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Indian, Chinese Passports Among Least Attractive for Global Visa Waivers

By [VISHNU VARMA](#)

NEW DELHI— A global [index](#) that ranks countries based on freedom of travel for their citizens has ranked India among the bottom few with its South Asian neighbors like Afghanistan and Pakistan. India's citizens have visa-free access to only 52 countries, with India ranking in 74th place, along with Uzbekistan.

Finland, Sweden and Great Britain, whose citizens have visa-free access to a maximum of 173 out of 218 countries, occupy the top three positions in the index. The bottom four countries in the index are Pakistan, Somalia, Iraq and Afghanistan, in that order. Afghans face the ignominy of being able to travel to only 28 countries without a visa.

Henley & Partners, a firm that works on international residence and citizenship planning, has published the index in collaboration with International Air Transport Association (IATA), a trade association that represents global airlines. "Visa requirements or the lack thereof are an indication of the relationship between individual nations and the status of a country within the international community of nations," Henley and Partners said in a statement.

India has slightly improved its position from 2010, when its citizens had visa-free access to only 50 countries.

India might, however, find some solace in the fact that its bigger, richer, and more powerful Asian neighbor, China, is ranked below India at 82, along with Cameroon and the Congo. Nepal is the only country that allows unlimited access to Indians.

A few months ago, Britain's Home Office [issued a statement](#) that visitors from India would have to pay a 3,000-pound refundable bond for visas. India was placed among a group of "high-risk" countries that comprised of Bangladesh, Ghana, Nigeria, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

However, India's concerns were considerably assuaged when the British high commissioner [said](#) that the proposal was "still under consideration" and that the scheme would only "apply to a select few cases where there is a clear possibility of visa rules being violated."

"I think India has been ranked low mainly based on economic parameters," said D. Suba Chandran, director of Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies.

"Indians pose a major risk of overstaying and South Asia is regarded as a region of immigrant-producing countries," Mr. Chandran added.

Mr. Chandran also pointed out that the Indian record of issuance and registration of visas is equally bad and therefore things could stand at a reciprocal level.

Many countries including the United States and Great Britain have in the past issued travel warnings for citizens wanting to travel to India, especially in light of terrorist activities and increasing cases of sexual assault against women.

Bharat Karnad, an expert on international relations at the Center for Policy Research in New Delhi, also believes that the reasons could be more economic and less related to security.

“I think there is a tendency on the part of Indians to end up as economic refugees in foreign countries,” Mr. Karnad said.

Eric Neumayer, a professor of London School of Economics, wrote in a paper on how countries use visa restrictions to control movement in a globalized world:

“The poorer, the less democratic and the more exposed to armed political conflict the target country is, the more likely that visa restrictions are in place against its passport holders. The same is true for countries whose nationals have been major perpetrators of terrorist acts in the past.”

Nine out of the top 10 countries in the index are members of the European Union, with the United States the only non-EU member. Among Asian countries, only Japan figures in the top 20. Singapore, Malaysia and South Korea are the other Asian countries that closely follow Japan on the list. Conflict-prone countries like Egypt and Iraq are toward the bottom of the list, several positions behind India.

Rajendra Kumar, an official working at Hi Ace India, a visa processing organization in New Delhi, said the country’s low ranking could be attributed to the tendency of Indians to misuse policies.

“People often go from here with a different purpose,” he said.

http://india.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/10/04/indian-chinese-passports-among-least-attractive-for-global-visa-waivers/?emc=edit_tnt_20131004&tntemail0=y&r=0