

SPECIAL ISSUE

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SEPTEMBER 8, 2025 ₹100

OC

# INDIA TODAY



MOOD OF THE NATION POLL

## MODI HOLDS FIRM

...BUT WORRIES ABOUT UNEMPLOYMENT AND  
EROSION OF DEMOCRATIC NORMS PERSIST



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## FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

**G**auging the public mood is a fascinating task in vexed times like these. From geopolitics to national politics and the economy, every realm of India's collective life seems to be colliding into the next. Each is now coated with a sense of crisis that was not present in our last Mood of the Nation poll in February. Since then, we have had a four-day war with Pakistan, a stunning diplomatic reversal that sees a 50 per cent US tariff rate kicking in this week and a supercharged Opposition campaign against electoral rolls that's heating up the political landscape. In short, the towering persona of Narendra Modi is being sternly tested. To his credit, the prime minister seems to gather strength each time he is pressed by adversity.

To use a cricketing analogy, Modi is not merely a flat-track blaster who performs only when the pitch is easy. Over 11 years as prime minister, he has shown he can bat through difficult spells and still control the scoreboard. The numbers reflect this resilience. This time, an impressive 58 per cent deem Modi's performance as prime minister 'good' to 'outstanding', a slight dip of 3.84 per cent percentage points from February. He also nets a 51.5 per cent endorsement as the leader best suited to be the next PM. The ratings for Rahul Gandhi, his prime challenger, remain at 24.7 per cent. These findings reiterate that the prime minister still enjoys substantial public trust and is seen as the most capable to navigate India through turbulent times.

The ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) has reason to be reassured.

If the Lok Sabha election were to be held now, the MOTN accords it 324 seats. This is 19 seats down from February, but 52 more than the simple majority mark and way more secure than the 293 it won in the summer of 2024. Its projected 46.7 per cent vote share, too, marks a good 4 percentage point rise over that election. Likewise, 52.4 per cent say they are 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the NDA performance. Since that too marks a dip of 10 percentage points from February, we could describe it overall as 'comfortable, but with caveats'. This applies equally to the BJP. Its individual vote share stays at 40.6 per cent, but its seat tally is down from 281 in February to 260 now. That's short of a simple majority by 12 seats, yet an improvement on its 2024 Lok Sabha tally of 240.

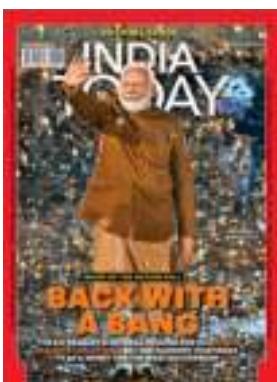
There is food for thought here. The euphoria from the election victories of Haryana and Maharashtra last year has waned for the BJP. The Opposition has gained some ground, though still short of critical mass. The Congress is the main beneficiary, with 47 per cent rating its performance as an Opposition party 'outstanding' or 'good'.

This was only 40 per cent in February. The X-factor is Rahul Gandhi, who emerges as the most preferred choice to lead the Opposition alliance, clocking 28.2 per cent. With other anti-BJP leaders appearing comfortable ceding space to him, at least for now, he has taken his charge of 'vote *chori*' to new levels of audibility and visibility, from Parliament to the dusty tracks of Bihar. Almost a third of our respondents seem inclined to believe him. It seems Rahul Gandhi fares better when he attacks the BJP on policy issues than when he makes personal criticisms, especially of PM Modi. Away from the battlefield of narratives, a gap in the strength of organisational machinery is what substantially separates the two sides now.

**T**he economy is where more grey tones emerge. Those who approve of Modi government's handling has dipped by 4.5 percentage points since February to 47.8 per cent, while those who disapprove has increased to 30 per cent. Pessimism is rising: 55 per cent believe the economy will stagnate or worsen over the next six months. Half of all respondents say becoming the fourth largest economy is just a symbolic achievement with little benefit for common people, rather than a meaningful milestone that tracks real progress. Worryingly, 33.7 per cent say their financial situation has worsened since Modi took office, up from 30.9 per cent in February. The perception that India's growth is favouring big business persists: 55.8 per cent now feel the Modi government exclusively favours big business. A high 46.2 per cent also feel the government has not adequately supported small businesses and startups.

There are other disquieting signs in the socio-political space that the Modi dispensation would do well to pay heed to. There are disturbingly high numbers for those

who believe India's democracy is under threat. Fewer seem convinced by Modi's anti-corruption rhetoric or political use of central investigating agencies. Increasingly, governors are seen as partisan actors. Among all the perceptual markers, the Modi government's economic ratings are the most material. These are clear signs of unhappiness, which the Trump's tariff shocker will now exacerbate. Yet, even as these concerns mount, the perception of Modi's leadership remains intact. That contrast is striking. It gives him a rare political advantage. The political arithmetic is in his favour. Considering the economic and geopolitical challenges the country is facing at the moment, this is the most opportune time to push through his next generation of reforms which the country sorely needs. As recent history has shown, India acts best when confronted with a crisis.



▲ February 24, 2025

(Aroon Purie)

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Photograph by CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

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# MODI HOLDS FIRM

**...BUT WORRIES ABOUT UNEMPLOYMENT AND EROSION OF DEMOCRATIC NORMS PERSIST**

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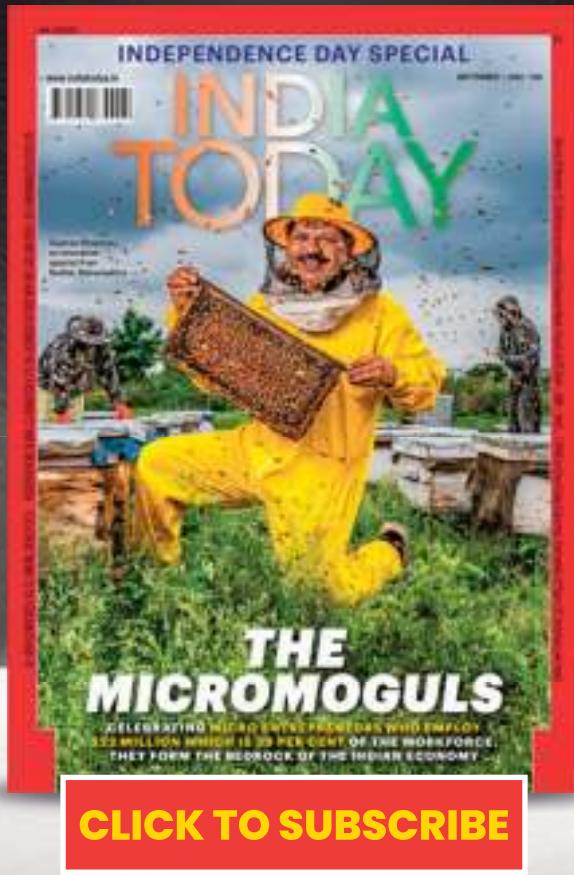
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COVER STORY

| MOOD OF THE NATION POLL |

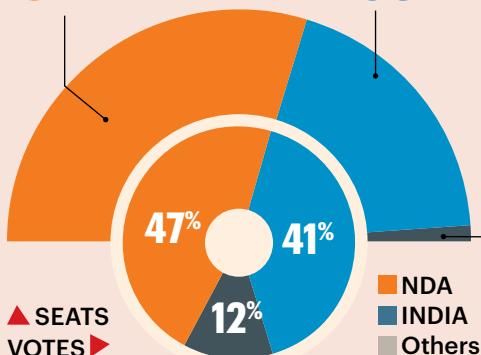
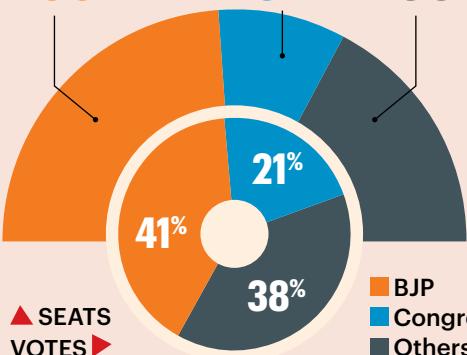
# MODI HOLDS FIRM

**...BUT WORRIES ABOUT  
UNEMPLOYMENT AND  
EROSION OF DEMOCRATIC  
NORMS PERSIST**

By RAJ CHENGAPPA



**SHOW OF STRENGTH**  
PM Narendra Modi during the 79th  
Independence Day ceremony at  
the Red Fort, New Delhi, Aug. 15

**INDIA TODAY MOOD OF THE NATION (MOTN) POLL, AUGUST 2025**
**PROJECTED RESULTS IF THE LOK SABHA ELECTION WERE TO BE HELD TODAY**
**ALLIANCE-WISE**
**TOTAL SEATS  
543**
**PARTY-WISE**
**324**
**208**
**11**

**260**
**97**
**186**

*Vote share figures rounded off*

**NDA:** Bharatiya Janata Party, Janata Dal (United), Telugu Desam Party, Rashtriya Lok Janshakti Party, Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas), Apna Dal (Soneyal), National People's Party, Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party, Naga People's Front, Mizo National Front, Sikkim Krantikari Morcha, All Jharkhand Students Union, Indigenous People's Front of Tripura, Republican Party of India (Athawale), Asom Gana Parishad, All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, Pattali Makkal Katchi, Tamil Maanila Congress, United People's Party Liberal, Rashtriya Janata Dal, Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party, Maharashtra Gomantak Party, Jannayak Janta Party, Prahar Janshakti Party, Rashtriya Samaj Paksha, Jan Surajya Shakti Party, Janata Dal (Secular), Kuki People's Alliance, United Democratic Party (Meghalaya), Hill State People's Democratic Party, Nishad Party, All India N.R. Congress, Hindustani Awam Morcha, JanaSena Party, Haryana Lokhit Party, Bharath Dharmra Jana Sena, Kerala Kamaraj Congress, Puthiya Tamilagam, Gorkha National Liberation Front, Tipra Motha

**INDIA:** Indian National Congress, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, All India Trinamool Congress, Samajwadi Party, Jammu and Kashmir National Conference, Communist Party of India (Marxist), Indian Union Muslim League, Communist Party of India, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, Revolutionary Socialist Party, Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi, Kerala Congress (M), Rashtriya Lok Dal, Apna Dal (Kamerawadi), Peoples Democratic Party, Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation, All India Forward Bloc, Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, Kongunadu Makkal Desia Katchi, Manithaneya Makkal Katchi, Kerala Congress (Joseph)

**OTHERS:** Aam Aadmi Party, Biju Janata Dal, Bahujan Samaj Party, Bharat Rashtra Samithi, YSR Congress Party, All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen, Shiromani Akali Dal, Indian National Lok Dal, Amma Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam, Bodoland People's Front, Gondwana Ganatantra Party, Gorkha Janmukti Morcha, Janta Congress Chhattisgarh, Makkal Needhi Maiam, Sikkim Democratic Front, Swabhiman Paksha, others

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 All Graphics by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY 

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# N

**Narendra Modi is no stranger to adversity and has invariably come out the better for it** in the 11 years he has been at India's helm. Now in the second year of his third term, the prime minister faces his toughest challenge, a trilemma, if you will. There is US president Donald Trump, who, in the first six months of his second term, has become wrecker-in-chief of the world order. India, surprisingly, is at the receiving end as Trump imposed a debilitating 50 per cent tariff on its exports, a move likely to hurt our economic growth.

**DESPITE THE POLYCRISIS, PM NARENDRA MODI RETAINS THE TRUST AND BACKING OF THE INDIAN VOTER. THE MOTN SHOWS HE IS STILL THE BEST TO GUIDE THE NATION**

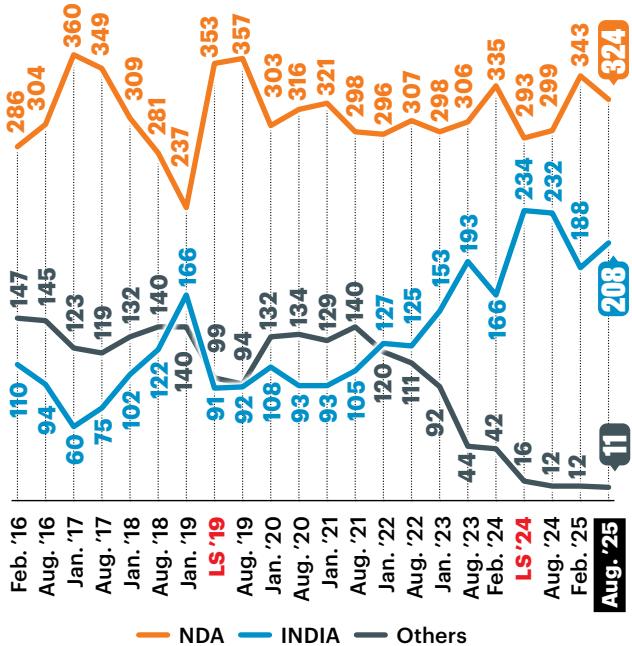
# HOW THE PUBLIC MOOD HAS CHANGED

Seat and vote share projections in the past MOTN polls

**TOTAL SEATS: 543**

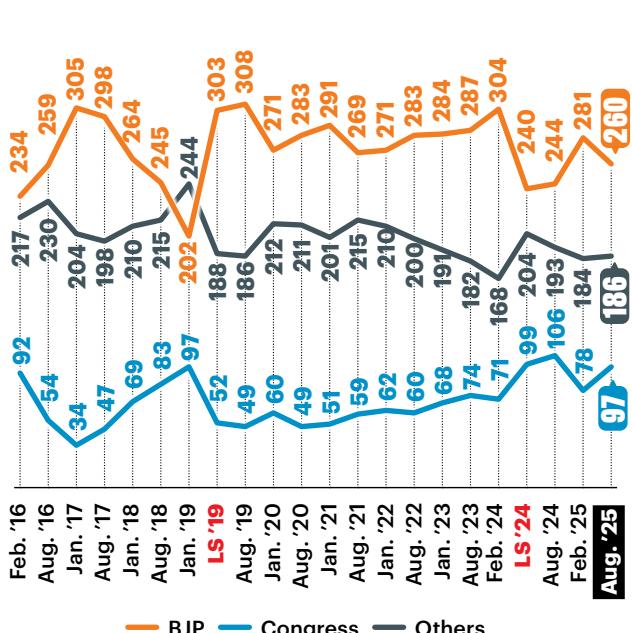
## ALLIANCE-WISE

### SEAT PROJECTIONS

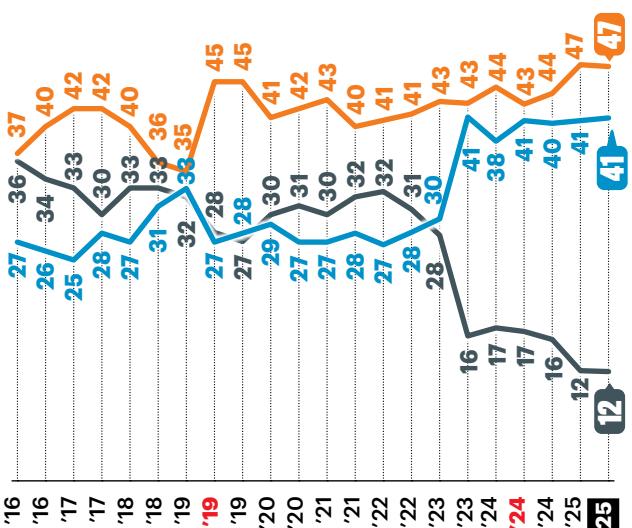


## PARTY-WISE

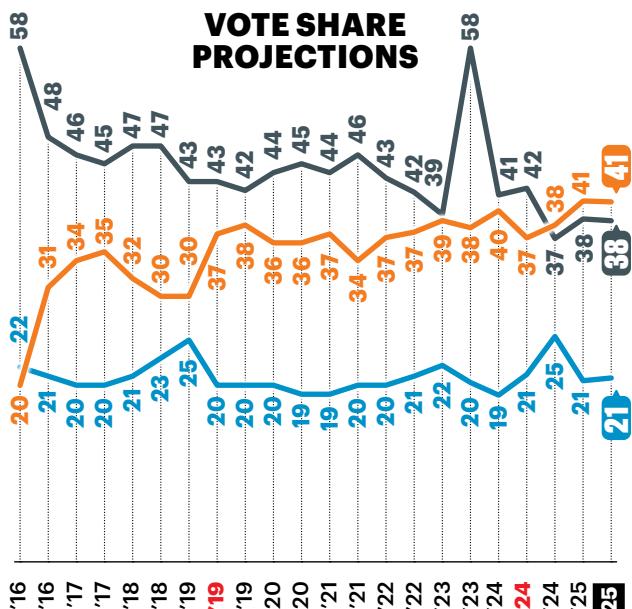
### SEAT PROJECTIONS



## VOTE SHARE PROJECTIONS



## VOTE SHARE PROJECTIONS



Vote share figures in % and rounded off; all previous projections/actual results mentioned against INDIA from Feb. '16 to Jan. '23 are for the erstwhile UPA

## Q. Who is best suited to be the next prime minister of India?

NARENDRA MODI

52

RAHUL GANDHI

25

AMIT SHAH

2

AKHILESH YADAV

2

YOGI ADITYANATH

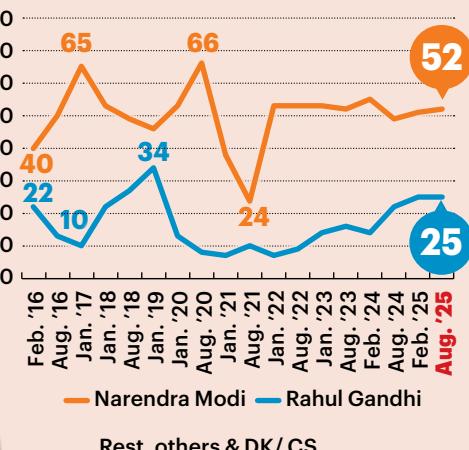
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All figures in % and rounded off;  
DK/ CS: Don't know/ can't say



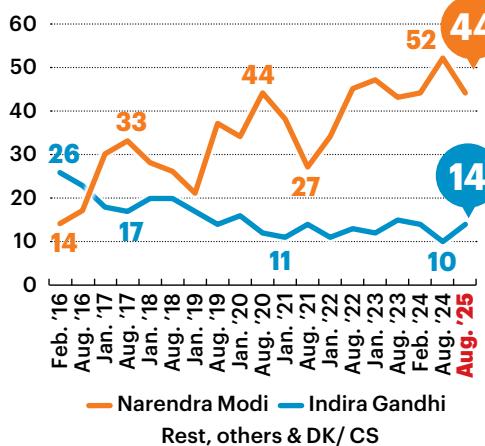
## NARENDRA MODI vs RAHUL GANDHI

How MOTN surveys have reflected the public mood on the choice of PM candidate between the two leaders



## NARENDRA MODI vs INDIRA GANDHI

The popularity trends of two Indian prime ministers known for their bold moves across MOTN polls



## Q. Who has been India's best prime minister so far?

NARENDRA MODI

47

43

44

52

51

44

ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE

16

12

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INDIRA GANDHI

12

15

14

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MANMOHAN SINGH

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JAWAHARLAL NEHRU

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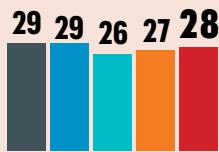
Rest, others & DK/ CS

Earlier this May, India went to war with Pakistan over the terror attack in Pahalgam in which 26 civilians were brutally killed. Operation Sindoar, as the Indian strike was called, drew thick red lines to deter Pakistan from fostering terror in future. But Trump played spoilsport again with his expansive claims of winning the peace and thereby diluting India's victory narrative. All these developments have compelled

**WHILE RAHUL GANDHI HAS MATURED AS AN OPPOSITION LEADER, HE STILL LAGS BEHIND PM MODI BY A SIGNIFICANT 27 PERCENTAGE POINTS**

**Q. Who is best suited to succeed Modi as the BJP's prime ministerial candidate?**

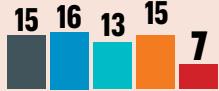
**AMIT SHAH**



**YOGI ADITYANATH**



**NITIN GADKARI**



**RAJNATH SINGH**



**NIRMALA SITHARAMAN**



■ Aug. '23 ■ Feb. '24 ■ Aug. '24  
■ Feb. '25 ■ Aug. '25  
Rest, others & DK / CS

Modi to rebalance India's foreign policy, hitherto characterised by a pronounced US tilt, and press the accelerator on what he calls NextGen reforms to boost the Indian economy.

