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Page-1**Centre brings
in new norms
for covering
crop loss**

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Union Agriculture Ministry on Tuesday recognised the modalities for covering crop loss due to wild animal attacks and paddy inundation under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana. Farmers' groups have been demanding that the government compensate for both types of crop loss.

The Ministry said crop loss due to wild animal attacks would now be recognised as the fifth 'Add-on Cover' under the 'Localised Risk' category. "States will notify the list of wild animals responsible for crop damage and identify vulnerable districts or insurance units based on historical data. Farmers will be required to report losses within 72 hours using the Crop Insurance app by uploading geotagged photographs," it said. The new norms will be in force from the 2026 kharif season.

"This coverage is expected to significantly benefit farmers in States with high human-wildlife conflict, including Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand, and the north-eastern States," the Ministry said.



Indonesian Defence Minister to visit Delhi for talks on BrahMos

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

Indonesian Defence Minister Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin is scheduled to visit India in the last week of November for a bilateral meeting with Defence Minister Rajnath Singh in New Delhi.

The meeting is being viewed as a significant follow-up to the major defence agreement involving the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile, marking an important step forward in India's expanding defence export programme.

A senior defence official confirmed that the upcoming talks hold considerable importance, coming after a series of meetings and reciprocal visits by senior military officials from both nations. Indonesia has shown strong interest in procuring the BrahMos missile system.

The development came to light after Defence Minister Rajnath Singh recently revealed in Lucknow that Indonesia had formally placed a request for the purchase of the BrahMos system being manufactured at the new BrahMos Aerospace facility in the city.

On October 18, Mr. Singh and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath flagged off the first batch of



Sjafrie Sjamsoeddin

BrahMos missiles produced at the Lucknow unit. Officials noted that the Indonesia deal would be a major milestone for India's defence exports, showcasing the country's capability to supply combat-proven indigenous weapons.

Earlier, Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan met Minister Sjamsoeddin in Jakarta to discuss expanding bilateral defence cooperation.

'Global confidence'

Defence experts said BrahMos missiles used during Operation Sindoor to strike Pakistani airbases with full accuracy have enhanced global confidence in India's defence manufacturing.

The BrahMos missile has a range of over 290 km with a speed of Mach 2.8. It was jointly developed by India's Defence Research and Development Organisation, and Russia's NPO Mashinostroyeniya.

Excessive dependence

A structural shift in India's trade portfolio is essential

India's record goods trade deficit in October (\$41.68 billion) follows a sequential build-up from September (\$32.15 billion), reflecting a disturbing turn in its external trade landscape. The shock from the U.S.'s tariffs has been largely responsible – a full 50% levy that came into effect in August – at a time when the U.S. had become India's largest single export market (since about 2018-19). But the main cause of the 11.8% year-on-year (YoY) drop in goods exports to \$34.38 billion (\$38.96 billion in October 2024) and the precipitous rise in imports lies in a record surge in precious metal inflows. Gold imports nearly tripled from last October (\$4.32 billion) and inbound silver rose more than fivefold. This suggests that the bullion surge is not merely seasonal but also a hedge against growing economic uncertainty. The rupee's weakening from about \$55.6 to a dollar in April to around \$88.4 to a dollar in October, and the net foreign portfolio outflow in September (leading into a recovery in October) further corroborate the hedging. What is troubling about October's merchandise data is the steep fall in exports of labour-intensive sectors such as textiles and apparel – cotton yarn and handlooms 13.3%; man-made yarn 11.75%; readymade garments 12.88%, and engineering goods 16.77%. The U.S. has been the largest market for these sectors for some years now. Overall exports to the U.S. declined by 9% YoY in October.

