

# World Press Freedom Index

## Why In News

- **India ranked 159 among 180** countries in the latest annual World Press Freedom Index released by **Reporters Without Borders** (RSF, short for Reporters sans frontières in French), an international non-profit organization. India had ranked 161 in the 2023 list.
- Meanwhile, **Pakistan ranked seven spots** above India at 152. It had ranked 150 in 2023. Norway topped the ranking, while Denmark was on the second rank in World Press Freedom Index. Sweden ranked third on the list.



## 'Press Freedom Is In Crisis'

- “**With violence against journalists**, highly concentrated media ownership, and political alignment, press freedom is in crisis in “the world’s largest democracy”, ruled since **2014 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi**, leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and embodiment of the Hindu nationalist right,” RSF stated while releasing the data.
- India was also mentioned in its report titled ‘**Asia – Pacific: Press freedom under yoke of authoritarian governments**’. Here, RSF said that India’s two-rank upgrade was “misleading”, as its scores fell but the change in position was due to worse falls by countries previously above it.



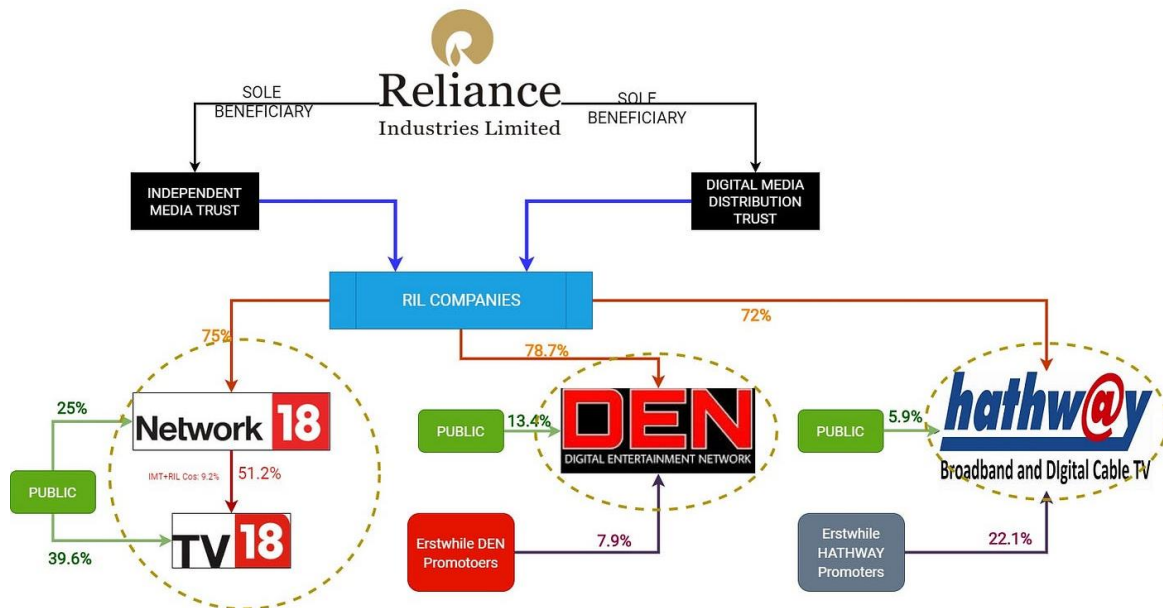
- India “was pushed up two places despite recently adopting more draconian laws. Its new position is still unworthy of a democracy”, the report noted.
- It said the Modi govt "has introduced several new laws that will give the government **extraordinary power to control** the media, censor news and silence critics, including the 2023 Telecommunications Act, the 2023 draft Broadcasting Services (Regulation) Bill, and the 2023 Digital Personal Data Protection Act".
- In its country report **on India, RSF says that the press freedom** situation has deteriorated on various counts since the Narendra Modi government came to power in 2014.

# REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS

## FOR PRESS FREEDOM

- “**Reliance Industries group’s magnate Mukesh Ambani**, a personal friend of the prime minister, owns more than 70 media outlets that are followed by at least 800 million Indians. The NDTV channel’s acquisition at the end of 2022 by Gautam Adani, a tycoon who is also close to Modi, signalled the end of pluralism in the mainstream media.

- Recent years have also seen the rise of “Godi media” (pun for designating Modi’s “dogs”) – media outlets that **mix populism and pro-BJP propaganda**.
- Through pressure and influence, the old Indian model of a pluralist press is being called into question.

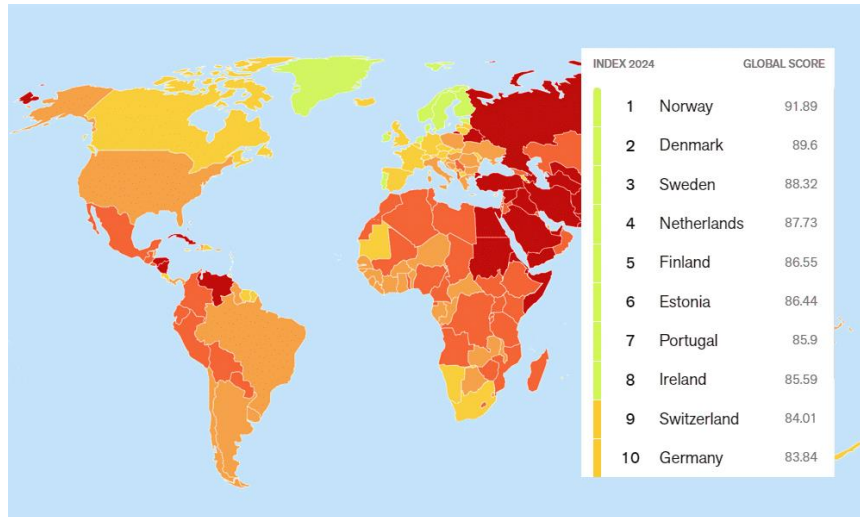


- The prime minister is very critical of journalists, seeing them as “intermediaries” polluting his direct relationship with his supporters. Indian journalists who are very critical of the government are subjected to harassment campaigns by BJP-backed trolls,” it notes.
- Across the **world**, **RSF notes**, “A growing number of governments and political authorities are not fulfilling their role as guarantors of the best possible environment for journalism and for the public’s right to reliable, independent, and diverse news and information.”
- Several of India’s neighbours have ranked slightly better than it – Pakistan is at 152, Sri Lanka at 15, Nepal at 74 and Maldives at 106. On the other side of the rankings, Afghanistan is at 178, Bangladesh at 165 and Myanmar at 171.

## Other Highlights

- The **overall decline in the political indicator** has also affected the trio at the top of the World Press Freedom Index.
- **Norway**, still in first place, has seen a fall in its political score, and **Ireland** (8th), where politicians have subjected media outlets to judicial intimidation, has

ceded its leading position in the European Union to **Denmark** (2nd), followed by Sweden (3rd).



- The RSF also painted a bleak picture of the increasing use of artificial intelligence, calling its use in the arsenal of disinformation for political purposes “disturbing”, with deepfakes being used to influence the course of elections.
- Reporting on the war against nature is also proving increasingly dangerous. Forty-four journalists have been killed for covering environment stories over the past 15 years, according to a separate report by Unesco, which organises today’s World Press Freedom Day.