At this critical juncture, encouragingly for Modi, INDIA TODAY's biannual Mood of the Nation (MOTN) survey reflects that the prime minister still has the backing and trust of the Indian electorate. As many as 58 per cent of

respondents believe that Modi's performance as prime minister is 'good' or 'outstanding'. It may be a dip of 3.8 percentage points from the February 2025 MOTN poll, but matches his ratings soon after the 2024 general election. This result found reaffirmation when respondents were asked who they think is best suited to be India's next prime minister. Modi polls a steady 51.5 per cent endorsement compared to 51.2 per cent in February. The rating of his prime opponent—Opposition leader Rahul Gandhi—hovers at 24.7 per cent, which means Modi retains a significant 27 percentage point lead over him.

The ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) led by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), too, can draw some comfort from the latest MOTN. If a general election were to be held now,

though the Uttar Pradesh chief minister is voted the best chief minister in the country by MOTN respondents.

### The Warning Bells

Yet there is some cause for worry for the BJP too. While the party's individual vote share holds steady at 40.6 per cent, its seat tally is down 21 seats, from 281 in February to 260 now. This is also 12 seats short of a simple majority, though better than the actual deficit of 32 seats in the 2024 Lok Sabha election. What should worry the BJP, though, is that following its big wins in the Haryana and Maharashtra assembly polls last year (on its own in Haryana, and as part of the Mahayuti coalition in Maharashtra), the euphoria seems to be waning. The BJP's tally has also dropped in poll-bound Bihar

**AS FOR WHO WILL SUCCEED NARENDRA MODI AS BJP'S PRIME MINISTERIAL CANDIDATE, UNION HOME MINISTER AMIT SHAH RETAINS HIS LEAD AS THE MOST PREFERRED CHOICE**

the NDA would secure 324 out of 543 seats in the Lok Sabha, 52 more than required for a simple majority. This is 19 seats less than the 343 seats in the February MOTN, but much higher than the 293 seats the NDA actually won in the 2024 general election. The NDA vote share of 46.7 per cent, too, is four percentage point higher than the 42.5 per cent in the Lok Sabha poll. These findings are bolstered by 52.4 per cent respondents saying they are either 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' with the NDA government's performance, even if it is a 10 percentage point dip from the 62.1 per cent endorsement in February. It is something the NDA leadership needs to factor in as it navigates the turbulence ahead.

As for who will succeed Narendra Modi, Union home minister Amit Shah retains the lead over Yogi Adityanath,

and West Bengal. To add to the party's woes, its tally shows some decline in BJP-ruled states like Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

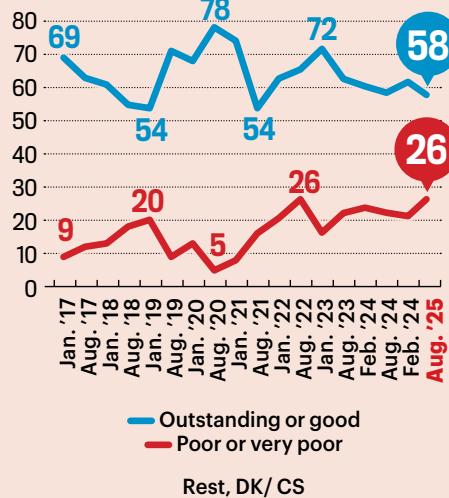
For Modi, too, there are plenty of caveats. Normally, there is admiration for his bold tackling of crises, which translate into massive spikes in his popularity ratings in MOTN polls. For instance, the prime minister in his first term successfully countered Pakistan's attack on an Indian army camp in Uri in September 2016 with surgical strikes across the LoC, In November, in a bid to erase black money, he demonetised Rs 500 and Rs 1,000 notes in circulation. The twin feats cemented Modi's position as a strong and decisive leader, in the latter case despite the hardships of the aam aadmi. His ratings soared to 69 per cent in the January 2017 MOTN poll, from

**Q. How do you rate the performance of Narendra Modi as prime minister?**



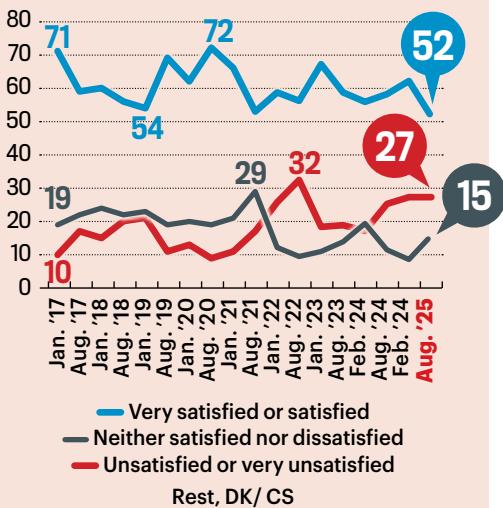
**Approval for PM**  
Narendra Modi remains almost constant since he took charge in his third term

**MODI'S PERFORMANCE ACROSS MOTNs**



**Support for Modi shows long-term decline—it was over 70 per cent in 2021 and has slipped below 60 per cent now**

**Q. How satisfied are you with the overall performance of the NDA government?**



**There is a 10 point dent in public satisfaction with the NDA govt's overall performance since February**

All figures in % and rounded off; DK/ CS: Don't know/ can't say

53 per cent in August 2016. The BJP's seat tally likewise rose to 305 from 259.

Again, in 2019, four months before the general election, the January MOTN poll showed a sharp dip in Modi's ratings and a drop in BJP's seat tally to 202, as much as 70 short of a simple majority on its own. The next month, however, saw a suicide bomber blow up a CRPF van in Pulwama, killing 40 personnel. Modi ordered the Indian Air Force to carry out punitive air strikes in Balakot, deep inside Pakistan, which proved to be a game-changer in the general election held in May that year. Modi and the BJP swept to power again with an even bigger majority of 303 seats on their own and 353 for the NDA. That sentiment carried over into the August MOTN poll, too, that year, with Modi's performance rating of 'good' to 'outstanding' spiking from 54 per cent in January to 71 per cent seven months later.

This year, however, despite Opera-

**THE MODI GOVERNMENT MAY HAVE WON THE BATTLE BUT IT LOST THE BRAGGING RIGHTS, WITH DONALD TRUMP GOING AD NAUSEAM ABOUT HOW HE HAD BROKERED PEACE**

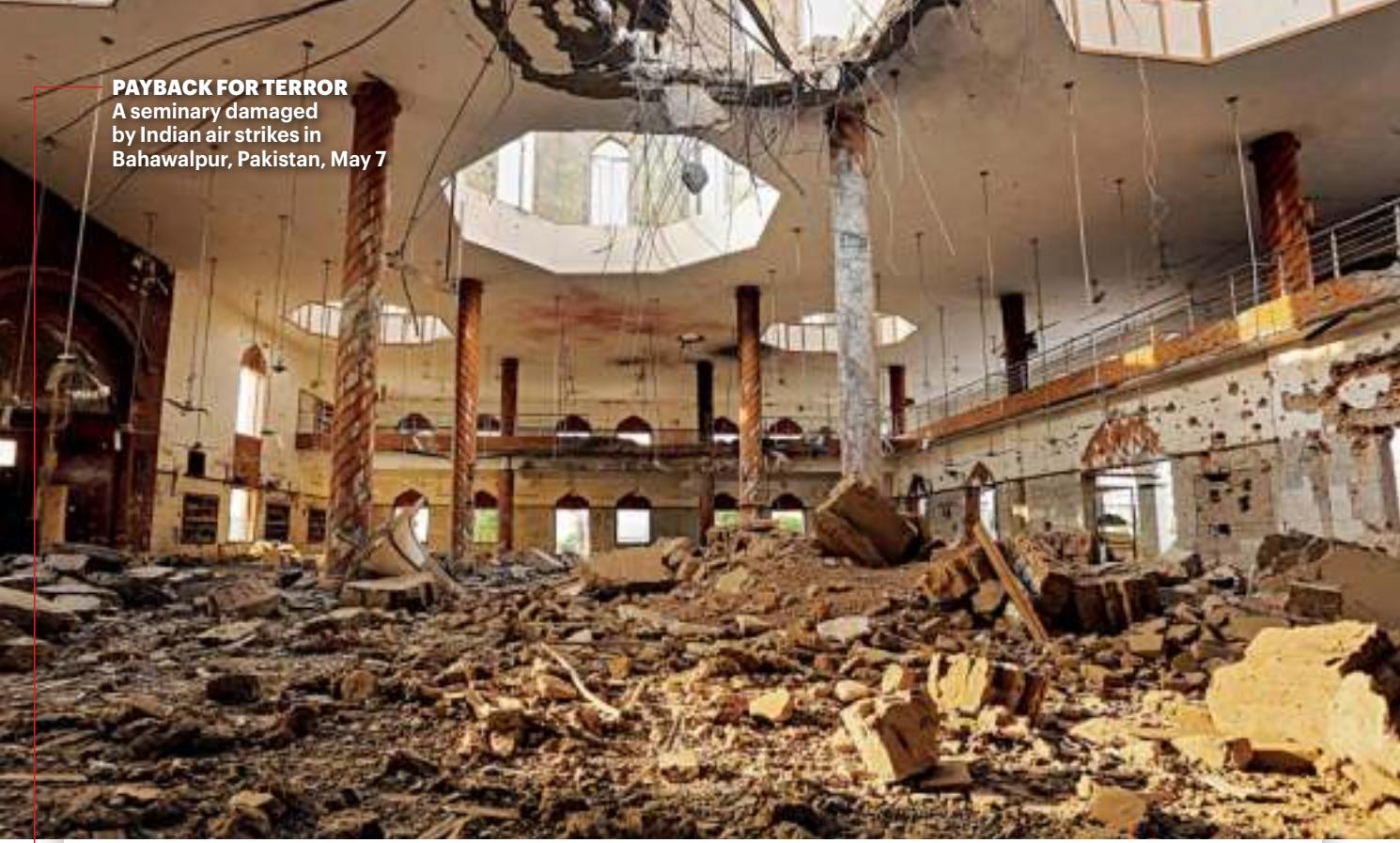
tion Sindoor being an even stronger strike on Pakistan, which saw the headquarters of prominent terror groups located in the politically powerful Punjab province as well as air bases being bombed, there is no spike either in Modi's ratings or in Lok Sabha seat projections for the BJP. This is probably because while India won the battle, the Modi government seemingly lost bragging rights to the US. Especially as Trump repeated ad nauseam that he had brokered the ceasefire between India and Pakistan to avert a nuclear war. This contradicted India's assertion that it was Islamabad that begged

Delhi for a ceasefire and not the US that brought it about.

**Who Stole the Narrative?**

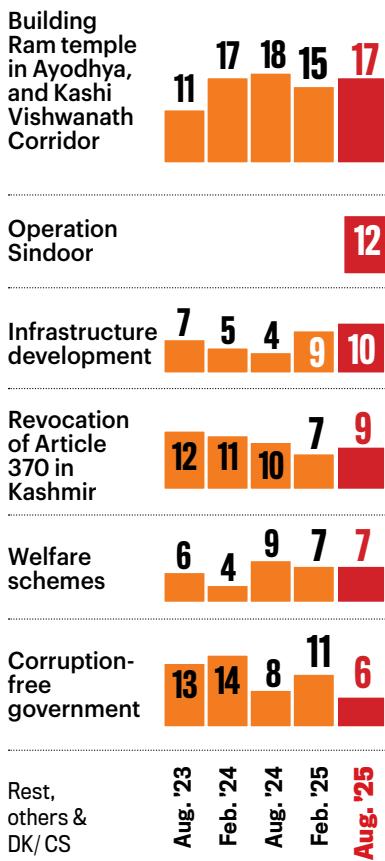
The MOTN poll reflects mixed public sentiment on how India handled the narrative. Nearly 55 per cent respondents regard Operation Sindoor as a strong response to the Pahalgam terror strike. But while 54 per cent believe that the Modi government provided truthful and transparent information about Operation Sindoor, almost 33 per cent, or a third, disagree. As for who the respondents thought orchestrated the ceasefire, a good 29 per cent

**PAYBACK FOR TERROR**  
A seminary damaged by Indian air strikes in Bahawalpur, Pakistan, May 7

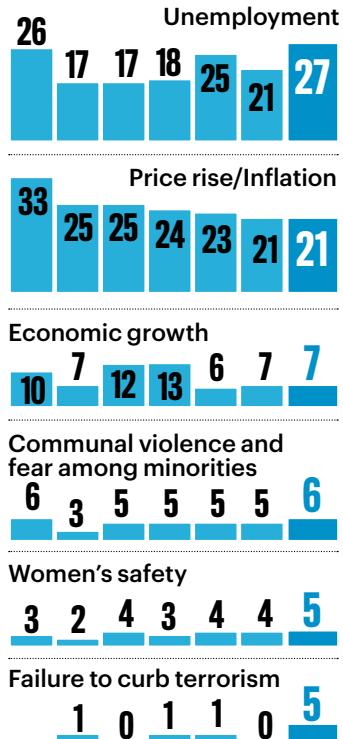


AFP

**Q. What has been the single biggest achievement of the NDA government?**



**Q. What has been the single biggest failure of the NDA government?**



**Q. What is the biggest problem India faces currently?**



All figures in % and rounded off; DK/ CS: Don't know/ can't say

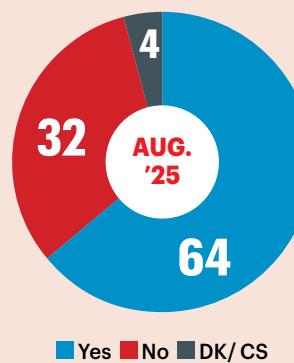
believe that it was an outcome of the pressure from the US president. Only 25 per cent believe it followed Pakistan's request to India after it was hit hard by Indian missile attacks. Almost a third say Modi decided to end the war on his own. Many BJP supporters felt let down by the Modi government declaring a ceasefire after all the hype about decisively defeating Pakistan.

Nor has Operation Sindoos dislodged rebuilding the Ram temple in Ayodhya in the list of the NDA government's top achievements; the temple maintains a five percentage point lead over Operation Sindoos. These are followed by infrastructure development, revocation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir, welfare schemes and a corruption-free government. Among the government's failures, unemployment heads the list, with a high 27 per cent flagging it as a top concern, followed by price rise (21 per cent) and economic growth (7 per cent). Together, they illustrate the growing unease of the electorate on the NDA government's economic stewardship. While 48 per cent feel the central government has done a 'good' to 'outstanding' job of handling the economy, almost an equal number rate the government's performance on this score as either 'average' or 'poor'.

### A Looming Economic Storm

**T**here are other trends to indicate that support for the prime minister and the BJP now comes attached with plenty of concerns, conditions and caveats. As many as 72 per cent perceive the unemployment situation in the country to be either 'very serious' (51 per cent) or 'serious' (21 per cent). Only a third believe that the economy will improve in the next six months, with 55 per cent saying it will either stagnate or worsen. Regarding the state of their own daily existence, 61 per cent of respondents believe their current expenses have become difficult to manage. That pessimism comes across in another finding, where 55 per cent believe their household income or salary will either see a reduction or stay

**Q. Do you think elections in India are free and fair?**



Two-thirds of respondents feel the polls are free and fair; a third beg to disagree

**Q. What's your view on Election Commission conducting SIR in Bihar and its plan to do the same in other states?**

It is being done to ensure that only citizens can vote

58

It is being done to ensure that only citizens can vote but the timing is suspicious

12

It is being done to help the ruling party

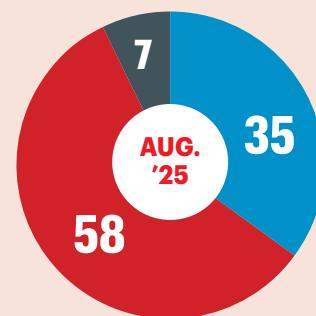
17

Rest, DK/ CS

70% of respondents think the Bihar roll revision will ensure that only citizens can vote

**ROLL REVISION**  
A surveyor collects forms from voters during the Special Intensive Revision in Bihar's Bhojpur district, Jul. 5

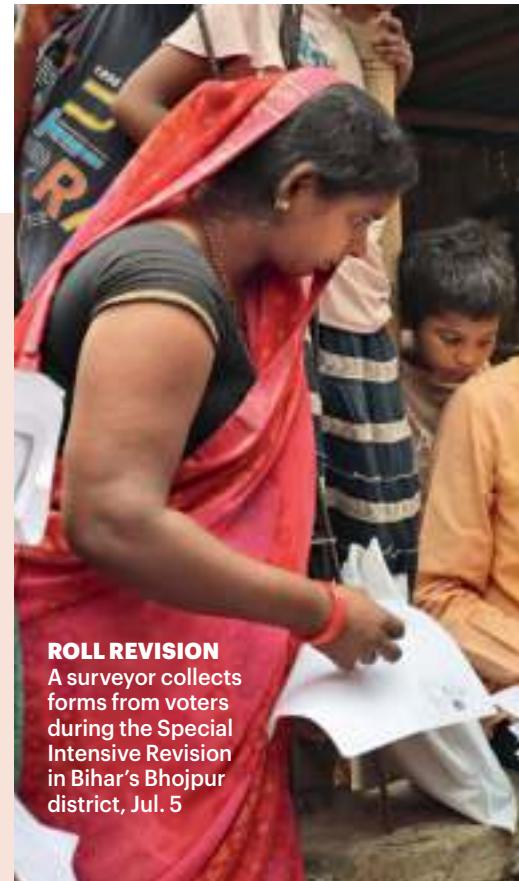
**Q. Do you believe the Opposition's allegation that the BJP manipulated voter rolls to win in Maharashtra and Haryana?**



■ Yes ■ No ■ DK/CS

A clear majority disagrees with the charge of voter roll manipulation

All figures in % and rounded off;  
DK/ CS: Don't know/ can't say



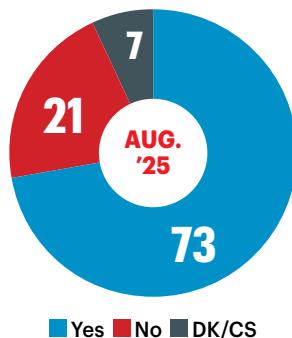


RANJANI RAHI

**FROM A 24% POINT GAP IN AUG. 2024 BETWEEN MODI AND MANMOHAN SINGH'S HANDLING OF THE ECONOMY, THE DIFFERENCE THIS TIME HAS NARROWED TO A MERE 2% POINTS**

ARUN KUMAR

**Q. Do you agree with RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's view that public leaders should retire by the age of 75?**



**Nearly three-fourths of respondents concur with Bhagwat on the retirement age for public leaders**

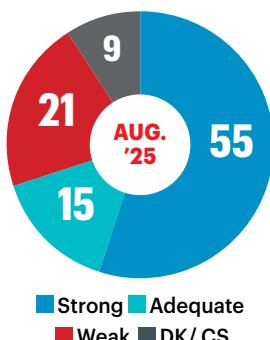
the same in the next six months.

Even worse for the Modi dispensation is the perception that its economic policies are skewed towards the rich. As many as 56 per cent believe that big business has benefited most from its economic policies to the detriment of small firms, farmers and the salaried class. This despite the NDA government running the world's largest food security programme, which benefits more than 800 million people. Over 60 per cent of respondents are cross that their economic status has remained the same or deteriorated since Modi came to power in 2014. Perhaps the most telling is the drastic reduction in the estimation of Modi's economic performance compared to that of Manmohan Singh. There is a difference of just 2 percentage points—45 per cent favouring Modi and 43 per cent Manmohan Singh—in their respective economic performance. This when just a year ago, in the August 2024 MOTN poll, Modi was miles ahead with a 22 percentage point lead over his predecessor.