The import surge in goods value is partly explained by the depreciating rupee but also strongly suggests the increased use of cheaper imported intermediate goods to keep finished exports competitive, rather than domestic sourcing. The detailed HS-chapter breakdown of imports by commodity and source country will elucidate this further. Meanwhile, the Centre has stepped in with export-promotion initiatives, for \$25,000 crore over six years, and the Reserve Bank of India has announced relief measures for exporters hit by tariff headwinds. Nonetheless, it is too early to conclude that this shift is structural rather than an immediate reaction to a major external shock. Rerouting of exports, new market access and supply-chain realignment take months if not years. The record October deficit may yet prove to be a blip, particularly if the India-U.S. Bilateral Trade Agreement is concluded swiftly and tariffs are rolled back. The steep drop in Russian imports (27.2%) and a concurrent rise in U.S. imports (32.89%), suggest an attempt to assuage American concerns of a widening trade deficit, and to reduce Russian crude inflows. Even if the overall deficit persists, despite a thaw in U.S. relations, that would only point to a structural shift in India's trade portfolio. While painful in the short term, such a shift may ultimately be desirable, as India's heavy dependence on the U.S. export market has now exposed it to both diplomatic and economic vulnerability.





Centre launches updated plan to curb misuse of antibiotics

Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) is a major public health concern and poses significant risks, particularly in surgical procedures, cancer treatment, and other healthcare interventions. It can be addressed only through collective action, Union Health Minister J. P. Nadda said on Tuesday at the launch of the second version of the National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance (NAP-AMR) (2025-29). "Overuse and misuse of antibiotics have become common, and NAP-AMR 2.0 aims to identify earlier gaps by increasing the ownership of AMR-related efforts, improving inter-sectoral coordination and ensuring stronger engagement with the private sector," he said.

Over 100 Indian universities make it to QS sustainability rankings

Abhinav Lakshman
NEW DELHI

The London-based QS Quacquarelli Symonds on Tuesday released its QS World University Rankings for Sustainability 2026, showing that India, with 103 universities, had the fourth-highest number of institutions in the list, behind the United States, China, and the United Kingdom.

The QS sustainability rankings, established in 2023, assess institutions across environmental and social sustainability categories such as environmental impact, social impact, and governance. These include indicators covering environmental research, sustainability, and education, along with equality, employability, knowledge exchange, and health and wellbeing.

Report card

India, with 103 universities, has the fourth-highest number of institutions on the list, behind the U.S., China, and the U.K.

- **Total Institutions Ranked:** ~2,000 from 100+ locations
- **Top university globally:** Lund University (Sweden)

TOP PERFORMERS IN INDIA

- **IIT Delhi:** 93rd in Employability & Outcomes
- **IIT Kharagpur:** 96th in Employability & Outcomes
- **Delhi University:** 94th in Knowledge Exchange



The rankings released on Tuesday showed institutions from the U.K., Canada, Sweden, and the U.S. dominating the top 15, with Lund University in Sweden taking the top position. This year's edition features close to 2,000 institutions from over 100 locations worldwide.

Of the 103 Indian universities featured, the Indian Institute of Technology,

Delhi was the best performing, placed at 205. Overall, QS noted that India had 12 universities in the top 500, matching the number for countries such as China and the Netherlands.

While this is IIT, Delhi's highest position in the sustainability rankings since their inception, it is lower in relative terms compared to its performance last year, when around 1,700

institutions were ranked. Among the top 15 Indian universities in this year's sustainability rankings, nine saw their positions drop from the previous year's. These included Jadavpur University, IIT, Kanpur, IIT, Madras, the Indian Institute of Science, and others.

Across the 103 Indian institutions ranked, 30 saw their positions decline, 32 improved, and 15 remained unchanged. At the indicator level, IIT, Delhi (93rd) and IIT, Kharagpur (96th) made it to the top 100 globally for Employability and Outcomes. The University of Delhi entered the top 100 for Knowledge Exchange, at 94.

In a statement, Jessica Turner, CEO of QS, said "Overall, Indian universities excel in knowledge exchange and environmental sustainability."



Time to sort out India's cereal mess

The recent controversy in Tamil Nadu over paddy procurement during the short-term *kuruvai* season has only strengthened the need for a relook at the procurement system of foodgrains as a whole. In this case – as in many States – the Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation (TNCS), which procures paddy on behalf of the Food Corporation of India (FCI), found itself in a spot because of time overruns and charges of corruption. One of the reasons cited is the rise in the coverage of the crop during the season, by about two lakh acres, which was known as early as mid-August. This is because farmers feel it is a safe bet to grow paddy rather than other crops due to minimum assured returns.

