “So many migratory birds used to come here. Now we cannot see any as the buildings cover up this area.”

Experts fear the loss of Kerala’s forests could worsen in

the coming years.

Some 75% of the remaining mangroves across Kerala are in the hands of private individuals and could be cleared for more lucrative intensive shrimp farming, said M. Ramit, a program officer for the Wildlife Trust of India, who is working on a project to restore mangroves in Kannur, a coastal district in northern Kerala.

“The Kerala government had earlier devised a plan to acquire the mangrove land from private individuals in order to conserve them,” Ramit said, but “somehow, the plan was later dropped.”

But Kerala’s state department of environment and climate change contested the claims and said there is no threat to the existing mangrove forests, regardless of ownership, as the forests are protected by state laws.

Varghese, the Kerala University researcher, said there’s still hope that the trend of mangrove loss can be reversed and the forest ecosystem can function normally in the near future.

“If we stop the adverse human interventions in the sanctuary and divert the drainage from Mangalavanam, in another 10 years we could regain all the potential benefits of the mangrove ecosystem,” Varghese said.

With the right measures, she said, communities can “turn it around as a good carbon sink.”

Editor’s note: This article is part of a series produced under the India Climate Journalism Program, a collaboration between The Associated Press, the Stanley Center for Peace and Security, and the Press Trust of India.

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		5	1	6	2			
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Difficulty level: Hard

#49534

Instructions: Fill in the grid so that the digits 1 through 9 appear one time each in every row, column, and 3x3 box.

Solution to last issue’s puzzle

Puzzle #96553 (Medium)

All solutions available at <www.sudoku.com>.

7	1	4	9	3	8	6	5	2
5	6	8	1	7	2	9	4	3
3	2	9	4	6	5	1	8	7
2	9	1	3	5	7	8	6	4
4	8	3	6	2	1	7	9	5
6	5	7	8	9	4	2	3	1
1	3	6	7	4	9	5	2	8
8	4	2	5	1	6	3	7	9
9	7	5	2	8	3	4	1	6

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