### A Weak Opposition

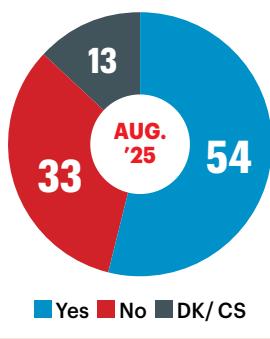
If there is so much concern and criticism over the Modi government's handling of the economy, why do voters continue to repose their faith in Modi, the BJP and their NDA allies to govern India? One major reason is that the Opposition, especially the INDIA bloc, is not yet perceived to be a potential threat to the NDA. There is a 5.8 percentage point difference in vote share between the two political alliances. The NDA is projected to win 324 Lok Sabha seats were a general election held today and INDIA, a mere 208 seats, a 26-seat drop from the 234 it actually won in the 2024 general election. Encouragingly, though, regional leaders such as Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal, M.K. Stalin in Tamil Nadu and even Tejashwi Yadav in Bihar have improved their Lok Sabha standing in this MOTN poll. Which goes to prove only one thing: more than the constituents of the INDIA bloc, it is the Congress's electoral performance or lack thereof

**Q. How would you rate Op Sindoor as a response to Pakistan's terror attack in Pahalgam?**



A majority believe the Indian response to Pahalgam was strong

**Q. Do you believe the Union government provided truthful and transparent information about Operation Sindoor?**



A third think that the Centre was not transparent about Op. Sindoor

that continues to weaken the Opposition's challenge to the BJP and its allies in the NDA. The party's vote percentage remains stuck at 20.8, almost half of the BJP's 40.6 per cent, even if it has improved its tally by 19 seats as compared to the February 2025 MOTN survey and is only two short of the 99 it actually won in the 2024 LS election. The 26.8 percentage point gap in popularity between

**Q. Which one of the following do you think brought ceasefire during Operation Sindoor?**

PM Modi decided on his own

31

Pressure from US President Donald Trump

29

Request from Pakistan to India as it was hit hard

25

Rest, DK/ CS



GETTY IMAGES

All figures in % and rounded off; DK/ CS: Don't know/ can't say

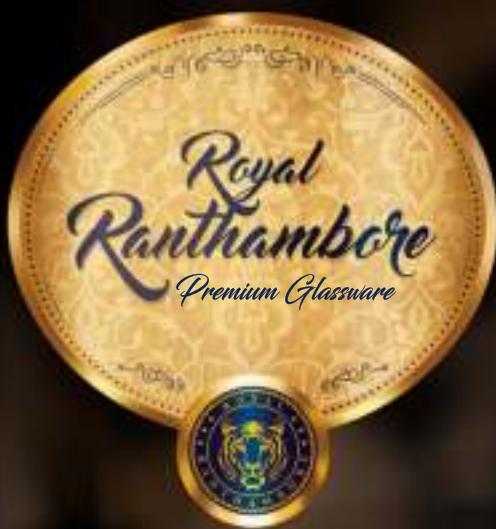
**OVER 60% ARE WORRIED ABOUT TRUMP'S TARIFFS, BUT 54% BLAME AMERICA FOR THE BREAKDOWN IN INDO-US TRADE TIES; ONLY 22% THINK INDIA GOOFED**

Rahul Gandhi and Modi remains high. Despite his spirited performance in calling out the Election Commission over 'vote rigging', he has a long way to go before he can project himself as a viable alternative to Modi. Especially as the BJP remains streets ahead in terms of organisational muscle and reach.

**Save Democracy**

**H**owever, if the Opposition could get its act together, there is enough discontent for it to tap into and challenge the BJP and NDA. In addition to the concern over a worsening economy, there is growing unease over the erosion of democratic norms. While 64 per cent believe elections in India are free and fair, a sizeable 32 per cent, or a third, think otherwise. Likewise, though a high 58 per cent dismiss the Opposition charge that the BJP manipulated voter rolls to win elections in Maharashtra and Haryana, a not-insignificant 35 per cent fear the worst. That feeling extends to the ongoing Special Intensive Revision of voter rolls for the upcoming Bihar assembly polls, where 58 per cent are confident that its intent is to ensure only eligible citizens vote, but 29 per cent do consider the timing to be suspicious and think the exercise is an attempt to help the ruling party.

The current MOTN survey also mirrors the growing discomfort over the violation or misuse of other democratic institutions. Asked whether BJP-appointed governors in Opposition-ruled states were playing a partisan role, as many as 61 per cent believe it might be the case. The perception that the BJP is misusing enforcement agencies such as the Enforcement Directorate (ED), Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the income tax department abides, with 46 per cent thinking this to be true. These misgivings have begun to colour public opinion about the judiciary as well, with only 37 per cent trusting it a great deal, 47 per cent expressing only partial faith in it and another 12 per cent distrusting it totally. Similarly, only 52 per cent feel they can speak freely about politics



HERE'S TO  
*India's*  
FINEST YET



and religion in the country. Overall, a high 48 per cent believe democracy in India is in danger compared to 39 per cent holding the opposite view.

Despite these hiccups, the odds remain in favour of Modi as the best leader to navigate India through these turbulent times. Over 60 per cent are worried about the impact of Trump's tariffs on India's exports. Importantly for Modi, in the battle of perceptions, 54 per cent blame America for the breakdown in Indo-US trade relations, and only 22 per cent think India goofed. The electorate also appreciates Modi's standing up to Trump's bullying, with 61 per cent asserting that India must not compromise on its interests but continue negotiating with the US.

For the prime minister, the immediate priority is minimising the impact

## THE POLL REFLECTS THE GROWING PUBLIC DISCOMFORT WITH MISUSE OF DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS, INCLUDING CENTRAL AGENCIES, AND THE POLITICISATION OF STATE GOVERNORS

of US tariffs on exporters and focusing on NextGen reforms to boost the economy. The rationalising of multiple slabs in the Goods and Services Tax (GST) by Diwali promises to provide the much-needed impetus. With a ma-

jority of respondents saying they find it difficult to start and run a business in India, the Modi government needs to ensure 'ease of doing business' becomes more than a catchy slogan. A large section of respondents feel the government has not done enough to support small businesses and that bureaucracy is a major hurdle to India's economic development. Half the respondents believe that all the talk of India becoming the world's fourth-largest economy is just a symbolic achievement that does little to benefit the common man. A third believe that the much-touted global economic image of India is at variance with the quality of infrastructure and public services in the country. All conditions that speak of an adversity Modi can convert into opportunity, a skill of which he is a past master. ■

## Methodology

**T**he INDIA TODAY Mood of the Nation (MOTN) poll was conducted by CVoter, a globally renowned name in the field of socio-economic research, between July 1, 2025, and August 14, 2025, interviewing 54,788 respondents in all Lok Sabha segments across all states. In addition to these samples, an additional 152,038 interviews from CVoter's regular tracker data over the past 24 weeks were also analysed for the long-term trendline in projections calculation of votes and seats. Thus, the opinion of a total of 206,826 respondents was considered for this

MOTN report. The margin of error is +/- 3 per cent at macro level and +/- 5 per cent at micro level of reporting, with 95 per cent confidence level.

From May 2009 onwards, the CVoter Tracker has been carried out each week, 52 waves in a calendar year, in 11 national languages, across all states and UTs in India, with a target sample size of 60,000 samples each quarter. The average response rate is 55 per cent. Starting January 1, 2019, CVoter has been carrying the tracker on a daily basis, using the rollover sample of seven days for tracker analysis.

All these polls are

based on a random probability sample as used in the globally standardised methodology, carried out by trained researchers across all geographic and demographic segments. This survey is based on Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI) of adult respondents across all segments. Standard Random Digit Dialling (RDD) is used to draw random numbers covering all frequency series allocated to all operators across all telecom circles in India.

CVoter ensures proper representative analysis by statistical weighing of the data to make it representative of the local population as

per the latest census figures. The data is weighted to the known census profile, including gender, age, education, income, religion, caste, urban/rural and vote recalls for the last Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections. For the analytics, CVoter uses its proprietary algorithm to calculate the provincial and regional vote share based on the split-voter phenomenon.

CVoter follows the code of professional ethics and practices drafted by the World Association of Public Opinion Research and the official guidelines on opinion polling as instructed by the Press Council of India. ■

# A NEW CHAPTER OF GROWTH NITISH GOVERNMENT'S ROADMAP FOR DEVELOPED BIHAR

Bihar is witnessing a new era of progress and prosperity, thanks to the visionary leadership of Chief Minister Shri Nitish Kumar. The state government has taken several major initiatives benefiting every age group and section of society, including women, youth, farmers, workers, and artists.

**C**hief Minister Shri Nitish Kumar has once again demonstrated his government's firm commitment to the welfare of the people. Since 2006, he has led the state on a path of progress marked by historic decisions, and today, these decisions are emerging as concrete evidence of a developed and prosperous Bihar.

## 125 UNITS OF FREE ELECTRICITY FOR DOMESTIC CONSUMERS

From August 1, 2025, all domestic electricity consumers in Bihar are receiving a major relief. Under the Chief Minister's Electricity Consumer Assistance Scheme, no consumer will be charged for electricity consumption up to 125 units per month. Effectively, the electricity bill for July consumption will be zero. This decision directly benefits 1.87 crore domestic consumers across the state. It is not only a strong step towards social security but also a landmark initiative to promote inclusive energy use.

During an interaction program held via video conferencing on August 12, 2025, the Chief Minister addressed electricity consumers from every district. On the occasion, he recalled that under the Saat Nishchay Yojana, the goal of Har Ghar Bijli was achieved in October 2018, two months ahead of schedule. Since then, electricity connections have been continuously provided to all new houses and hamlets.

## RECORD SUBSIDY ALLOCATION

Under this scheme, the government has allocated a subsidy of ₹19,792 crore for FY 2025–26, of which ₹15,995 crore is earmarked for domestic consumers. Additionally, BPL families and rural households consuming more than 50 units will receive further relief, saving 40 paise per unit on every additional unit consumed. This provision alone will benefit 1.25 crore households.

## ENHANCED SOCIAL SECURITY PENSION

Another example of the government's sensitivity towards public welfare is the increase in social security pensions. Pensions for the elderly, widows, and persons with disabilities have been raised to ₹1,100 per month. This decision reflects

not just sound policymaking but also a governance model that values human dignity alongside financial security.

## ECONOMIC SECURITY FOR ARTISTS

To safeguard Bihar's cultural heritage, the government has introduced the Chief Minister Artist Pension Scheme. Under this, traditional artists of the state will receive ₹3,000 per month as pension. This initiative is a tribute to generations of artists who preserved Bihar's rich folk traditions.

Complementing this, the Guru-Shishya Parampara Yojana has also been announced to protect fading art forms and connect future generations with their cultural roots.

## ESTABLISHMENT OF BIHAR YOUTH COMMISSION

In a significant decision, the government has approved the formation of the Bihar Youth Commission to prioritize youth interests in education and employment, particularly in the private sector. This measure will safeguard the rights of young people within the state and those working outside, ensuring them better opportunities and representation.

## FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO ASHA AND MAMTA WORKERS

Acknowledging the vital contribution of Asha and Mamta workers in health services, the government has increased their incentive amount. Now, Asha workers will receive ₹3,000 per month, while Mamta workers will get ₹600 per month. This step benefits over two lakh workers, providing them both financial stability and enhanced social recognition.

## INTERNSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH UNDER 'PRATIGYA YOJANA'

Youth aspirations have been given due importance with the launch of the Mukhyamantri Pratigya Yojana. This internship program will engage young people in administrative and developmental work. For FY 2025–26, an allocation of ₹40.69 crore has been made, with plans to expand its reach in subsequent years.

## NEW RIGHTS GIVEN TO THE PANCHAYAT CHIEF

In strengthening grassroots governance, the Chief Minister has increased the financial powers of



## ATTRACTIVE INCENTIVES TO INDUSTRIES

To give a new push to industrialization, the government has launched the Bihar Industrial Investment Promotion Package (BIIPP) 2025. Approved by the state cabinet, this policy introduces several attractive incentives for investors. It is worth noting that on the occasion of Republic Day, January 26, 2025, the Chief Minister had announced several new concessions for industries in his address. These concessions have now been formally implemented through cabinet approval.

### THE PACKAGE INCLUDES:

- Free industrial land up to 10 acres for companies investing ₹100 crore or more and creating at least 1,000 jobs
- 25 acres of land for investments above ₹1,000 crore.
- Special allotments of 10 acres to Fortune 500 companies at token money of just ₹1.
- 50% discount on land prices for smaller investors under BIADA

Land in industrial parks is being readied, with 32 industrial parks planned and 14,600 acres acquired for industrial use over the last 15 months. These measures will significantly enhance Bihar's industrial landscape and attract large-scale investments.

village chiefs (Mukhiya). Now, under MNREGA, a chief can approve projects up to ₹10 lakh, double the earlier limit of ₹5 lakh. This reform will accelerate village-level development and strengthen decision-making at the local level.

# GROWTH FACES HEADWINDS

Geopolitical turmoil, American tariffs and a discouraging employment scenario dampen enthusiasm for the narrative of rapid economic growth

By M.G. ARUN

ARUN KUMAR



## DREAMS ON HOLD

Young aspirants at a job fair organised by the Congress in Delhi, Jun. 19

# A

**As the global economy grapples with its severest crisis since the pandemic,** India has caught a particularly biting strain of the flu. Geopolitical tumult—Russia's grinding war in Ukraine, Israel's bombardment of Gaza and now Donald Trump's killer tariffs—has disrupted global trade and dented investor confidence. That third factor hits directly at India's momentum. We hold on to our crown as the world's fastest-growing major economy, but growth remains stuck in second gear: GDP grew a middling 6.5 per cent in the fiscal year ending March 2025, and the prognosis does not seem too good for this year either.

Little wonder, then, that public confidence in the Modi government's economic stewardship is beginning to waver. According to the latest INDIA TODAY Mood of the Nation (MOTN) poll, the share of respondents rating the government's handling of the economy as 'outstanding' or 'good' has slipped by 4.5 percentage points since February—to 47.8 per cent from 52.3 per cent. This is the lowest since August 2023, when only 46.6 per cent held that view. In tandem, the ranks of those who deem the government's performance 'average' or 'poor/very poor' have swelled by 1.7 and 1.8 percentage points, respectively. As economic headwinds gather, so too do questions about the government's ability to steer through them.

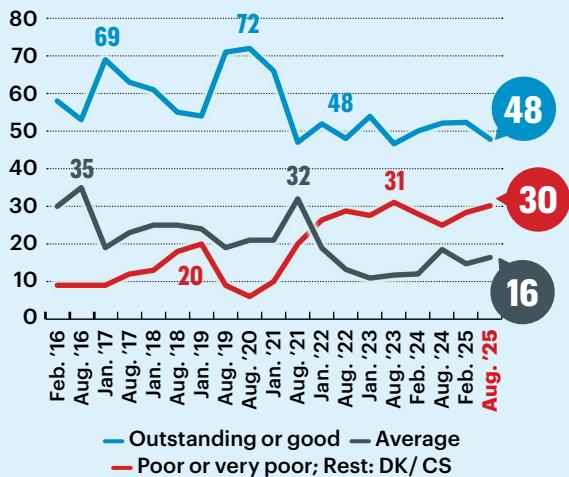
**36 PER CENT**  
of respondents aged between 18 and 24 rate Modi government's handling of economy as 'poor' or 'very poor'

**49 PER CENT**

**in the North believe the benefits of economic growth are reaching only the rich, highest among all regions; only 35% in the Northeast think so, the lowest**

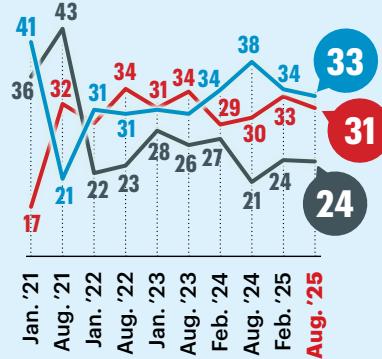
Optimism about an imminent economic revival appears to be losing steam. Just 33.1 per cent of respondents in the latest MOTN poll believe the economy will improve over the next six months—a marginal decline from the previous survey, and the lowest since August

**Q. How would you rate the NDA government's handling of the economy?**



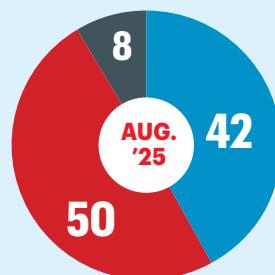
**Approval of the government's economic management dips, dissatisfaction rises**

**Q. How do you see the Indian economy in the next six months?**



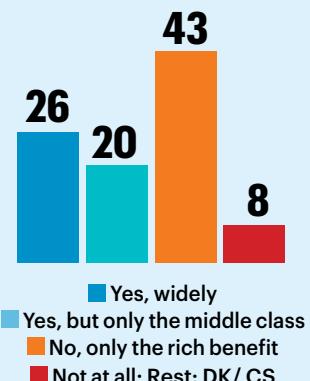
**Optimism about economic growth sees steady weakening since Aug. 2024**

**Q. In your view, is being the fourth-largest economy a meaningful milestone or just a symbolic achievement?**



**The verdict is almost divided taking the sheen off the achievement**

**Q. Are the benefits of India's economic growth reaching the common people?**



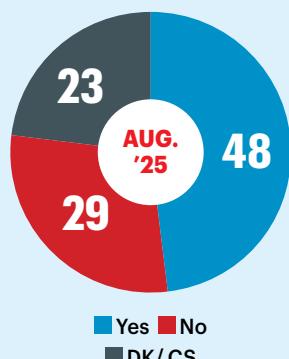
Nearly half feel the growth benefits only the rich; just a quarter believe gains are widely shared

**Q. Does India's global economic image match the quality of infrastructure and public services in your area?**



A third feel India's global economic image contrasts with weaker infrastructure and local public services

**Q. Do you think the bureaucracy is a hindrance to India's economic development?**



A majority see bureaucracy as a key hurdle to growth

2023. Yet amid the gloom, there is a sliver of reassurance: the proportion of those expecting conditions to stagnate or worsen has edged down to 55 per cent, from 56.9 per cent in February.

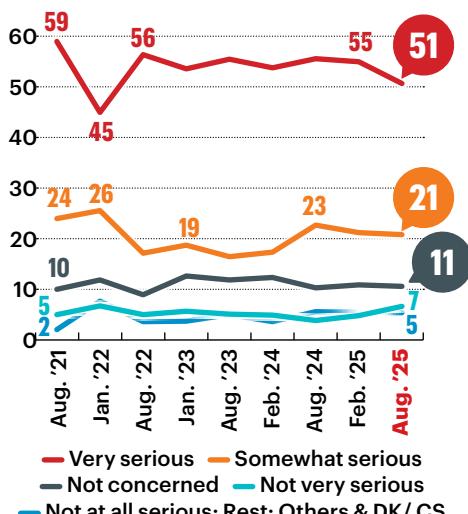
Modi's once-commanding lead over his predecessor in economic credibility appears to be narrowing. Asked who has managed the economy better—Narendra Modi or Manmohan Singh—just 44.6 per cent back Modi, down from 51.1 per cent in February and the lowest since August 2023. Support for Manmohan Singh, by contrast, has crept up to 43.1 per cent, from 39.9 per cent six months ago. Public sentiment on personal economic wellbeing tells a similar story: 33.7 per cent say their financial situation has worsened since Modi took office, up from 30.9 per cent in February. Only

33.1 per cent report an improvement, a slight decline from 34.9 per cent earlier this year.