Paddy procurement data

The glut is not restricted to Tamil Nadu. Going by the data of the Union Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, the procurement of paddy (in terms of rice) all over the country was nearly 119.86 lakh tonnes as on October 31, 2025 compared to 82.08 lakh tonnes on the corresponding day last year. In the last three years, with regard to rice and wheat, the quarterly opening stock position, as on October 1, was consistently higher than what is prescribed under the norms for the central pool. In the case of rice, the quantity is at least two times more than the requirement. In October this year, the stock was 356.1 lakh tonnes against the norm of 102.5 lakh tonnes.

Compared to wheat, rice is still abundant, if one goes by the Union government's data for the last three years on procurement and offtake under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) and other schemes. Between April 2022 and March 2025, the procurement of rice at the all-India level hovered around 525 lakh tonnes-547 lakh tonnes every year, whereas annual offtake under the Public Distribution System (PDS) was in the range of 392 lakh tonnes- 427 lakh tonnes.

Significantly, in the case of wheat, the utilisation under the PDS exceeded the quantity of procurement in two of the last three years (barring 2024-25). At the same time, it must be noted that the Union government spends around ₹2 lakh crore every year in food subsidy.

While, on the one hand, the country is grappling with surplus stocks of rice, on the other it is incurring a huge expenditure in the import of



T. Ramakrishnan

It is a case of paradoxes – India has huge stocks of rice, and also imports large quantities of pulses and oilseeds despite being one of the world's largest producers

pulses and oilseeds, which are two essential commodities that are central in every Indian household. Ironically, in the case of pulses, India is the largest producer in the world – 252.4 lakh tonnes in 2024-25. The two years, from 2023-24, saw a substantial fall in the procurement of notified pulses at minimum support prices (MSP) through agencies which included the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India.

Edible oil imports

According to the annual report of the Union Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers Welfare for 2024-25, the country imported edible oil (₹1.2 lakh crore) and pulses (₹30,000 crore) during 2023-24. In the case of edible oil, about 55% of the demand is met only through imports. Needless to say, the Russia-Ukraine war, which began in February 2022, is a factor that contributed to the steep rise in the cost of edible oil imports which was around ₹82,000 crore in 2020-21, though the quantity imported remained between 135 lakh tonnes-157 lakh tonnes a year in the last six years.

Ironically, the country's production of oilseeds, since 2014, crossed the 400-lakh-tonne mark only once, despite there being no large change in the area covered, which was around 25 million hectares. For about 25 years, experts and the media have been holding the government's decision in the 1990s to allow the import of cheaper edible oil responsible for the adverse effect on domestic production. Yet, the response to counter the impact has not been adequate.

The situation raises a fundamental question: whether the country, in the name of ensuring food security, is following a sustainable policy of procurement at least with regard to rice. It also raises other pertinent questions. Is paddy cultivation being encouraged at the cost of crop rotation? Also, why is it that the country's efforts to improve pulse and oilseed production have not been spectacular unlike in the case of paddy and wheat about 55 years ago? And, should India continue to have the existing arrangement of one or the other central agency in the procurement, storage, transportation and allocation of foodgrains in bulk to the States?

The authorities may protest, if any study is conducted with regard to leakage in the PDS (which was originally meant for managing food supplies during scarcity), as they did about a year

ago when an Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER) report had stated that there was about a 28% loss of rice and wheat during distribution. It is also well known that the system is far from perfect.

Incentivise crop diversification

To wean paddy-growing farmers from the cereal, crop diversification can be tried out after carrying out area-specific market studies of demand and supply with the involvement of every stakeholder. One reason why farmers have not taken to diversification in a big way is uncertainty about success if there is a crop switch. Their apprehension can be allayed only by offering financial support and proper guidance. As it is clear that the country is producing more rice than required, the government should allow farmers to freely export rice and not resort to restrictions in a knee-jerk manner.

Many a time, primary procurers of agricultural products are in the dark about the suppliers. For instance, *papad* manufacturers getting to tie-up directly with farmers who raise blackgram or have the means to do so, will result in a win-win situation for both. If such farmers are able to organise themselves as farmers producers' organisations (FPOs), the results will be more durable. The Centre and the States can facilitate such an arrangement.

As an institution, FPOs are still in a nascent stage. Their services can be tapped by the authorities for a range of purposes – educating farmers about soil health; sensitising them to go in for crop diversification; preparing the groundwork for market studies, and establishing the supply chain.

As in West Bengal, FPOs can be utilised for paddy procurement to reduce the load on existing players. Self-help groups and cooperative societies should also be encouraged more in this respect. Wherever required, all such new entrants should be covered under capacity building programmes.

Changes in such a complex system cannot happen overnight but a beginning can be made. It is time that agriculture experts, farmers, food security specialists, policy makers and planners collectively deliberated on ways to plug the loopholes in the system, if not reform it.

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Bad tidings

The problems with India's mines are deep and structural

Sonbhadra is a name that indicates wealth and good tidings. As a part of a region straddling Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh – arguably India's richest in terms of mineral resources though not in human development – this district in Uttar Pradesh is also India's energy capital. It is home to some 6,000 MW of coal plant capacity – nearly half of all of Tamil Nadu's. On Saturday, a stone quarry collapsed over nearly a dozen workers in Odra in the district. The death toll is mounting even as hopes are still alive that some may have survived. The State government has ordered a three-tier probe by the district administration, the police and the mining department. An FIR has been filed against the quarry owner alleging negligence of safety protocols. But if there were indeed violations, what was the government doing? State disaster response workers reached the site from Mirzapur, making a case for their local stationing in an area that has over a dozen stone quarries and other mines such as coal along the Vindhyas-Kaimur hill range. Questions have been raised about the level of safety training of workers and them having adequate safety gear.

But the problems are deeper and structural. Opposition allegations of rampant illegal quarrying are not fanciful stuff. Stone quarries represent the lowest end of mining, and often the least safety conscious. Stone quarry contractors are often small-time operators. Ideally, micro geological studies need to be done to plan the cutting. These studies will clearly flesh out the weak joints and fracture lines on hill slopes where cutting should be avoided. The government may do broad and general geological studies at the macro level before leasing the blocks. But once contracts are given out, micro studies, say at the square kilometre level, are rarely done by the individual contractors. It is just luck that there are not many more accidents, geologists point out. Blasting design is a science that accurately assesses the size and throw of explosives needed and, therefore, at what distance the explosives should be set off. But explosive size and distance are often just rule of thumb decisions. Such open mines need to be benched – small horizontal plateaus cut along the slope of a hill. This ensures safety and decreases chances of a wholesale quarry collapse, as in Odra. Investigators will need to find out to what extent these basic measures were followed not just at the site but across the region. Ironically enough, some of the best minds and technologies are available at IIT (ISM) Dhanbad. Whether there is political will to leverage them fully in the area is the bigger question.



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The NH-701A highway is an ecological risk

Roads have long been viewed as symbols of development – linking regions, opening markets, and connecting people. In mountainous regions, however, road construction is never a simple feat of engineering. It involves negotiating steep gradients, fragile soils, sensitive ecosystems, and communities whose lives are intricately bound to their landscapes. The challenge of balancing development and environmental sustainability is particularly acute in Jammu & Kashmir (J&K), where geography is not merely physical but deeply political and cultural.

In October 2024, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) issued a tender for the preparation of a detailed Project Report and for construction supervision of a two-lane highway with paved shoulders, stretching from Shopian to Magam. This will go through Kollar, Palbharpora, Yousmarg, and Doodhpathri – all within mountainous districts.

The case of NH-701A

On paper, the project appears to improve connectivity and integrate regions into wider economic and administrative networks. However, the Himalayas, and particularly the Kashmir Valley, are defined by fragile landscapes, high seismicity, unique biodiversity, and hydrological systems sustained by glaciers and snow-fed rivers. Infrastructure interventions in such terrains often produce far-reaching ecological, social, and cultural consequences.