### Rising Disparity

In May, NITI Aayog CEO B.V.R. Subrahmanyam declared that India had overtaken Japan to become the world's fourth-largest economy, citing data from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Some analysts quibbled over the timing, saying India still had some months to go before it could officially lay claim to that distinction. Yet such objections are largely pedantic. With developed countries like Japan growing at a rate much more tepid than India, overtaking Germany to claim third place appears a question of when, not if. But what does this mean for the ordinary citizen? Very little, going by the MOTN poll. Asked

**Q. What is your opinion of the unemployment situation in the country?**



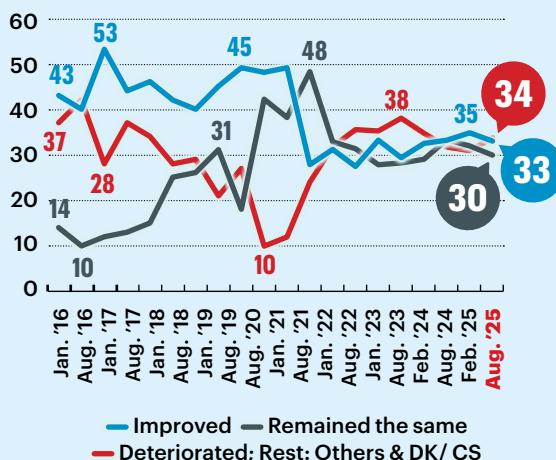
More than 70 per cent respondents are concerned about unemployment

**Q. Who, in your opinion, has better managed the overall Indian economy?**



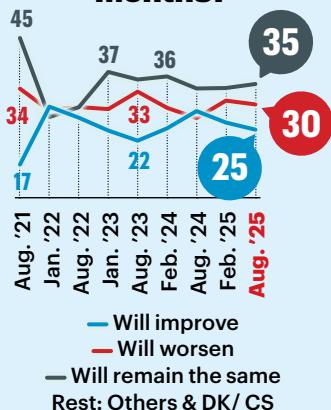
Modi's earlier lead has narrowed sharply, showing public resentment over economic handling

**Q. How has your economic status changed since the NDA government came to power in 2014?**



One in three respondents reports a decline in their economic condition since the NDA took office in 2014

**Q. Is your household income/ salary likely to improve in the next six months?**



More than one-third expect their incomes to stagnate; 30 per cent fear a decline

whether being the fourth-largest economy marks a meaningful milestone or a merely symbolic one, nearly half of respondents—49.5 per cent—dismissed it as little more than a headline, with no real impact on everyday life.

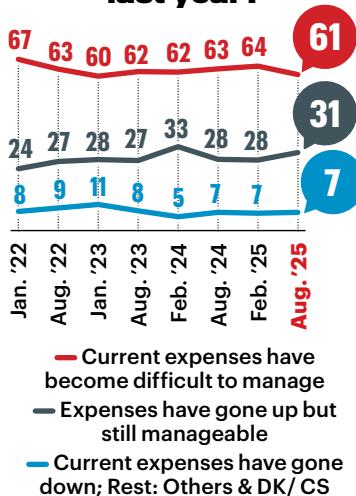
There is also a pervasive sense that India's economic growth has failed to trickle down. Only 26.3 per cent believe the benefits are 'widely' shared, while 42.5 per cent say that the gains have accrued solely to the rich. Another 19.6 per cent contend that the middle class alone has prospered. Since the pandemic, economic inequality has sharpened, producing a textbook K-shaped recovery—where the rich pull ahead and the poor fall further behind—a trend the current poll clearly reflects.

The Modi government has bet big on infrastructure, earmarking Rs 11.2 lakh crore for roads, bridges and railways in FY26. Though much remains to be done in linking rural areas with urban centres, the progress is percep-

tually salient: 58.5 per cent of respondents feel India's global economic image is beginning to reflect in the quality of infrastructure and public services in their regions. Yet, 32.3 per cent see a yawning gap between the international image that India projects and the everyday realities on the ground.

The perception that India's economic policies chiefly serve the rich and powerful persists. A majority—55.8 per cent—now say the Modi government favours big business, up from 51.2 per cent in the previous poll. By contrast, just 9.8 per cent and 8 per cent believe farmers and small enterprises have benefited, respectively. Nearly half—46.2 per cent—feel the government has fallen short in supporting small businesses and startups. While 29.4 per cent feel flagship schemes such as Make in India and Digital India have made a 'significant' difference, over a quarter (26.7 per cent) report no impact, and 11.9 per cent say the schemes have actually worsened their situation.

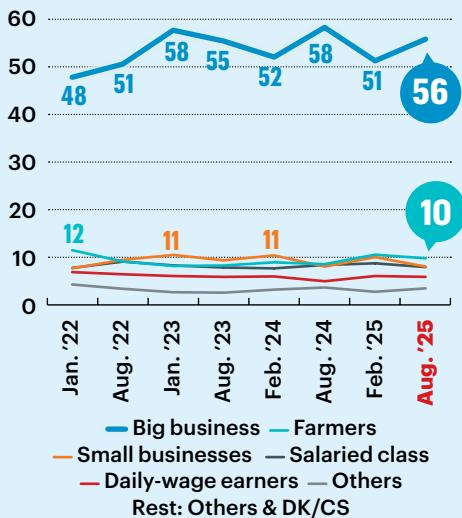
**Q. How do your current daily expenses compare with those last year?**



A majority say daily expenses are difficult to manage, a steady concern over the years

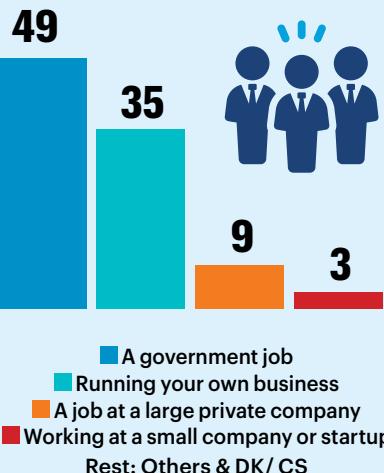
All figures in % and rounded off;  
DK/ CS: Don't know/ can't say

**Q. Who has benefited the most from the economic policies of the NDA government?**



More than half believe big business has been the main beneficiary of the NDA's policies, a steady trend

**Q. Given a choice, what kind of job would you prefer personally?**



Government jobs remain the choice for nearly half

**Cost of Compliance**

It is no secret that entrepreneurs in India have to navigate a maze of compliances across central, state and local jurisdictions before they can even set up shop. A white paper by the consultancy TeamLease Regtech reported last year that Indian businesses are governed by 1,536 acts, involving a staggering 69,233 compliances and 6,618 annual filings. These regulations—part of both central and state laws—vary across businesses and geographies. They are also constantly changing, often blindsiding businesses. The predictable upshot? Delayed decision-making, cost overruns and a setback to the entrepreneurial spirit.

Little surprise, then, that 48.3 per cent of respondents see bureaucracy as an impediment to economic development. A majority—53.5 per cent—say it is difficult to start and run a business, while only 18 per cent find it 'very easy'. Yet there is a glimmer of improvement: 54.1 per cent acknowledge that the Goods and Services Tax (GST) has eased compliance burdens. The Centre's proposal to reduce GST slabs from four to just two is expected to streamline things further.

**The Jobs Challenge**

Business uncertainties, the surge of AI-driven technologies and America's move to impose 50 per cent tariffs, including the 25 per cent penalty for sourcing Russian oil, are darkening the mood in the jobs market. White-collar workers are already feeling the squeeze: recent layoffs at Tata Consultancy Services, India's IT behemoth, are widely viewed as a harbinger of tougher times ahead for the sector. It is clouding the outlook on wages as well. Some 34.7 per cent of respondents anticipate their

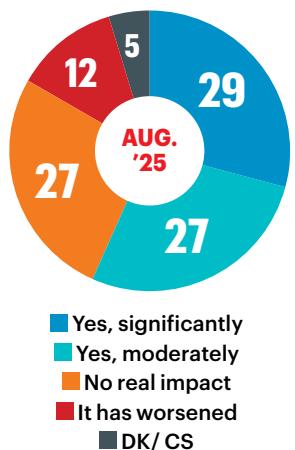


HARDIK CHHABRA

**DEMAND DROUGHT** ▶

The Chanakya mall in New Delhi

**Q. Have flagship initiatives like 'Make in India' and 'Digital India' made a difference to your life?**



More than half say 'Make in India' and 'Digital India' have impacted their lives



54  
PER CENT

of respondents say GST has simplified compliance for businesses, while 23 per cent think otherwise

46  
PER CENT

of those polled say the government has not provided enough support to small businesses and startups, while 42 per cent disagree

salaries and household incomes will stagnate over the next six months, up slightly from 33.8 per cent previously, while 30.3 per cent expect conditions to deteriorate.

One source of temperance—despite stagnant wages and job security continuing to squeeze household budgets—is headline inflation tapering down to 1.55 per cent in July, helped by easing food prices. Yet that headline figure, a year-on-year measure, signals only a slower pace of price rises, not a fall in costs. Consequently, 60.6 per cent of respondents say managing everyday expenses remains a struggle, although this is 3.7 percentage points lower than those who said so in the previous MOTN. Meanwhile, 30.7 per cent report that their expenses have increased but remain manageable, a rise from 27.5 per cent in February.

Last year, the Centre rolled out a slew of initiatives, including the Prime Minister's Internship Scheme, to tackle unemployment and bridge the gap

### Q. How easy or difficult is it to start and run a business in India?



A majority find it difficult to start and run a business in India

All figures in % and rounded off  
DK/ CS: Don't know/ can't say

between education and employment. It allocated Rs 10,831 crore for FY26 to provide internships to 10 million youth, especially those Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). Yet progress has been sluggish, hampered by regulatory hurdles and limited awareness. Joblessness remains a pressing worry for India's youth: 50.7 per cent of respondents rate the jobs situation as 'very serious', a slight improvement from 55 per cent in February, while 20.8 per cent consider it 'somewhat serious', down marginally from 21.2 per cent. Most (48.5 per cent) prefer government jobs, compared to private-sector roles (8.5 per cent), though 34.7 per cent choose to run their own businesses.

The economy continues to be a persistent headache for the government, as in past years. This time, however, the challenges seem manifold and, in some cases, beyond the Centre's control. Steering the country through these choppy seas will demand economic dexterity from the Modi government. ■

# THE ROAD TO REVIVAL

If the Congress and allies are seeking credibility, the MOTN findings offer reassurance and caution. They have arrested the slide, made gains. The Bihar polls will be a litmus test

By KAUSHIK DEKA

**I**nian politics is moving into a season of reckoning. After a decade of BJP dominance that has reshaped not just electoral polities but the very grammar of political discourse in India, the Opposition finds itself at a crossroads. The defeats in Haryana and Maharashtra last year were particularly bruising, coming as they did after the small win of denying the BJP an outright majority on its own in the 2024 general election. These setbacks have exposed the fundamental weaknesses of the Opposition INDIA bloc: the inability to convert anti-incumbency into electoral victories, the challenge of maintaining alliance cohesion beyond the heat of the general election and, most critically, the struggle to construct a narrative that resonates beyond urban echo chambers and social media algorithms.

It now confronts another critical test: the Bihar assembly election later this year. It is here that leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi's persistent

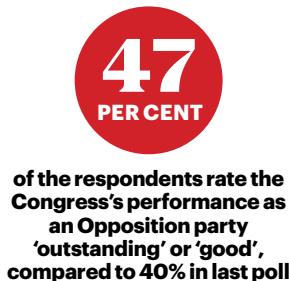
charge of "vote *chori*" and the Opposition's shared doubts over the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls will face their moment of truth, either transforming into a force of mobilisation or revealing the limits of rhetoric against the organisational machinery of the ruling NDA.

Against this backdrop, the latest INDIA TODAY Mood of the Nation poll—the last before Bihar heads for election—offers a revealing snapshot of the Opposition's standing. It shows where the Congress

and its allies hold ground, and how much space remains for reinvention. For a fragmented Opposition seeking credibility, the findings carry both reassurance and caution.

At the centre of this shifting dynamic stands Rahul, who has emerged as the most preferred choice to lead the Opposition alliance, drawing

28.2 per cent support. The number marks an improvement from earlier this year, yet it remains below his peak popularity a year ago. The Gandhi scion has halted the slide and regained some credibility, but he is still far from commanding the kind of decisive mandate that would silence the doubts about his leadership.

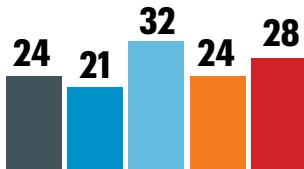


ANI



**Q. Who among the current Opposition leaders is best suited to lead the Opposition alliance?**

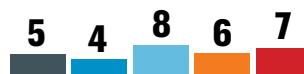
**RAHUL GANDHI**



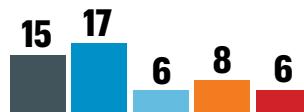
**MAMATA BANERJEE**



**AKHILESH YADAV**



**ARVIND KEJRIWAL**



**PRIYANKA GANDHI**



Rahul's numbers improve even as some Opposition leaders fall in esteem

All figures rounded off; Rest: Others; DK/CS: Don't know/ can't say

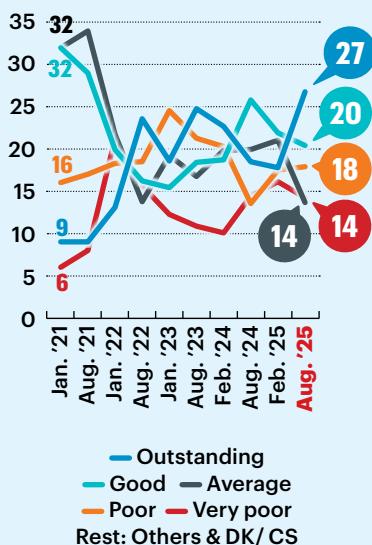
In relative terms, however, he is comfortably ahead of contenders like the Trinamool Congress's Mamata Banerjee, Aam Aadmi Party's Arvind Kejriwal and Samajwadi Party's Akhilesh Yadav. The gradual rise is due to months of sustained visibility, inside Parliament, out on the streets and in front of the camera. Rahul is no more the reluctant politician and the fumbling speaker, even though there are still occasional missteps. If insiders are to be believed, he rehearsed several times before stepping up for his now-famous "vote chor" press conference on August 7.

**Q. How do you evaluate Rahul Gandhi's performance as Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha?**



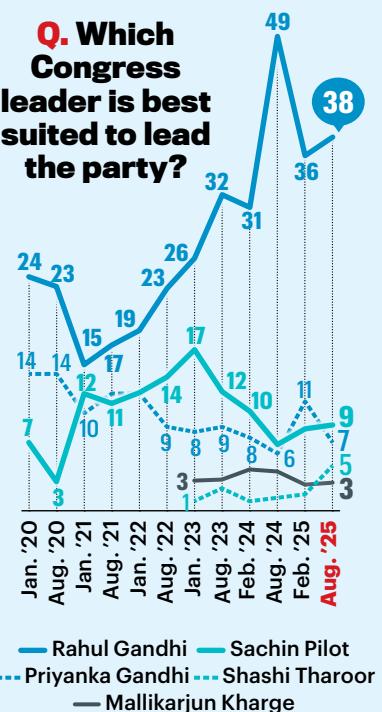
50% give thumbs up, helped by 12-point drop in the 'poor' rating since last poll in Feb.

**Q. How would you rate the performance of the Congress as an Opposition party?**



At 47%, this is the highest positive rating for the Congress since Jan. '21

**Q. Which Congress leader is best suited to lead the party?**



Rahul leads, but the post-LS poll high of '24 is still a mountain to climb

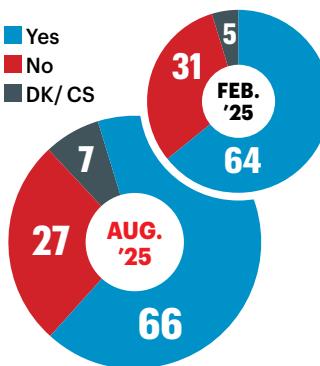
All figures in % and rounded off

Yet the MOTN poll numbers also underscore the thin bench strength of the leadership behind him. Mamata, once projected as a rival power centre, has lost ground, while Kejriwal's sharp decline in the wake of corruption scandals and the loss in Delhi suggests that AAP's national ambitions are faltering. The INDIA bloc's dilemma, therefore, could not be clearer: it finds itself more dependent on Rahul even as uncertainty persists over whether he has the strength to carry the entire Opposition into a general election.

**Perceptual Gains**

**P**ublic perception of Rahul's performance as the official LoP marks a significant improvement. Over half rate him 'outstanding' or 'good', a sharp recovery from the last poll when 'poor' outpolled 'good'. The numbers hint at something important: the public now sees him not merely as a dynastic

**Q. Is Congress the real Opposition party?**

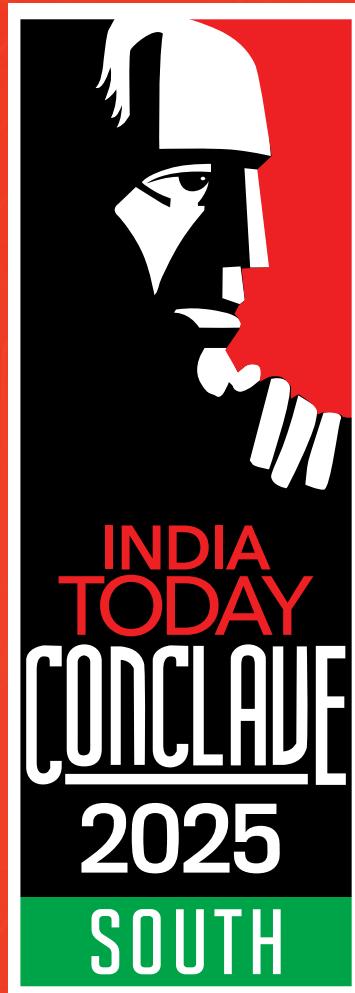


Two-thirds of those polled now see the party as the one to take on the BJP

figure but as an institutional counter-weight in Parliament. The Congress party itself presents a picture of gradual rehabilitation. The improvement in its public perception as an oppositional force—47.2 per cent now rate it 'outstanding' or 'good', compared to more modest numbers earlier in the year—suggests its more aggressive stance in Parliament and coordinated campaigns on economic issues have begun to bear fruit. Yet the fact that nearly a third of respondents still view its performance negatively highlights the depth of the challenge facing India's Grand Old Party.

Within the Congress, Rahul has clearly consolidated his position. The 38.3 per ayes for him to lead the party represent a steady climb from earlier this year, even as it falls short of the near-majority support he briefly enjoyed in 2024. In the poll for the most favoured non-Gandhi leader, the

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emergence of Sachin Pilot (16.4 per cent), hints at the generational change many within the party seek, though his numbers remain modest enough to pose no immediate challenge to the Family. The relatively low support for other potential leaders, including party president Mallikarjun Kharge (12.4 per cent), reinforces the sense that the Congress, for better or worse, remains inextricably linked to the Gandhi family in the public imagination.

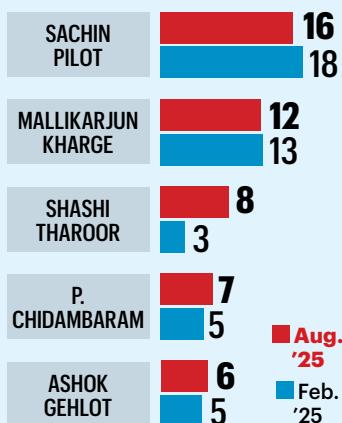
### Testing Times Ahead

**E**ven the party's relationship with allies remains complicated. The improved performance suggests that the Congress is regaining some legitimacy as the Opposition's anchor. Two-thirds of respondents view Congress as the 'real' opposition party, a psychological threshold that matters enormously in a political culture where perception often becomes reality. This acknowledgment, up slightly from earlier this year, suggests that despite the presence of strong regional parties and the formal structure of the INDIA bloc, the public still looks to the Congress as the primary vehicle for opposition to the BJP. For the INDIA bloc, this poses a balancing act: the Congress is indispensable, but its improving position risks alienating allies who fear being swallowed up in its shadow.

The question of the INDIA bloc's future adds another layer of complexity to the calculations. With 63.3 per cent supporting its continuation, a figure that has remained remarkably stable, there's clear public appetite for a united Opposition front. Yet the alliance faces its own internal contradictions, evident in the relatively low support for Mamata (7.7 per cent), Akhilesh (6.7 per cent), and Kejriwal (6.4 per cent) as potential alliance leaders. These numbers suggest that while voters want Opposition unity, they struggle to see any of the regional leaders as genuine national alternatives, potentially creating tensions within an alliance where many of them harbour prime ministerial ambitions.