The proposed NH-701A alignment cuts across forests, grazing lands, and water catchments, raising concerns about long-term sustainability. For much of its length, the road traverses forested and sparsely populated stretches where basic connectivity already exists.

While projects such as NH-701A have not been sufficiently studied, existing research offers important clues. A 2022 study, 'Qualitative Slope Stability Assessment of Hill



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Slopes Using Multiple Integrated Approaches along Bafiaz-Poshiana (Mughal) Road, Jammu and Kashmir' (*Journal of the Geological Society of India*), revealed a high probability of slope failure along cut slopes – particularly during heavy rainfall.

This finding pertains to the same terrain and geological conditions in which NH-701A is proposed. Although the official tender notice does not mention it, the project effectively extends the Bafiaz-Poshiana Peer Ki Gali-Shopian road. According to the map attached to the tender, the road stretch connecting Bafiaz to NH-44A (the Jammu-Poonch highway), a key defense corridor, was transferred from the J&K Public Works Department to the MoRTH in September 2024. The rationale for this transfer has not been publicly explained, prompting speculation about the project's true intent, with some experts suggesting strategic or operational motivations rather than purely developmental ones.

Systematic evaluation

Under India's Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Notification of 2006, large-scale road projects ordinarily require systematic evaluation. The EIA process is not a bureaucratic hurdle but a critical safeguard, measuring potential impacts on land use, biodiversity, drainage, pollution, and community livelihoods. Importantly, it mandates public consultation.

However, in 2022, the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) issued a notification exempting highway projects within 100 km of the Line of Control from prior environmental clearance. While justified on security grounds to expedite border connectivity, this diluted environmental scrutiny in regions already vulnerable to ecological degradation.

Even so, the MoEFCC's Office Memorandum of July 14, 2022, emphasised the continued need for safeguards. Subsequent Standard Operating Procedures,

issued on February 6, 2023, clarified that EIA exemptions do not waive other statutory approvals. These SOPs mandate a range of risk assessments and studies including detailed slope stability and disaster management evaluations, eco-fragility and hydrological studies; geological surveys for tunnelling; catchment and drainage analyses; and preservation of heritage trees or compensatory plantation at a 1:10 ratio. In effect, while the exemption removes one layer of public oversight, it shifts greater responsibility onto project proponents and State authorities for ensuring compliance. But so far, there is no public evidence that these processes have been initiated in the case of NH-701A.

The ecological risks are compounded by socio-cultural concerns. Yousmarg and Doodhpathri are vital grazing grounds for pastoralist communities such as the Gullars and Bakarwals. A major highway bisecting these areas risks reducing grazing land, disrupting migratory routes, and marginalising vulnerable groups.

Hydrological systems in these glacier-fed regions are equally fragile. Road construction on unstable slopes can trigger erosion, landslides, and sedimentation, degrading water quality and disturbing downstream flow regimes. As multiple studies have shown, such interventions magnify risks in a context where climate change is already shrinking glaciers and destabilising mountain hydrology.

The proposed highway is thus far more than an engineering project; it stands as a litmus test for environmental governance in J&K. If executed without robust safeguards, it risks unleashing ecological and social costs that could outweigh its developmental benefits. Yet, if approached through integrated planning, inter-departmental cooperation, and community consultation, it could still evolve into a model of sustainable infrastructure in fragile mountain regions.

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Unpacking the global 'happiness' rankings

Why is Finland the happiest country in the world for the eighth year in a row while India languishes at 118? How can Pakistan, which is struggling with political instability and recurring International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailouts score higher than India, the world's fastest-growing major economy? What does this really say about how we define "happiness"?

The World Happiness Report 2025, by the Wellbeing Research Centre at Oxford, again places Finland, Denmark, Iceland and Sweden at the top. India's score is 4.389 of 10, averaging 124 over the years; Pakistan is 109. The contrast seems puzzling against the economic and social realities of both nations.