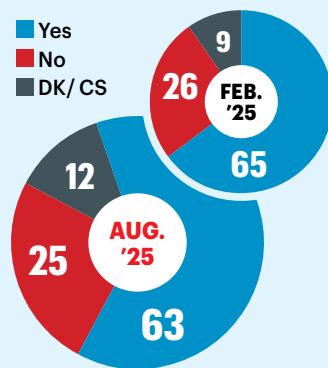
Bihar, with its complex caste equations and history of coalition politics,

### Q. Who among the non-Gandhi leaders is best suited to lead the Congress party?



Support for Pilot is an indicator that voters want to see a generational change

### Q. Should the INDIA bloc continue?



An overwhelming verdict, alliance need of the hour to take on BJP

All figures in % and rounded off; DK/ CS: Don't know, can't say



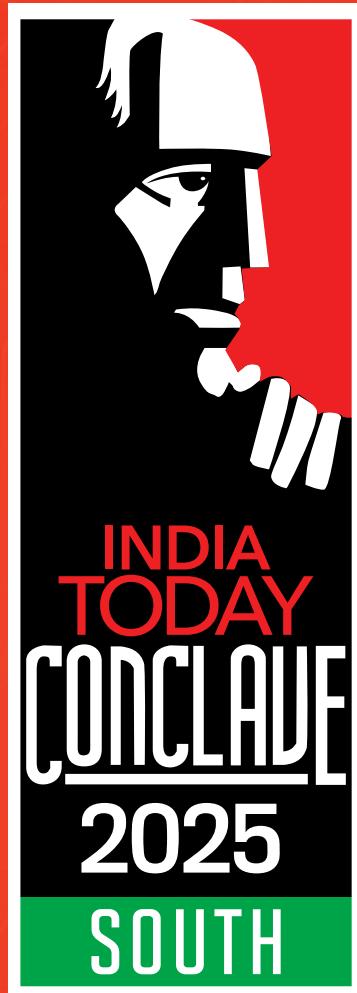
respondents in the South want Rahul Gandhi to lead the Opposition alliance, highest among all regions

has often served as a bellwether for national political trends. For Rahul and the Congress, it represents an opportunity to validate their emerging narrative around electoral integrity and what they call the systematic manipulation of the democratic process. The Congress's organisational weakness at the grassroots level, though, remains a worry here. That said, a strong performance by the INDIA bloc, with Congress playing a pivotal role, could provide the momentum needed to challenge the BJP's narrative dominance ahead of other state elections. Conversely, a poor showing could reignite questions about Rahul's leadership and the viability

of the Opposition strategy. Bihar's significance is amplified by its symbolic importance—as one of India's poorest states with a large population of marginalised communities, it represents exactly the constituency that Congress claims to champion against what it characterises as the BJP's pro-corporate agenda.

What emerges from these numbers is a picture of an Opposition in transition, no longer in free fall but not yet ascendant. Modest gains in public perception, a measure of stability on leadership questions, and sustained backing for unity point to a political force that has arrested its decline and tentatively begun the work of rebuilding. But the distance to be covered to mount a credible challenge to the BJP's dominance remains enormous. The real test for the Opposition lies not only in countering the ruling party but in articulating a persuasive, cohesive vision capable of rallying India's diverse electorate. ■

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| MOOD OF THE NATION |

| BEST CMs |



1

**YOGI ADITYANATH**  
Uttar Pradesh  
**36** [35.3]

Photograph by BANDEEP SINGH

## MOST POPULAR CMs (ACROSS INDIA)

Respondents across 30 states were asked to rate who they thought to be the best-performing CMs in the country

**2 MAMATA BANERJEE**

West Bengal

**12.5** [10.6]

**3 N. CHANDRABABU NAIDU**

Andhra Pradesh

**7.3** [5.1]

**4 NITISH KUMAR**

Bihar

**4.3** [3.4]

**5 M.K. STALIN**

Tamil Nadu

**3.8** [5.2]

**6 PINARAYI VIJAYAN**

Kerala

**3** [1.6]

**7 REVANTH REDDY**

Telangana

**2.8** [2.1]

**8 MOHAN YADAV**

Madhya Pradesh

**2.7** [2.2]

**9 HIMANTA BISWA SARMA**

Assam

**2.1** [3.4]

**10 DEVENDRA FADNAVIS**

Maharashtra

**1.7** [4]

Respondents across all states were asked to rate the performance of 30 CMs. The ratings are their perception. So, 36 per cent of the 206,826 respondents rated Yogi Adityanath as India's No. 1 CM

# SAFFRON SUPREMACY

**Yogi Adityanath rides an unbroken winning streak as the country's most popular chief minister, while Himanta Biswa Sarma emerges as the best-performing within home state**

By KAUSHIK DEKA

# O

**Over the past decade,** India's political landscape has been defined by a powerful convergence of Hindu nationalist rhetoric and display with claims of administrative efficiency, most visibly in the BJP-ruled states. This fusion has allowed the party's most ideologically assertive chief ministers to dominate public imagination in ways their counterparts on the opposite end of the spectrum have struggled to match. The latest INDIA TODAY Mood of the Nation (MOTN) poll, by examining Indian federal polities through the lens of state leadership, sheds light on this dynamic. It reveals how voters across diverse states weigh governance, performance and ideology in shaping their perceptions.

Two distinct questions structured the exercise. First,

respondents across the country were asked who they considered their favourite CM in India. This is a perception ranking, reflecting visibility, national resonance and image beyond state borders. Second, each state's respondents were asked to judge their own CM's performance, a more grounded, local assessment, anchored in everyday governance.

At the apex of national popularity stands Yogi Adityanath, the saffron-robed CM of Uttar Pradesh. His 36 per cent approval rating signifies the mainstreaming of muscular Hindu nationalism that once occupied the margins of Indian polities. Yogi's position, virtually unchanged over 11 consecutive surveys, suggests that his mix of religious symbolism, development and promises of law and order resonates far beyond India's most populous state. What makes this noteworthy is that he maintains this national prominence while simultaneously securing a respectable 40.4 per cent satisfaction rating

within UP itself, a feat that eludes most other nationally recognised CMs.

The phenomenon extends to Assam's Himanta Biswa Sarma, another BJP leader known for his hardline stance on issues of religious identity and demographic change. Despite experiencing a significant decline in his home state approval rating—from 55 per cent to 44.6 per cent over the past six months—Himanta still commands the highest satisfaction rating among CMs of major states. The erosion is notable ahead of next year's assembly election, suggesting fatigue or discontent despite his high-

decibel politics. However, unlike Yogi, in the national popularity list, Himanta appears far down at No. 9, securing support of just over 2 per cent respondents. For both CMs, the divergence between national visibility and local acceptance illustrates the importance of maintaining a delicate balance between local bases and national attention.

The disconnect between national

# 11

**Consecutive surveys in which Yogi Adityanath has emerged as India's No. 1 CM**

## BEST PERFORMING CMs (HOME STATE/ BIG\*)

Respondents in every state were asked to rate their own CM



1

**HIMANTA BISWA SARMA**  
Assam  
**44.6 [55]**

**2 VISHNU DEO SAI**  
Chhattisgarh  
**41.9 [39]**

**3 HEMANT SOREN**  
Jharkhand  
**41.9 [31]**

**4 BHUPENDRABHAI PATEL**  
Gujarat  
**40.7 [54]**

**5 YOGI ADITYANATH**  
Uttar Pradesh  
**40.4 [37]**

**6 MOHAN YADAV**  
Madhya Pradesh  
**39.2 [38]**

**7 N. CHANDRA-BABU NAIDU**  
Andhra Pradesh  
**38.1 [47]**

**8 MOHAN CHARAN MAJHI**  
Odisha  
**34.2 [39]**

**9 MAMATA BANERJEE**  
West Bengal  
**30.1 [46]**

**10 BHAGWANT SINGH MANN**  
Punjab  
**29.9 [17]**

Respondents were asked to evaluate the performance of their own CM. For instance, 44.6% respondents of the total of 6,755 from Assam said they were satisfied with Himanta Biswa Sarma while 41.9% of the 1,529 respondents from Chhattisgarh expressed satisfaction at Vishnu Deo Sai's performance

\*States with more than 10 Lok Sabha seats

## | BEST CMs |

recognition and local performance becomes even more pronounced with opposition and non-BJP stalwarts who have dominated Indian political discourse for decades. Mamata Banerjee of West Bengal, N. Chandrababu Naidu of Andhra Pradesh, Nitish Kumar of Bihar and M.K. Stalin of Tamil Nadu feature prominently in the national popularity rankings, benefiting from their high media visibility and long political careers. Yet when voters in their own states are asked to evaluate their performance, only Naidu manages a satisfaction rating approaching 40 per cent, placing him among the top five, while Mamata languishes at just 30.1 per cent, a precipitous fall from 46 per cent six months earlier. Again, this could be a worrying signal ahead of her electoral test next year.

### **BJP's Edge**

The BJP's dominance in the performance metrics presents a compelling narrative about its governance model and reception among voters. Six of the top 10 best-performing CMs helm BJP-governed states, a remarkable achievement that underscores the party's ability to translate electoral victories into, at least, perceived administrative competence. The roster includes not just ideological hardliners like Yogi and Himanta, but also their lower-profile counterparts like Vishnu Deo Sai of Chhattisgarh and Mohan Yadav of Madhya Pradesh, suggesting that the BJP's governance template, whether focused on Hindu nationalism, development or welfare schemes, has found a receptive audience. By contrast, no Congress CM finds a place in this top bracket, exposing the party's state-level organisational weakness and its inability to convert incumbency into credibility. It's a damning indictment of India's principal Opposition party's governance record.

Among the Opposition faces, Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren stands out as an unexpected success story. After a turbulent spell out of office, he has returned with a striking turnaround, climbing from 31 per cent satisfaction six months ago to nearly 42 per cent now, enough to place him third

## **BEST PERFORMING CMs (HOME STATE/ SMALL\*)**

Respondents in every state were asked to rate their own CM



RAJWANT RAWAT

1

**PREM SINGH TAMANG**

Sikkim

**53.9 [62]**



**2 PEMA KHANDU**

Arunachal Pradesh

**41.6 [42]**



**3 DR MANIK SAHA**

Tripura

**40.4 [39]**



**4 CONRAD SANGMA**

Meghalaya

**38.6 [38]**



**5 LALDUHOMA**

Mizoram

**38.4 [38]**

Respondents were asked to evaluate the performance of their own CM. For instance, 53.9% respondents of the total of 300 from Sikkim said they were satisfied with Prem Singh Tamang while 41.6% of the 300 respondents from Arunachal Pradesh expressed satisfaction at Pema Khandu's performance

\*States with less than 10 Lok Sabha seats

in the overall ratings. The surge suggests Soren's second innings may prove steadier than anticipated and offers the Opposition a rare glimmer of encouragement at a time when most of its state leaders struggle to be seen as credible performers. His rise also highlights a broader truth: voters can set aside past controversies when leaders manage to deliver tangible governance.

The elevation of previously struggling leaders offers another compelling narrative. Bhagwant Singh Mann of Punjab, whose approval rating has surged from a dismal 17 per cent to nearly 30 per cent, demonstrates that CMs can recover from early missteps if they adjust their governance approach.

### **Small but Rising**

The poll also highlights promising trends from India's smaller states, where leaders often govern beyond the glare of national attention. In Sikkim, CM Prem Singh Tamang continues to command majority approval, with around 53 per cent

of respondents in his state expressing satisfaction with his performance. This places him at the very top nationwide for the second consecutive round.

Taken together, the findings point to a central paradox in Indian politics today. The most visible CMs—combative, ideological and relentless in their projection—are not always the ones securing satisfaction at home. Yogi remains the rare exception, managing to dominate the national stage while holding steady in his own state. Meanwhile, Himanta and Mamata illustrate the hazards of overexposure and inflated expectations, particularly in the run-up to elections. The Congress's absence from the list of top performers underscores its deepening state-level crisis, while the BJP's prominence reflects leaders increasingly moulded in the party's ideological and electoral image.

The broader lesson for CMs is clear: ideological clarity and political aggression may deliver visibility, but lasting success still depends on the harder test of sustained governance. ■

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MOOD OF THE NATION

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| FOREIGN AFFAIRS |

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# STEADYING THE SHIP

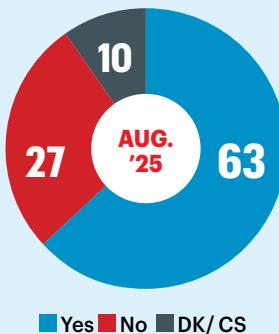
**With Trump imposing punitive trade tariffs on India and wooing Pakistan, India has a tough task at hand reassessing diplomatic priorities. Indians endorse an approach that places national interest first**

*By PRADIP R. SAGAR*

I

In the realm of foreign policy, India had an eventful half-year that may well reshape its future course. The first inflection point came in May, when the government launched Operation Sindoora in response to the Pahalgam terrorist attack, accompanied by a carefully calibrated diplomatic effort to rally international support. Soon after came a far more unpredictable variable: a sledgehammer called Donald Trump.

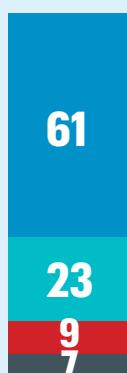
**Q. Are you worried about US president Trump's high tariffs on Indian goods?**



Indian exports worth \$48.2 billion are affected by US tariffs. Naturally, it worries the majority

**Q. How do you think India should deal with the US to ensure tariffs are lowered?**

- India must not compromise on its interests but continue negotiations
- Indian economy is capable of handling high tariffs by the US
- India should accept US demands
- DK/CS



Over 60 per cent of those surveyed are in favour of continued talks

All figures in % and rounded off;  
DK/ CS: Don't know/ can't say

Jeopardising the India-US strategic partnership is Trump's characteristically unilateral move to slap a 25 per cent tariff on imports from India, citing its unjustifiably high tariff regime. More damaging still was an additional 25 per cent penalty on Indian goods, ostensibly in retaliation for New Delhi's continued purchases of discounted Russian oil, bringing the total tariff burden to a bruising 50 per cent. This economic broadside has done more than rattle markets; it has imperilled India's delicate balancing act between its historical ties with Moscow and its growing strategic alignment with Washington. Adding to New Delhi's anxieties is Trump's

74  
PER CENT

respondents in the North are opposed to playing sports with Pakistan as it continues to sponsor terrorism, but 38 per cent in the South are okay with it

abrupt diplomatic courtship of Pakistan, rekindling fears of a regional encirclement as relations with China remain tense and Bangladesh drifts away from India's orbit.

The US tariffs affect Indian exports worth \$48.2 billion (Rs 4.13 lakh crore), with sectors such as textiles, pharmaceuticals, auto components, steel and aluminium bearing the brunt. The textile industry, in particular, may see a sharp fall in orders, with American buyers scouting alternatives in Vietnam and Bangladesh, bringing with it the spectre of job losses and a slowdown in export growth. Though the government has said it will take necessary steps to protect national interests and shield exporters, it has done little to assuage the worries of ordinary Indians. Ac-

cording to the INDIA TODAY Mood of the Nation (MOTN) August 2025 poll, over 63 per cent of respondents express concerns over the impact of high US tariffs. Only 27 per cent remain relatively unperturbed. Policy analysts advocate that India must respond with a blend of pragmatic diplomacy, targeted sectoral support, and strategic market diversification.

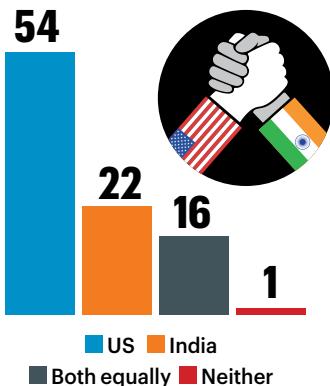
**76  
PER CENT**

**in the South say foreign policy under NDA has strengthened India's global standing; compared to only 63 per cent each in the North and West**

When asked how India should navigate the worsening trade row, 60.7 per cent of respondents believe India must not cede ground on its own interests but continue negotiations. Another 23 per cent exuded

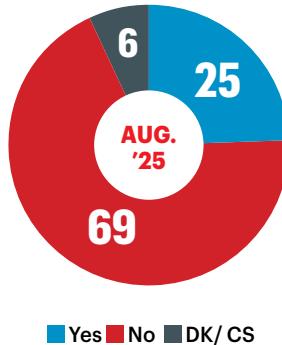


**Q. Who is responsible for the breakdown in US-India trade deal negotiations?**



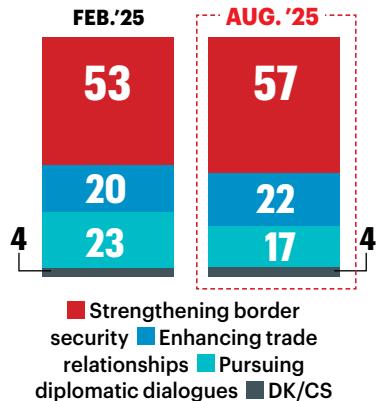
Expectedly, the US cops most of the blame, but a sizable number blame India

**Q. Should India play sports, including cricket, with Pakistan while it continues to sponsor terrorism?**



A majority of respondents are willing to forego a India-Pak clash in any sport

**Q. What should be India's priority in managing its relationship with China?**



Concerns over border security while dealing with China have increased

All figures in % and rounded off; DK/CS: Don't know/can't say

confidence in the Indian economy's innate capacity to absorb the shocks; a mere 8.7 per cent advocated acquiescence to American demands. Trade talks between the two nations remain stalled due to mismatched expectations. The US has long sought greater access to Indian markets in agriculture, dairy and automobiles, while India has been pressing for tariff relief on its labour-intensive exports, particularly textiles and garments. Public opinion appears divided on where blame lies: 53.5 per cent fault the US, 22 per cent point the finger at India, and 16 per cent hold both equally culpable. Despite mounting Western sanctions, India continues to buy discounted Russian oil, citing a steadfast commitment to its domestic economy and consumers. India also notes that it was initially encouraged by the US to procure Russian crude to stabilise volatile global oil prices. Reflecting this stance, 68.7 per cent of respondents believe that continuing to buy oil from Moscow serves India's national interest, while only 15.9 per cent dissent.

### The Pak-US Tango

**D**ominating the foreign policy landscape, though, was Op. Sindoor and the supercharged narratives around it. Even amidst contested details, there's consensus that India massively escalated the cost for Pakistan's policy of 'war by other means'. The 88-hour conflict saw India's military extend its reach to sensitive military assets deep within Pakistan, raising the benchmark for reciprocity. The public mood is in sync. Asked if India should play sports, including cricket, with Pakistan, over 68 per cent of respondents say no; only 24.5 per cent think otherwise. On its part, the government has decided to forgo bilateral series with Pakistan, although Indian teams will continue to face their rivals in multi-lateral tournaments.

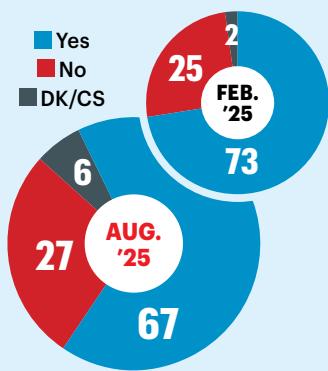
India's diplomatic resolve is being put to test not just by the Trump administration's aggressive tariff poli-

### Q. How worried are you about the emerging nexus between China, Pakistan and Bangladesh?



A possible encirclement by inimical forces worries 72 per cent of respondents

### Q. Has India's foreign policy under the NDA government strengthened its global standing?



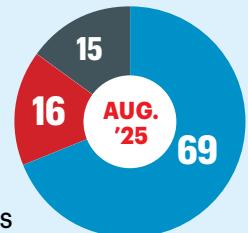
Most people questioned still believe the foreign policy of the NDA is robust

### Q. Have India's global influence and reputation improved in recent years?



Over 80 per cent say India's global influence has improved/ stayed the same

### Q. India continues to buy discounted Russian oil despite Western sanctions and imposition of high tariffs by US. Is this in India's national interest?



Over two-thirds say India must not yield to US pressure and protect national interest interests

All figures in % and rounded off; DK/CS: Don't know/can't say

56  
PER CENT

upper caste Hindus think close India-China engagement will strengthen India's position globally—highest among caste groups

cies but also from America's open courting and hosting of Pakistani army chief Asim Munir. Asked how India should respond if the US deepens its political/military support to Pakistan, over 59 per cent advocate bolstering ties with allies such as Russia, while 29 per cent favour enhancing military readiness. Only 5.5 per cent believe in seeking dialogue with

Pakistan, a precipitous fall from the 44.7 per cent who endorsed talks just six months earlier. Pahalgam seems to have upended many of India's old certainties, particularly in the neighbourhood.

Strains in the Indo-US ties have prompted India to reaffirm its time-tested relations with Moscow and cautiously reopen diplomatic channels with China. In August, during a visit by Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi, national security advisor Ajit Doval officially announced PM Modi's participation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit in Tianjin, scheduled for August 31–September 1. Both sides are seeking to bring bilateral relations on track, with steps such as resuming the



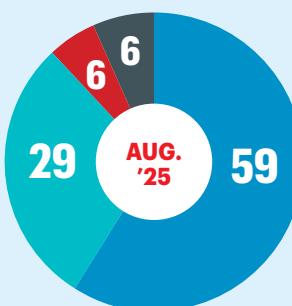
**Muslim respondents feel India was responsible for trade talks with US breaking down—highest among all religious groups**

Kailash Mansarovar Yatra, reopening trade routes and restarting direct flights. Yet mistrust lingers. India's military establishment remains wary, recalling the 2020 Chinese incursions into eastern Ladakh. The public shares this caution. Asked to rank priorities in India's relationship with China, 56.5 per cent of respondents favour bolstering border security, while 22 per cent prioritise trade, a slight uptick from 53.3 per cent and 19.7 per cent, respectively, in February.

### An Emerging Nexus

In a bid to rebuild trust, China has pledged to address three of India's pressing concerns: the supply of fertilisers, rare earth materials and tunnel-boring machinery. These assurances are seen as confidence-building measures, underscoring a renewed attempt at pragmatic cooperation after years of frostiness. Indeed, India and China appear to be re-engaging in trade and diplomatic forums with cautious intent. Public opin-

### Q. If the United States increases political or military support to Pakistan, how should India respond?



**A majority recommend leaning on traditional allies like Russia**

### Q. Recent reports suggest India and China are engaging more closely in certain trade and diplomatic forums. How do you view this for India?



**The majority feel India will be stronger globally if it aligns with China**

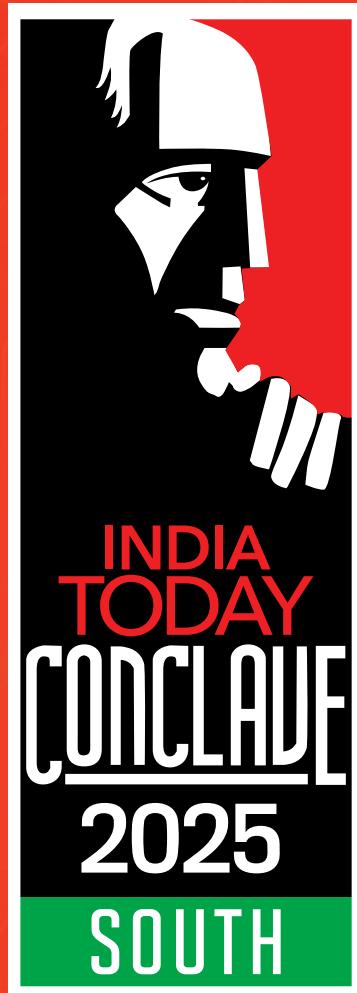
All figures in % and rounded off;  
DK/CS: Don't know/can't say

ion reflects this ambivalence. Asked about the implications of this thaw, 51.7 per cent of respondents say closer economic engagement with China will strengthen India's global position but 26.3 per cent worry it may come at the expense of national security.

Last month, Chief of Defence Staff Gen. Anil Chauhan warned that the growing strategic convergence between China, Pakistan and Bangladesh could carry significant consequences for regional stability and Indian security. His remark came weeks after Beijing hosted the first-ever trilateral meeting between the three countries on June 19. Each participant, experts contend, brings its own agenda to the table. China is keen to expand its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects and dilute India's influence in South Asia. Pakistan hopes to gain strategic access to Bangladesh, a potential staging ground for asymmetric warfare against India. For Dhaka, the prize lies in greater infrastructure investment and political backing from Beijing. Indians are cagey about this emerging nexus—47.8 per cent of respondents say they are 'very worried', another 23.7 per cent are 'somewhat worried'. Only 12.1 per cent appear not to be concerned.

The Opposition parties have been accusing the NDA government of diplomatic isolation following Op. Sindoora. Responding to the charge, PM Modi told Parliament that only three of the 193 United Nations member states supported Pakistan. The rest, he said, supported India's war on terror, the BRICS bloc among them. Most MOTN respondents support the government's claim, with 66.7 saying India's global standing has improved under the NDA, although this marks a slight dip from 72.6 per cent in February. Dissent has edged up too: 27.4 per cent now question the effectiveness of India's diplomacy, compared to 25.4 per cent earlier this year. On a broader measure of global influence, 60 per cent feel India's global esteem has risen in recent years, while 21.7 per cent believe it remains unchanged. Only 14.5 per cent say it has declined. ■

# WHERE TRADITION MEETS TRANSFORMATION



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WARS ▶**  
An MNS poster  
decrying the  
imposition of  
Hindi, Mumbai,  
Apr. 18



MOOD OF THE NATION

| SOCIO-POLITICAL |

# DEMOCRACY AT A CROSSROADS

Indians acknowledge progress in infrastructure and welfare, yet worry about democratic institutions, corruption and cohesion

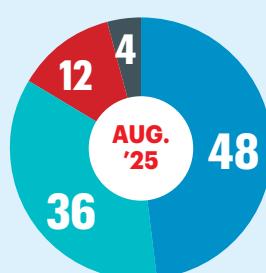
By KAUSHIK DEKA



**T**

The August 2025 poll for the India Today Mood of the Nation (MOTN) offers a telling portrait of Indian democracy in flux, marked by contradictions, anxieties and a measure of guarded optimism. In contrast to the triumphalist narratives that have defined the 11 years of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the findings reveal a nation that remains proud of its democratic journey, yet uneasy about its direction. Public opinion reflects both recognition of tangible gains in infrastructure and governance and mounting

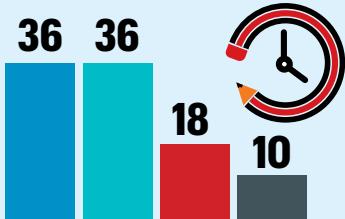
**Q. Is it important to learn and speak the local language of the state in which you may be living?**



■ Yes, it makes everyday life easier ■ Yes, but it should happen by one's own choice, without pressure ■ No, there is no need for that ■ DK/CS

Vast majority backs learning the local tongue, yet many push back against coercion

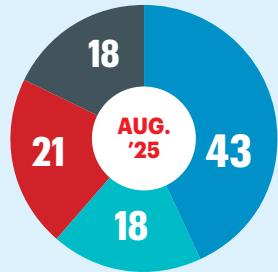
**Q. Do you support the revision of history textbooks?**



■ Yes, our history has been misrepresented in textbooks  
■ Yes, but it should not be politically motivated  
■ No  
■ DK/ CS

72% agree with revisions, but half of them are against any politicisation

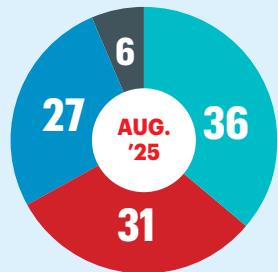
**Q. Has the role of governors in Opposition-ruled states become politically motivated?**



■ Yes ■ Somewhat ■ No ■ DK/CS

Most respondents see governors in Oppn states as politically motivated

**Q. What do you think of caste-based reservation system in higher education and government jobs?**



■ It has some benefit but needs reform ■ It should be removed entirely ■ It is necessary for social equality ■ DK/CS

The demand for reforms outweighs voices of outright support or opposition

All figures in % and rounded off; DK/CS: Don't know/can't say

**31  
PER CENT**

**OBC respondents say that caste-based reservation in higher education and government jobs should be removed**

anxiety over the fragility of democratic institutions. Support for the Modi-led NDA government's flagship ideas persists, but it is tempered by growing apprehension about corruption, institutional credibility and social cohesion, evidence of an electorate increasingly unwilling to extend the government an unqualified benefit of the doubt.

Take democracy itself. Almost half of respondents—48.3 per cent—believe India's democracy is 'in danger', the highest since 2021. This is not a sudden outburst,

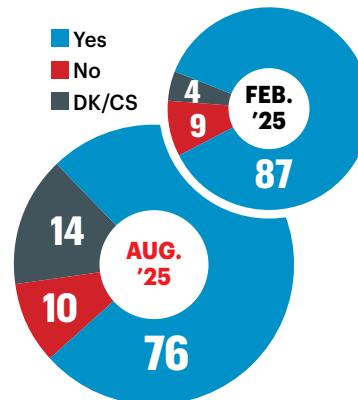
but a steady progression from earlier surveys, suggesting that what once seemed like a worry at the margins is now a mainstream sentiment. And yet, paradoxically, a majority still claims they feel free to express their views on both politics and religion. The contradiction is telling. Indians may continue to exercise their voice in private spaces or local contexts, but there is an unmistakable perception that the larger architecture of democracy—its institutions, its checks and balances—is weakening. The anxiety is less about whether one can speak, and more about whether speaking matters.

### Anxieties over Institutions

**T**he survey illuminates growing tensions in India's federal structure. A majority (43.2 per cent) views governors in Opposition-ruled states as politically motivated actors, with another 18.3 per cent partially agreeing. This perception strikes at the heart of constitutional design, where governors theoretically serve as neutral arbiters between a state and the Centre.

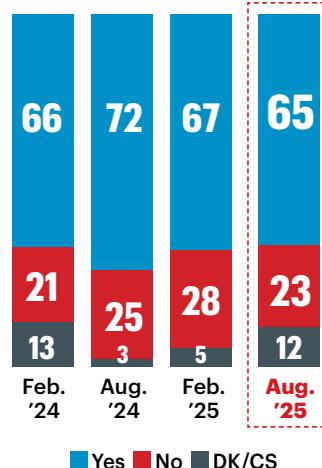
That anxiety is mirrored in perceptions about corruption. When Modi swept to power in 2014, one of his most powerful promises was to rid India of endemic graft. More than a decade later, 45.2 per cent respondents believe his government has reduced graft, but 47.2 per cent disagree. This represents a marked shift from just six months ago, when the government enjoyed a 10-point advantage on this metric. In fact, the share of those affirming government progress on curbing corruption has declined sharply since 2024. In tandem, 45.5 per cent respondents say that the BJP government misuses enforcement agencies like the ED and the CBI more than its predecessors did. This dual slide—in confidence about corruption control and suspicion of political misuse of agencies—marks a dangerous erosion of the very plank that once brought the government to power. It suggests that the aura of being cleaner than the rest, so central to the Modi brand, is under serious strain.

**Q. Should the minimum support price (MSP) for agricultural produce be legally guaranteed by the government?**



Support for legal guarantee on MSP softens, though still dominant

**Q. Do you support the idea of One Nation, One Poll?**



Voices in favour of synchronising all elections are still strong

All figures in % and rounded off; DK/CS: Don't know/can't say

69  
PER CENT

respondents in the South think it's important to learn and speak the local tongue of the state where you live

### Social Crosscurrents

**T**he terrain of identity and culture, meanwhile, shows an electorate deeply divided. When it comes to caste-based reservations, more than a quarter of respondents call them essential for social equality, but an almost equal proportion now believes they should be scrapped entirely. The largest segment sits somewhere in the middle, insisting that the system needs reforms. This middle ground is significant. It reflects neither blind defence nor outright rejection, but a demand for recalibration,

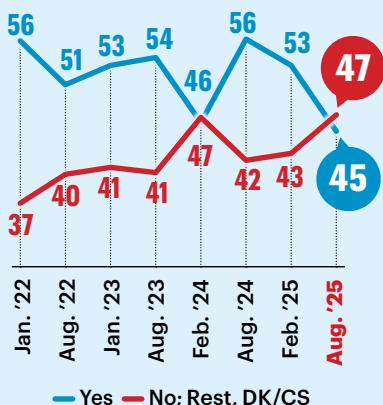
proof that the quota debate has entered a new phase where generational and class anxieties intertwine with caste politics.

History and language are equally fraught. An overwhelming 71.9 per cent support revising history textbooks, though they split evenly between those believing history has been 'misrepresented' (36 per cent) and those worried about political motivation (35.9 per cent). This indicates that in an environment where history has become a battlefield of ideological legitimacy, Indians want their past re-examined but fear the process being hijacked for partisan ends.

On language, the response is more pragmatic. A vast majority agrees that learning the local tongue makes life easier, though most resist the idea of it being enforced. It is a reminder that while Indians negotiate multiple identities daily, they prefer choice over coercion.

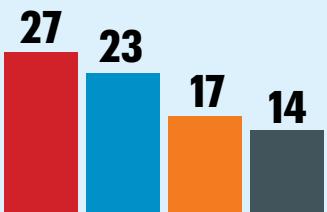
In an era of digital polarisation, Indians display remarkable unity on one issue: 81.4 per cent support stricter government regulation of social media

**Q. Has the Modi government been able to reduce corruption in India?**



Opinions are sharply divided on the BJP regime's action against graft

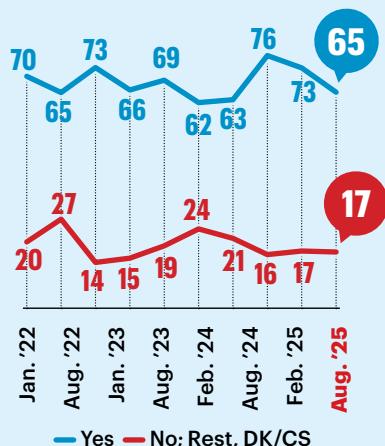
**Q. How does bureaucracy impact your life?**



- It creates unnecessary hurdle in public welfare reaching targeted beneficiaries
  - It facilitates public welfare and I benefit as a citizen
  - It forces me to pay bribes
  - It is there to exercise power and not to serve citizens
- Rest, DK/ CS

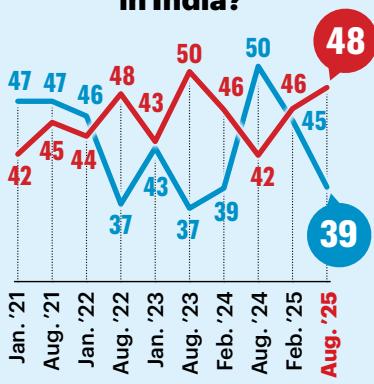
Six in 10 respondents view Indian bureaucracy in a poor light

**Q. Should a Uniform Civil Code be implemented in India?**



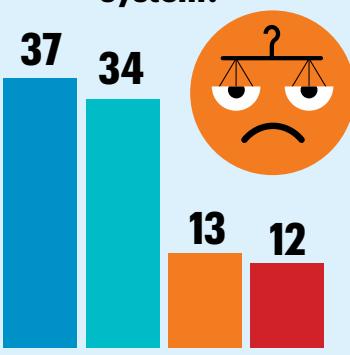
The support for UCC has dropped by over 11 points since its peak a year ago

**Q. What do you think about the current state of democracy in India?**



Almost half the respondents feel that Indian democracy is in danger

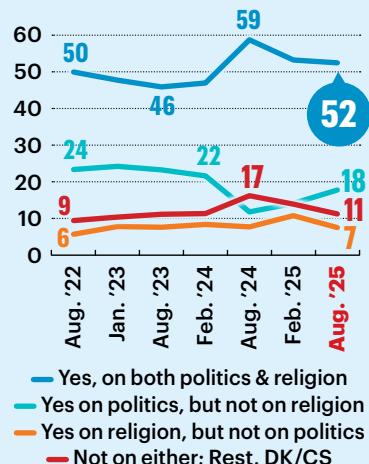
**Q. How much do you trust the Indian judicial system?**



- A great deal
- Somewhat
- Not much
- Not at all; Rest: DK/CS

71% of respondents trust the judiciary, either 'a great deal' or 'somewhat'

**Q. Do you feel free to express your opinion on politics and religion?**



A majority feels free to express opinion on politics and religion

All figures in % and rounded off; DK/ CS: Don't know/ can't say

to combat misinformation and hate speech. This near-consensus cuts across party loyalties and demographics, reflecting exhaustion with the toxicity of online discourse.

On women's safety, the nation is almost evenly divided between those who

believe conditions have improved and those who believe they have worsened. In both cases, progress feels fragile, reversible, and subject to partisan lenses.

The everyday frustrations with bureaucracy remain vivid: citizens speak as much of bribes and obstacles as they

53  
PER CENT

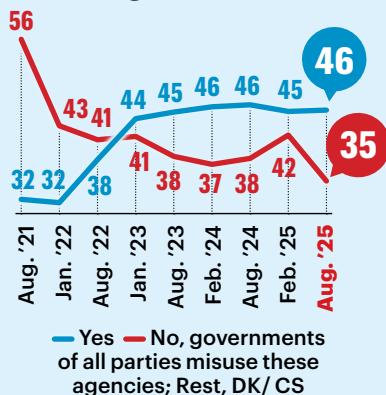
respondents think India is doing enough to protect the environment; 36% beg to differ

**Q. Should the government impose stricter regulations on social media to curb misinformation and hate speech?**



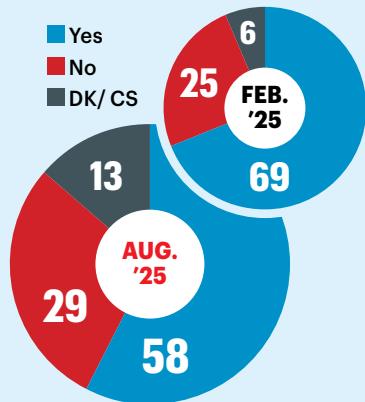
Stricter regulation of social media finds the biggest consensus

**Q. Do you think the BJP government misuses enforcement agencies such as ED, CBI and I-T department more than other governments?**



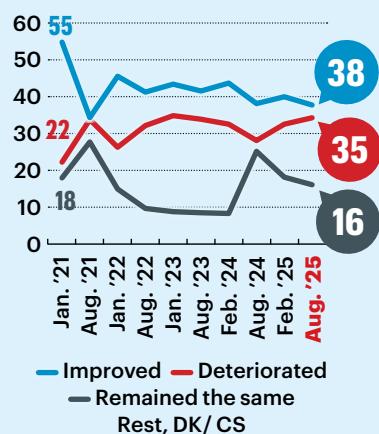
A near-majority sees greater misuse of enforcement agencies under the BJP govt

**Q. Do you support the amendments to the Waqt Act that increase government control over waqt properties?**



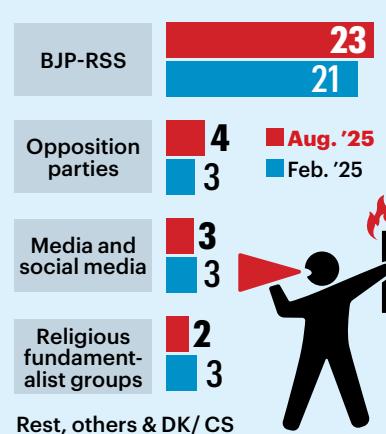
There is an 11 point drop in the support for Waqt Act changes, since last MOTN

**Q. What do you think of communal harmony under the NDA-ruled Union government?**



Just 38% now see better communal harmony, down from 55% in Jan. 2021

**Q. If you think communal harmony in the country has deteriorated, who would you blame for it?**



Among those citing worsening communal ties, one in four blame BJP-RSS

**Q. Has India become safer or less safe for women?**



Views are split on whether India has become safer or less safe for women

do of welfare facilitation. The state is present, but too often as a barrier rather than a partner.