India, with a \$3.7 trillion GDP, is the world's fifth-largest economy; Pakistan's \$375 billion GDP is barely 10% of that. India's digital economy is booming, and its infrastructure is expanding, whereas Pakistan survives on repeated bailouts. Yet, Pakistan appears "happier"?

Is happiness an economic measure, a perceptual one, or a proxy for something else?

The mirage of metrics

The report relies on the Gallup World Poll's Cantril Ladder, where people rate their lives from 0 to 10, linked with six variables – GDP per capita, social support, life expectancy, freedom, generosity and corruption perception. But perceptions are slippery.

Societies with low expectations often report higher happiness because people adapt to hardship. In vibrant democracies such as India, rising aspirations and constant media scrutiny can lower perceived satisfaction even as well-being improves. When citizens expect better governance or cleaner cities, dissatisfaction reflects higher expectations, not misery.

That paradox explains why the United States has fallen to 24 despite record wealth, while the Nordic nations with high taxes but deep social trust dominate.

The report itself admits that "belief in community kindness" and social trust predict

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Dissatisfaction, for instance, could reflect higher expectations, and not misery

happiness better than income.

India's challenge, then, is not growth but connection. Nearly 19% of young adults globally say they have no one to rely on – up 39% since 2006. With migration and digital life reshaping relationships, Indians too face shrinking real-world networks and expanding virtual ones – prosperity without proximity.

The politics of perception

Critics note that global indices rest on perception-based biases. A 2022 paper by the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister (Sanjeev Sanyal and Aakanksha Arora) showed that indices such as Freedom House and V-Dem depend on small, opaque pools of western "experts". Their subjective views skew results.

A one-party state may appear freer simply because dissent is absent; media-controlled regimes look "stable" because citizens voice fewer complaints. Democracies, by contrast, are penalised for openness. The World Happiness Report risks repeating that error – valuing calm conformity over democratic cacophony. India's low score may reflect self-critical awareness – a maturing democracy unwilling to be complacent.

India's rank has swung between 94th and 144th in a decade. The best phase came in 2022 with post-COVID-19 pandemic recovery and welfare programmes such as Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana. The worst was in 2012 amid corruption scandals and slowdown. But happiness rarely tracks fiscal performance. Studies show that social trust, fairness and community matter far more.

In Finland, people believe a lost wallet will be returned – a proxy for institutional trust. In India, governance uneasiness erodes that confidence, though local and familial trust remain strong. The COVID-19 lockdown exposed this: millions returned to villages not only for work loss but because community bonds offered the security absent in cities. Such informal trust, ignored by global metrics, sustains resilience.

The report's behavioural framework also carries the WEIRD bias – Western, Educated,

Industrialised, Rich and Democratic. It privileges institutional trust that is typical of individualistic societies and overlooks collective trust networks in countries such as India, where family and community are the real safety nets.

Even so, institutional trust is evolving. Campaigns around mental health, workplace wellbeing and inclusion mark a cultural shift. Programmes such as Tele-MANAS (Tele Mental Health Assistance and Networking Across States) and Mind India place emotional resilience on the policy map. Happiness, once dismissed as a luxury, is now a governance concern.

Aspirations to empathy

To climb the happiness ladder, India must pair economic ambition with empathy infrastructure – investing not only in GDP but also in GNH (Gross National Happiness) through three pathways. First, rebuild social capital. Create community spaces, shared meals and inter-generational ties. The report finds that household size and belief in community kindness significantly raise happiness.

Second, restore institutional trust. Simplify citizen-state interactions. When public services – from ration cards to railway tickets – work transparently, trust follows.

Third, recognise mental health as economic policy. Productivity gains mirror psychological wellbeing. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that every \$1 spent on mental health yields \$4 in returns – an investment no economy should ignore. As *The Pursuit of Happiness* reminds us, happiness is not something we possess. It is something we pursue. India's restlessness – its debates, innovations and demands for better lives – may be the clearest sign of wellbeing. Less satisfaction does not mean unhappiness. It signals ambition.

If rank 118 means that Indians still seek cleaner air, fairer governance and fuller lives, perhaps the nation is not unhappy but just unfinished, still chasing a truer idea of happiness.

The views expressed are personal