Big-ticket social reforms, once touted as silver bullets for governance, are also losing their sheen. Support for the Uniform Civil Code has slipped considerably from the highs of recent years.

45  
PER CENT

respondents in the Northeast say India's become less safe for women, the highest across all regions

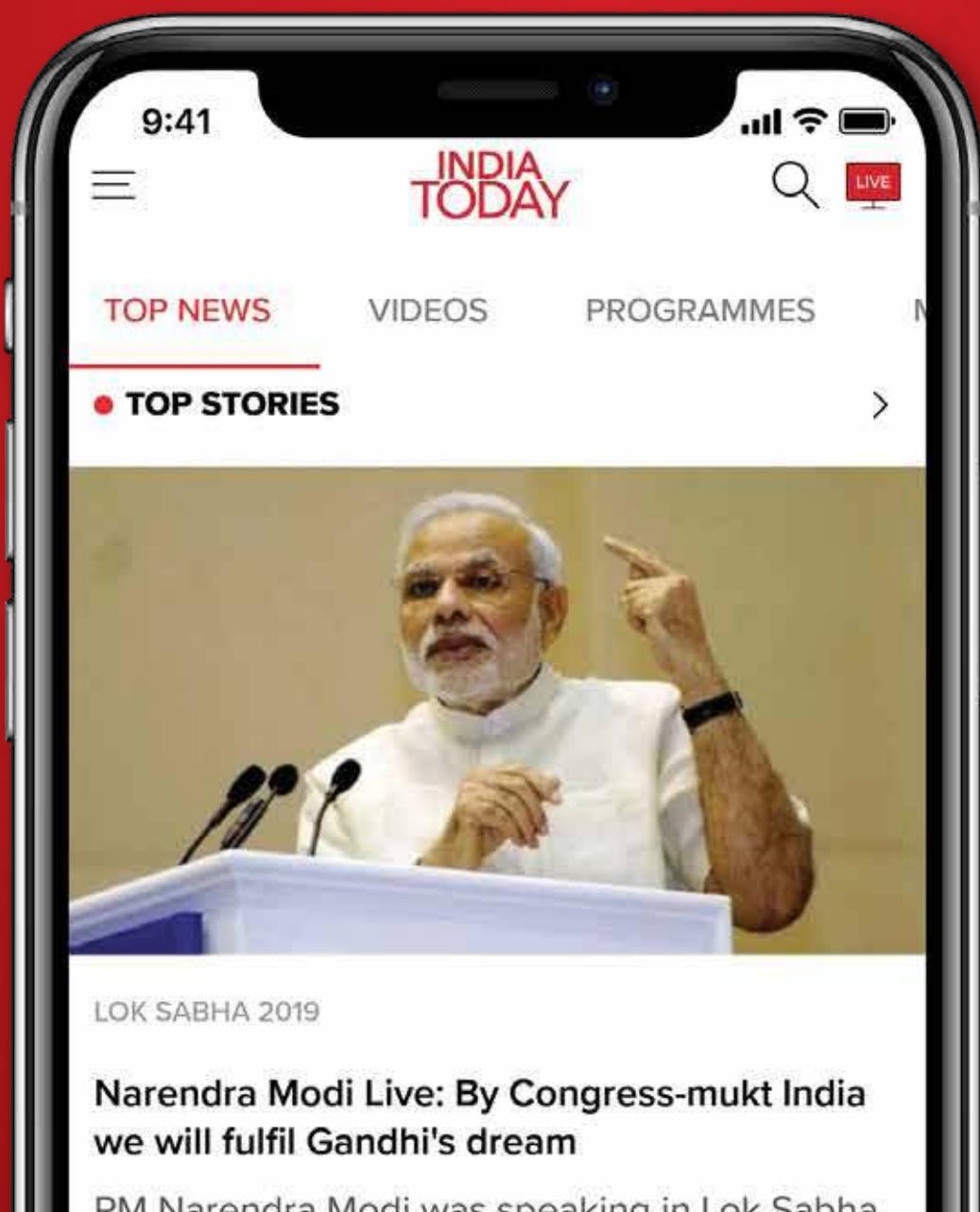
Likewise, enthusiasm for the 'One Nation, One Poll' idea, while still strong, is clearly softening. Amendments to the Waqt Act, granting greater government control over religious endowments, too, face growing scepticism.

Similarly, support for legally guaranteed Minimum Support Prices (MSP)

INDIA  
TODAY

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A section of the newly inaugurated Dwarka Expressway and the Urban Extension Road-II in New Delhi, Aug. 17

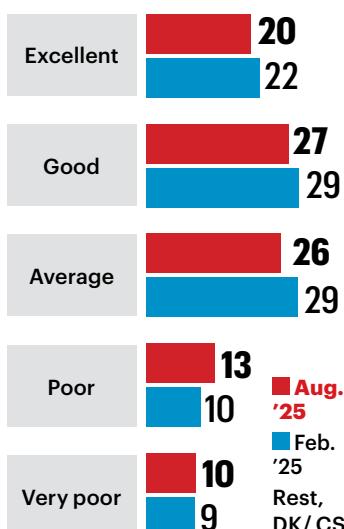
for farmers remains overwhelming at 75.5 per cent, even as it has declined from February's 86.6 per cent. This suggests growing awareness of fiscal constraints amid continuing sympathy for agricultural distress.

Another significant verdict lies in perceptions of social harmony and safety. On communal relations, only a thin majority thinks conditions have improved under the NDA. Almost as many say they have worsened, and among those who see deterioration, nearly one in four directly blame the BJP-RSS.

### Pockets of Optimism

**A**nd yet, there are signs of optimism. For instance, the recognition of the government's infrastructure push, with nearly 50 per cent satisfied with the road quality. Amid growing global concerns around climate change, Indians seem to be driven by a self-assured complacency. More than half the respondents think

### Q. How would you rate the quality of roads and infrastructure development in India?



**Nearly 50% of the respondents are satisfied with the road quality**

All figures in % and rounded off

the country is doing enough to protect the environment.

The biggest endorsement, though, came for the judiciary, often seen as democracy's last line of defence. A combined 71 per cent of respondents say they trust the judicial system either 'a great deal' or 'somewhat'. Yet the fact that nearly 59 per cent respondents don't fully trust the courts reflects growing frustration with delayed justice and perceived politicisation of the institution.

The poll reveals an electorate not rejecting the system but renegotiating its terms with it. India remains a country of sweeping mandates and grand promises, yet citizens are no longer content to cheer from the sidelines. They are less inclined to overlook failures as the inevitable cost of ambition. Voters still endorse structural reforms, value strong leadership and take pride in their democratic freedoms, but they now demand vision coupled with fairness and bold ideas matched by honest execution. ■

# आज तक

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# THE FOREVER ICONS

**Old is still gold in the cricketing roster, but chess players begin to make their presence felt in other sports**

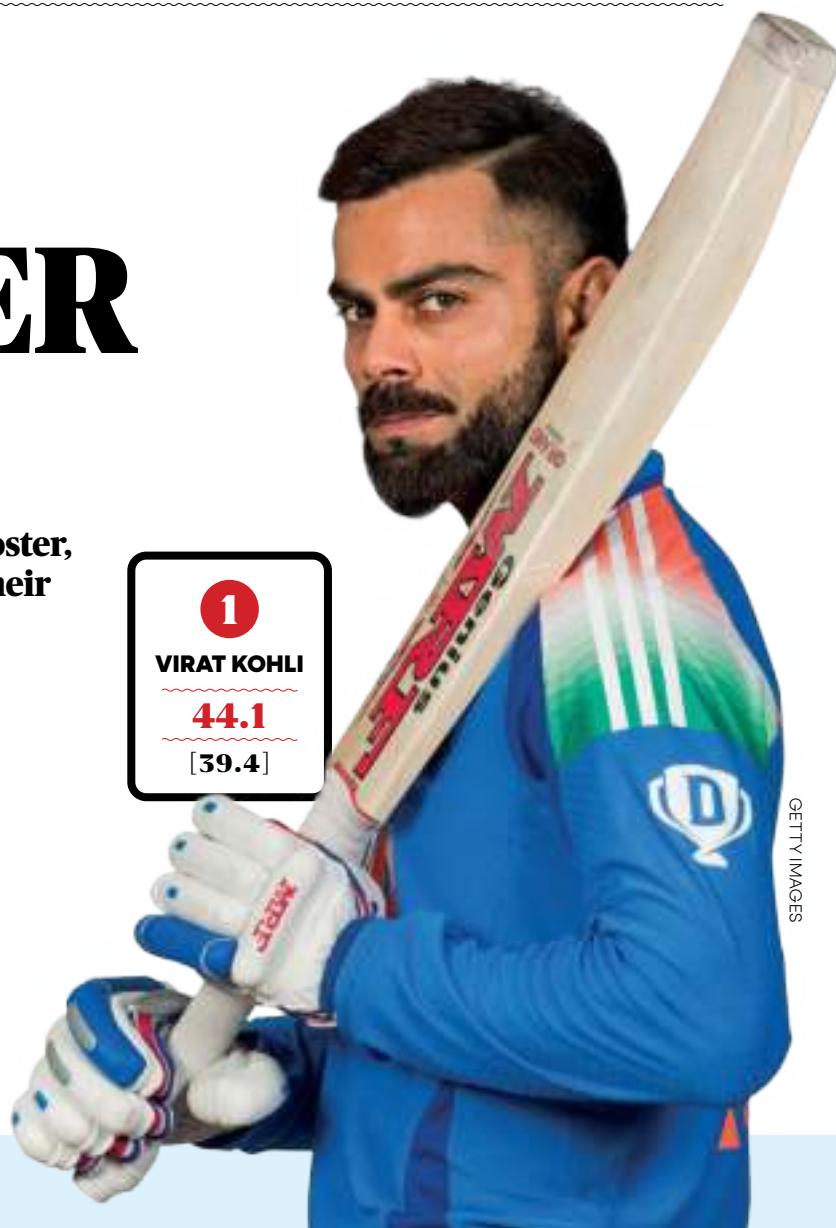
By SUHANI SINGH

I

t's hard to let go of legends, especially when it comes to cricket. Both Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma have retired from Twenty20 and Test formats, while M.S. Dhoni hung up his blue jersey ages ago. But, for Indians, they are still the holy trinity of cricket, players who continue to inspire and entertain. Kohli's reign at the top of the popularity chart can be attributed to him finally getting the long coveted feather in his already-overcrowded cap after Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) became Indian Premier League champions. Meanwhile, Sharma retains his #3 position after leading India to yet another ICC trophy, after winning the Champions Trophy earlier this year, defeating tough opponents in Australia and New Zealand en route.

On the women's front, only one name

**64 PER CENT**  
respondents in South India believe that India is capable of organising Olympics 2036, the highest among all regions



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## Q. WHO IS INDIA'S NO. 1 MALE CRICKETER?



2  
**M.S. DHONI**  
**20.9 [22.3]**



3  
**ROHIT SHARMA**  
**11.2 [11.2]**

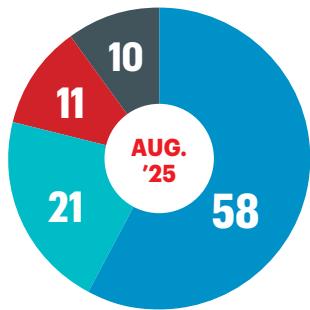


4  
**SHUBMAN GILL**  
**4.6 [8]**



5  
**RAVINDRA JADEJA**  
**2.7 [0.2]**

## Q. Is India capable of holding the Olympics in 2036?



Yes  
Maybe  
No  
DK/ CS

A majority of respondents express confidence; a fifth do not dismiss the possibility

stands tall—Smriti Mandhana. All eyes will be on the ICC Women's ODI Cricketer of the Year 2024, one of our most talented batters ever, as she looks to claim the one thing that has been missing in her storied career so far—an ICC team trophy. Needless to say, if the Women in Blue want to open their account, Mandhana needs to fire on all cylinders in the Women's Cricket World Cup. The tournament could also be captain Harmanpreet Kaur's last attempt to craft a legacy of her own.

In the non-cricketing world, double Olympic medalist Neeraj Chopra is still the athlete to beat, as is shuttler P.V. Sindhu in women's badminton. But India's wunderkinds in chess are getting noticed too. Grandmasters D. Gukesh, recent World Cup winner Divya Deshmukh (making her top five debut) and Ramesh Praggnanandhaa and his sister R. Vaishali were all recognised for their feats in the latest poll. But the presence of 41-year-old football legend Sunil Chhetri, who came back from retirement to help the struggling team, and Olympic medallists Mirabai Chanu, Manu Bhaker and Lovlina Borgohain, signify India's lack of sporting accomplishments in the international arena, with respondents rewarding recall value rather than recent performances. ■

GETTY IMAGES



## Q. Who is India's No. 1 sportsman?



**1**  
**NEERAJ CHOPRA**  
(Athletics)

**33.9** [39.1]

**2** **SUNIL CHHETRI**  
(Football)  
**13.6** [17.2]



**3** **D. GUKE SH**  
**8.9** [12.2]



**4** **R. PRAGGNA-NANDHAA**  
(Chess)  
**2.7** [0.4]

**5** **CHIRAG SHETTY & S.S. RANKIREDDY**  
(Badminton)  
**1.8** [3.6]

## Q. Who is India's No. 1 sportswoman?



**2** **MIRABAI CHANU**  
(Weightlifting)  
**4.8** [6.8]



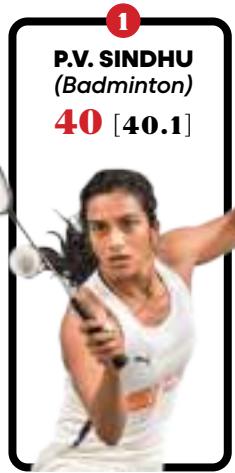
**3** **DIVYA DESHMUKH**  
(Chess)  
**3** [0.1]



**4** **MANU BHAKER**  
(Shooting)  
**2.3** [9.7]



**5** **LOVLINA BORGOHAIN** (Boxing)  
**1.8** [0.6]



**1** **P.V. SINDHU**  
(Badminton)  
**40** [40.1]

**1**  
**SMRITI MANDHANA**  
**53.4** [42.3]

## Q. WHO IS INDIA'S NO. 1 FEMALE CRICKETER?



**2**  
**HARMANPREET KAUR**  
**10.1** [8.7]



**3** **DEEPTI SHARMA**  
**6.2** [8]



**4** **SHAFALI VERMA**  
**4.1** [13.1]



**5** **RAJESHWARI GAYAKWAD**  
**1** [0.1]

# RISE OF THE SOUTHERN STAR

**Even as Big B, Shah Rukh Khan and Deepika Padukone remain the leading lights of Bollywood, South Indian stars are making inroads and changing the game—fast**

By SUHANI SINGH

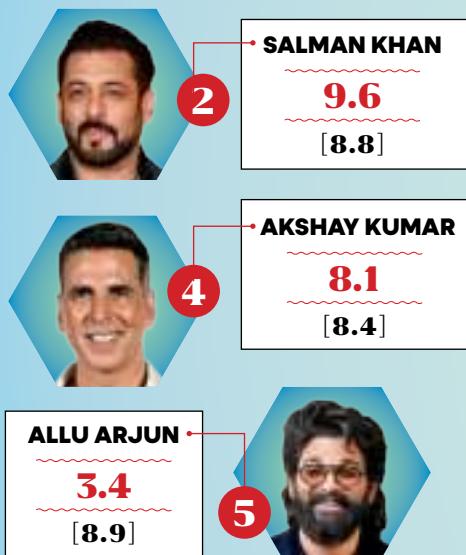
In sci-fi spectacle *Kalki 2898 AD*, Amitabh Bachchan's last release dating back to April 2024, he played Ashvatthama aka the immortal one. That status appears to hold its ground even among respondents of INDIA TODAY's Mood of the Nation poll, who seem to believe that mere hosting duties on *Kaun Banega Crorepati* are enough for the 82-year-old legend to give his decades-younger peers a run for their money.

Allu Arjun remains the sole representative from the South in the top five. But the story among actresses is entirely different. In a first, not one but three leading ladies from the region ranked high: Sai Pallavi, Rashmika Mandanna and Nayanthara. Pallavi

**36  
PER CENT**

Share of respondents in West India whose favourite hero is Amitabh Bachchan, the highest among all regions

## Q. WHO IS THE NO. 1 HERO IN THE COUNTRY?



GETTY IMAGES

is expected to make her Hindi film debut opposite Aamir Khan's son Junaid later this year. But what could be a career-defining role for the actress, best known for Tamil dramas *Gargi* and *Amaran*, will come next year as she plays Sita in the most expensive Indian movie to date—*Ramayana*—featuring Ranbir Kapoor as Ram.

On the OTT front, Pankaj Tripathi was favoured for successfully headlining two shows—*Mirzapur* and *Criminal Justice*—season after season. Among OTT actresses, Samantha Ruth Prabhu's two Hindi shows thus far were enough for her to retain top honours. *Panchayat*'s Manju Devi/Rinki ki Mummy may have lost the election in the latest season, but the actress who made the character popular, Neena Gupta, was a winner,

**15  
PER CENT**

Share of respondents in Northeast India whose favourite heroine is Deepika Padukone, the highest among all regions



### Q. Who is the No. 1 OTT male star in the country?

1 PANKAJ TRIPATHI

**14 [15.6]**



2 ABHISHEK BACHCHAN

**13.4 [10.3]**



3 MANOJ BAJPAEE

**8.1 [12.8]**



4 BOBBY DEOL

**4.7 [3.2]**



5 JITENDRA KUMAR

**1.7 [3.4]**



### Q. Who is the No. 1 OTT female star in the country?

1 SAMANTHA RUTH PRABHU

**9.1 [9.5]**



2 SUSHMITA SEN

**8.4 [13.7]**



3 NEENA GUPTA

**4.1 [8.6]**



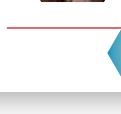
4 SONAKSHI SINHA

**3.2 [8.2]**



5 RAVEENA TANDON

**3.1 [13.8]**



### Q. WHO IS THE NO. 1 HEROINE IN THE COUNTRY?

1

DEEPIKA PADUKONE

**8.2**

[9.8]



3

RASHMIKA MANDANNA

**3.1**

[7.8]

2

SAI PALLAVI

**4.6**

[1.3]



4

ALIA BHATT

**2.6**

[4]

5

NAYANTHARA

**2.4**

[3.6]





### Q. Who is India's No. 1 male singer?

- 1 ARIJIT SINGH  
31.8 [36.6]
- 2 SONU NIGAM  
25.5 [32.7]
- 3 DILJIT DOSANJH  
2.4 [3.6]
- 4 JUBIN NAUTIYAL  
1.8 [8.8]
- 5 SHANKAR MAHADEVAN  
1.7 [1.2]



### Q. Who is India's No. 1 female singer?

- 1 SHREYA GHOSHAL  
32.8 [27.1]
- 2 NEHA KAKKAR  
11.8 [9.7]
- 3 SUNIDHI CHAUHAN  
2.9 [5.2]
- 4 PALAK MUCHHAL  
1.1 [3]
- 5 REKHA BHARDWAJ  
1.1 [0.2]

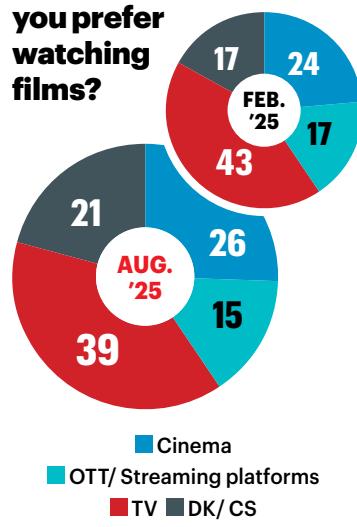


DK/ CS: Don't know/ can't say; all figures in % and the rest of the respondents gave other responses

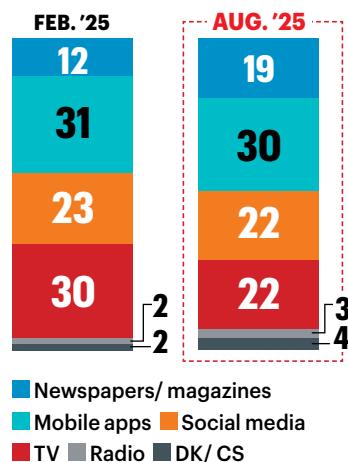
making her top five debut in the poll.

As for musicians, Arijit Singh, the most followed artist on Spotify globally, continued his dominating run in the MOTN poll. 'Kesariya' is still one of the most-streamed songs even three years after its release. He has featured in hit soundtracks of two romances already this year: *Saiyaara* and *Metro... In Dino*. Sonu Nigam, at 52, has also seen a rise in popularity, going strong after nearly four decades in the industry and beating the likes of Diljit Dosanjh and Jubin Nautiyal to finish second.

### Q. Where do you prefer watching films?



### Q. Where do you get your news from?



**34 PER CENT**  
respondents in Northeast India  
get their news from social  
media, the highest among  
all regions

Among women singers, MOTN respondents repose their faith in Shreya Ghoshal, who retains her top billing. Neha Kakkar is a distant second—she's

still the most followed singer on Instagram, even if she doesn't have the biggest hits these days.

As for movie consumption habits, the telly is a clear favourite, with cinema visits coming a close second. A sizeable chunk have no strong preference, content to view films wherever available. But with the news, mobile apps are a clear go-to. Social media is as much of a source as television news. Surprisingly, newspapers and magazines are making a comeback, with a 9 percentage point rise in those who rely on them for news. ■

**IndiaContent**

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सबसे भरोसेमंद  
खोतों से,  
सबसे सटीक  
जानकारी

## सब्सक्राइब करें और पाएं 68% तक की छूट

हाँ! मैं इंडिया टुडे को सब्सक्राइब करना चाहता/चाहती हूँ

अपनी पसंद के सब्सक्रिप्शन को टिक करें और फॉर्म को इस पते पर भेज दें- वी केअर, लिविंग मीडिया इंडिया लि. सी-9, सेक्टर-10, नोएडा 201301 (भारत)

टिक करें	अवधि	कुल अंक	कवर प्राइस (₹)	ऑफर प्राइस (₹)	प्लान	डिस्काउंट
<input type="checkbox"/>	1 वर्ष	52	3120	999	डिजिटल	68%
<input type="checkbox"/>	1 वर्ष	52	3120	2699	डिजिटल+प्रिंट	14%

कृपया फॉर्म को ब्लॉकलेटर में भरें

मैं चेक/डीडी जमा कर रहा/रही हूँ जिसकी संख्या.....है और इसे दिनांक.....को लिविंग मीडिया इंडिया लिमिटेड के पक्ष में .....(बैंक का नाम).....रूपये की धनराशि (दिल्ली से बाहर के चेक के लिए ₹ 50 रूपये अतिरिक्त जोड़, समान मूल्य के चेक माव्य नहीं होंगे) के लिए बनवाया गया है।

नाम..... पता.....

..... शहर..... राज्य..... पिन.....

मोबाइल..... ईमेल.....



सब्सक्राइब करने के लिए यहां स्कैन करें।

ऑफर के विषय में विशेष जानकारी के लिए निम्न माध्यमों से संपर्क भी कर सकते हैं

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# LE ! SURE

ART: DIFFERENT MODERNISMS PG 64

PHOTOGRAPHY: INDIA'S LEGACY WITH THE MEDIUM PG 65

BOOKS ▶

## THE HOUSE THAT ROY BUILT

ARUNDHATI ROY'S NEW MEMOIR  
IS ABOUT HER COMPLEX  
RELATIONSHIP WITH HER MOTHER



Photograph by MAYANK AUSTEN SOOFI

# A

**"ANYTHING'S POSSIBLE IN HUMAN NATURE," CHACKO TELLS HIS "FOUNTAIN-HAIRED NIECE",** in Arundhati Roy's debut, *The God of Small Things*. "Love. Madness. Hope. Infinite joy." Roy's latest book, out in shops now, is a memoir built on the foundations of this insight, of this all-encompassing embrace of humanity, of humanness.

In *Mother Mary Comes to Me*, Roy presents her mother to us, not sublimated in fiction, but in her brutal, glorious entirety. "She's such an extraordinary, crazy, contentious person—woman—she needs to be shared with the world," Roy says in a Zoom call. "She belongs in the pages of literature, of history as 'she', not as a fictional character." A woman in full.

This is no hagiography. Roy doesn't soft-pedal her mother's terrifying violence—both physical and verbal—doesn't diminish the effect it has on her and her older brother, or hide her need to flee in the face of her mother's rage. But how could Mary Roy have been a 'conventional' Indian mother—that domestic goddess, that icon of self-abnegation and self-sacrifice—when her life was a long, loud denunciation of convention and its hypocrisies?

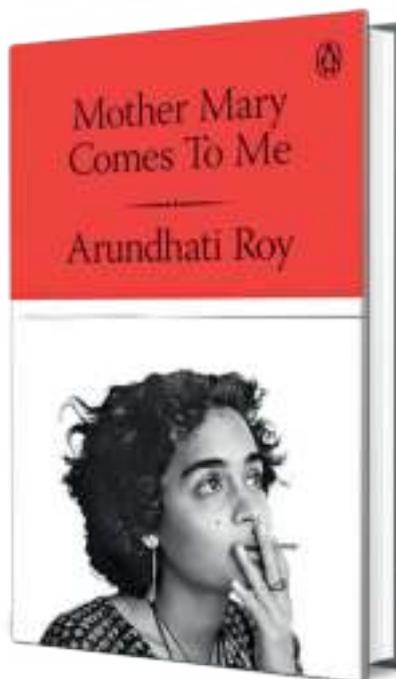
Mary Roy thrived, as few women do in India, as a public figure—the doyenne of a school she fashioned from rock and brush, and winner of a landmark lawsuit that gave Syrian Christian women the same rights as their male siblings to inherit property. Despite the upheaval, the havoc that marks Arundhati Roy's early life, this is not a book about a family being cleaved apart. Instead, everyone, however titanic their anger, finds room in their hearts and imaginations to reconcile, to learn

to live with difference. When Roy is not quite three, her mother leaves her husband, a genial, charismatic alcoholic who manages a tea plantation in Assam, and takes the children to Ooty. There, in Roy's grandfather's house, largely abandoned except for an old English woman who seemed to be some sort of tenant, the three of them "lived like fugitives". An "Imperial Entomologist", Roy's grandfather's legacy is the violence he visits on and bequeaths to his family, and perhaps a streak of mad genius.

Not long after they move to Ooty, Mary Roy's mother and brother descend on the house to evict the squatters. Mary and the children were "running through the town in panic, trying to find a lawyer", a foreshadowing of more consequential legal battles later. Penniless and desperate, Mary eventually leaves Ooty. She heads to Kerala and Ayemenem, the village that is home to her mother and brother—a Rhodes scholar and Balliol man who had given up his previous life, including his Swedish wife and three children, to "start a pickle, jam and curry-powder factory".

For Mary, the move was a humiliation. "Life in

Ayemenem," Roy writes in *Mother Mary Comes to Me*, "was like living on a ledge that we could be nudged off at any moment. Even Kochu Maria, the cook, would tell me that



**MOTHER MARY COMES TO ME**  
By Arundhati Roy  
PENGUIN HAMISH HAMILTON  
₹899; 376 pages

**ROY'S INDOMITABILITY, HER ABILITY TO TURN ALMOST EVERY ADVERSITY INTO FAIRY TALE TRIUMPH, GIVES MOTHER MARY COMES TO ME A PICARESQUE QUALITY**

we had no right to be living there. She would mutter and grumble about the shamefulness of having fatherless children living under the same roof as decent people." Still, it is here that Mary starts her school. And it is here, that Roy herself experiences one of those Wordsworthian spots of time: a sensory experience so profound it nourishes her memory, her art, her very way of being throughout her life.

Without revealing very much about herself, Roy packs her mem-

# A BOUQUET OF MARVELS

**AATISH TASEER**'s new collection of essays is part memoir and part travelogue

oir with incident. Hers is a fabulous life, as in a life that seems more mythical, more magical than real. Roy's sheer indomitability, her ability to turn almost every adversity into fairy tale triumph, gives *Mother Mary Comes to Me* a picaresque quality. She doesn't dwell, doesn't wallow in grief or self-pity—she just keeps bouncing over obstacles.

In the end, *Mother Mary Comes to Me* is a paean to freedom, to independence. Roy took the astonishing Booker-winning success of *The God of Small Things* as a sign that she could now face the world on her own terms. Her greatest strength as a writer—as a human being—is her radical empathy. It's a necessary antidote to the times. "We've become," Roy says, "for the most part, a hateful people who have narrowed their understanding of everything to a pinpoint." The lesson we can learn from the Roys, mother and daughter, is to open our minds and our hearts to others. ■

—*Shouyat Dasgupta*

**E**xiled from India in 2019, Aatish Taseer sets out to write a series of wonderfully evocative travel essays. Commissioned by *T: The New York Times Style* magazine, they were clearly also a form of therapy, helping the

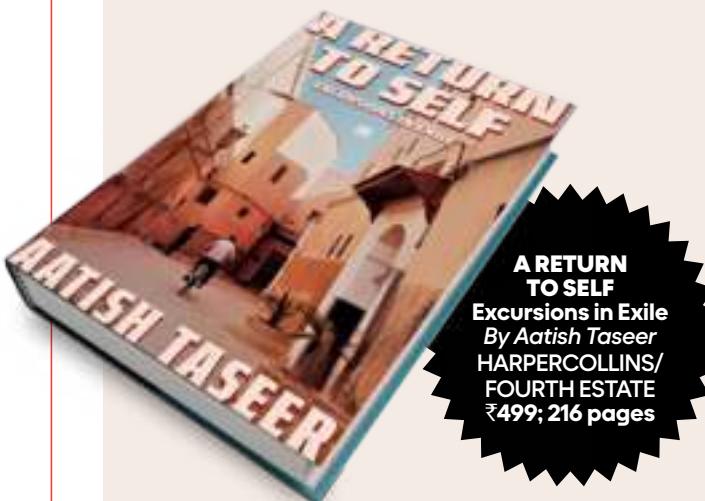
to Uzbekistan. Seeing beyond the drab Soviet-era buildings, he conjures the days of Genghis Khan, when horse-borne warriors thundered westward across Central Asia, bearing death and silk. Then to Morocco where he confronts the mind-

ma, Earth Goddess of the Andes. In Mongolia, it's energy vortices paired with Russian vodka, at the gateway to the mystical region of Shambhala at the heart of Asia. In Iraq, in Najaf, a medieval spectacle is brought to life annually, as men and boys re-enact the central trauma of their Shia faith by cutting open their own scalps with knives. Ringing them are observers holding up lighted cellphones to record the ordeal.

The juxtapositions of then and now, bristling with dates and historical arcana, are occasionally overwrought. Some of Taseer's yearning for India comes across as precious. But the author's personal history certainly earns him the right to a sharpened awareness of irony. Born in the UK, he grew up in India, the love-child of Tavleen Singh, high-profile journalist and a Sikh, and Salman Taseer, a Pakistani Muslim former governor of Punjab, who was assassinated in 2011.

As a young man, the author was keenly conscious of the prejudices of traditional society towards homosexuality. He acknowledges the debt he owes to the gay movement and the writings of authors such as James Baldwin, which helped him come out. Now in his forties, he lives in New York with his husband. ■

—*Manjula Padmanabhan*



**A RETURN TO SELF**  
Excursions in Exile  
By Aatish Taseer  
HARPERCOLLINS/  
FOURTH ESTATE  
₹499; 216 pages

author process his sense of outrage and loss.

The first of these journeys is to Istanbul, where he reconnects with memories of when he travelled as a straight man with a girlfriend while struggling to conceal his attraction to beautiful young men. The second journey begins with being introduced, as a teenager in his mother's home in New Delhi, to an extraordinary scent called oudh. The description is so intense, so extreme, it made my own nose ache with longing.

The third journey is a mesmerising trip

altering vastness of the great Sahara. In Spain, he listens for echoes of the five and a half centuries of Muslim rule which ended in 1248. In Mexico, he traces the arc of history through grains of rice and corn. In Sri Lanka, he's seduced by the divine purity of the lotus.

In the final and longest essay, he visits Bolivia, Mongolia and Iraq. He goes as a pilgrim, hoping to witness, and thereby understand, ecstatic expressions of faith. In Bolivia, it is the adoration of the Virgin of the Catholics merging with Pachama-

# GIRL ON A ROLL

With a deluge of releases to her credit, 2025 has been a great year for actor Surveen Chawla

In the past two months, wherever one looked on streaming, there was Surveen Chawla. Here she was as the strong-willed Naina in *Rana Naidu* (Netflix); then as wife of the key accused in the new season of *Criminal Justice* (Jio Hotstar); as an ambitious politician with secrets in the crime thriller *Mandala Murders* (Netflix again); and caught up in an investigation with supernatural elements in *Andhera* (Amazon Prime). The deluge led netizens to declare it is as Surveen's breakthrough year. "That's it for me. I have no more goodies," Chawla says of her prolific spell in 2025. The actress is downplaying the good run she's had, which has seen her draw acclaim, particularly for her performance in *Criminal Justice* and being the saving grace of the otherwise underwhelming *Mandala Murders*. "I am glad it happened, but this 'Oh, you have finally arrived' I find shallow," says Chawla. "When you have had such a profound journey, it feels nice to get amazing feedback." With two decades in the industry, where she's acted her way across television, films (Hindi, Punjabi and South) and now web series, she's aware how fleeting adulation can be. Chawla quit TV after three years to embrace the big screen only to get stereotyped after *Hate Story 2*, this despite having indie films like *Ugly* and *Parched* to her credit. "I was medically depressed," she says. "Self-doubt crept in, and one didn't have the backing of names in the industry."

A supreme realisation came eight years back, bringing a much-needed change in outlook. By detaching herself from the end result, Chawla found her liberation. This self-awareness interestingly coincided with the rise of streaming platforms in India. It gave Chawla's career a new lease of life, beginning with *Sacred Games* followed by Netflix's romcom *Decoupled*. The latter may not have been renewed, but it got Chawla eyeballs. The game changer was *Rana Naidu* and this time even Chawla sensed a shift from audiences and creators. The parts coming her way may not be titular, but she has mastered the art of making the most of what she gets. "The attempt is to add value and elevate it a bit," she says. "I am not insecure. I just want to get better, explore more and just focus on what I am doing right now." ■

—Suhani Singh

**THE RISE OF STREAMING PLATFORMS IN INDIA GAVE CHAWLA'S CAREER A NEW LEASE OF LIFE**



**PLAYING NOW**  
Sacred Games  
and Decoupled got  
Chawla eyeballs, but  
*Rana Naidu* was the  
game changer

**T**he first time Namya Chadha, a filmmaker and photographer from Meerut, wore a hearing aid, she was startled. As someone who is hard of hearing, the 24-year-old grew up 'caught between worlds—neither fully deaf nor fully abled'. "People assume hearing disability means deafness, but it varies from person to person," she explains. This is what Chadha explores in her documentary *Behind the Ears*.

Chadha's graduation project at NID had its international premiere at the Indian Film Festival of Melbourne in August 2025. Also sharing space was Assamese filmmaker Bobby Sarma Baruah's feature *Rador Pakhi* (Morning Sunshine), an inspiring story of overcoming disability. "The film is loosely based on the life of Assamese author Sarmistha Pritam, who has been bedridden since the age of eight because of spinal muscular atrophy. Yet she has achieved so much," says Baruah, who won a national film award for her film *Mishing* (2018).

In the year it took for Chadha to

## MOVIES ▼

# Resilience On Reel

Two female filmmakers, **NAMYA CHADHA AND BOBBY SARMA BARUAH**, on their films that deal with disability, freedom and identity



make her film, she had to learn to let go of control as a filmmaker. "In films, the director tells you what to shoot. In a participatory documentary, the space allows participants to share aspects of their lives and express their own perspectives." For Baruah, the challenges were no different from those of most independent directors. "If you look at the credits, you'd notice that I've done everything from research to production design and make-up. That's just how indie films get made." ■

—Karishma Upadhyay



## RAPPER ▼

# SOUTHERN SOUND

**Rapper Iyuki Berry** is winning hearts with her vibrant personality and sharp performances

**D**r Iyuki Berry is not your typical rapper. A trained medical doctor, singer, songwriter and cultural force, she has emerged as a unique voice in the independent music scene. The "Rap Queen" of Tamil

Nadu has risen from Thanjavur to international stages.

After earning her MBBS, Berry established her aesthetic clinic, Berry Glow, in Chennai. But music was in her bones. "Medicine taught me discipline, empathy and the art of listening. Music taught me freedom, truth and the courage to speak," she reflects. "As a doctor, I've seen human vulnerability up close—and as a rapper, I turn that into strength in my lyrics."

Her latest track, 'Itihasam', is a genre-blending anthem that fuses Tamil literature with hip-hop. Created in collaboration with A.R. Rahman's Unreal Engine VR studio, it stands as both homage and revolution. "Hip-hop isn't just beats and bars—it's storytelling," says Berry. "In 'Itihasam', I pulled from the rich heritage of Tamil literature. Hip-hop

allows me to make it breathe in today's world."

Berry's growing influence has been amplified through television appearances on *Bigg Boss Season 5*, *BB Jodigal* and *Super Singer*, where her personality, unfiltered authenticity and sharp performances have won hearts. Her style, infused with a global accent she calls "Iykkish", reflects her broad musical influences.

As she prepares to perform at Chennai's Hunterhood Festival this September, Berry speaks of her deep connection to the city. "Hunterhood is a celebration of freedom, identity and self-expression," she says. "I grew up riding on my dad's Royal Enfield Bullet, feeling that mix of power and pride. So, when I perform here, it's about bringing that same energy into my music." ■

—Nikhil Sardana



The 34-year-old rapper has impressed all with her unfiltered authenticity



**A NEW LEAF**  
Gallerist Devashi Jain; (far left) Manjit Bawa's 'Untitled', 2000; (right) F.N. Souza's 'Untitled', 1943; (below) Sadanand Bakre's 'Untitled', 1962



ART ▼

# REFRAMING MODERNISM

In the 18th and 19th centuries, the Paris Salon was arguably the most influential art event where artistic reputations were forged, taste was dictated and the very idea of modern art was contested. Densely hung and intellectually charged, these exhibitions shaped the trajectory of Western art history. *Salon: The India Way*, Nature Morte's bold new exhibition in Mumbai, channels that artistic atmosphere, reimagining the Salon as a transnational

space where Indian and European modernism hang side by side.

Spearheaded by gallerist Devashi Jain, this initiative marks a significant expansion of the gallery's vision and commitment to fostering connoisseurship, accessibility and value in the art ecosystem. The aim is to build bridges between Indian and global collecting practices. "Indian collectors have long engaged with Western art abroad, but few platforms within India offer consistent ac-

cess to blue-chip international artists. *Salon: The India Way* challenges that gap, showing that a Pablo Picasso can hang alongside a Bharti Kher in the same home," says Jain, who leads the gallery's new vertical dedicated to international and Indian modern art.

Curated by art world veteran Poonji Nath, the inaugural exhibition collapses borders, timelines and the usual hierarchies of modernism. Long framed as belated, derivative, or in conversa-



**HARD-WON WISDOM**  
Pieces on display by Sanjay Bhattacharya, M.F. Husain (top) and Uma Shankar Pathak (left)

**Nature Morte's**  
new vertical  
bridges Indian  
and international  
modernism for the  
Indian collector

EXHIBITION ▼

## MILESTONES IN ART

**Arushi Arts Gallery** is marking its 25th anniversary with an ambitious showcase of artworks from upcoming and established artists

**H**arvest started in 2001 as a showcase of artists, both emerging as well as established, and 25 years later, the exhibition has grown into a commitment by Arushi Arts Gallery to make the world aware of India's beautiful and diverse arts and cultures. The Delhi-based gallery is now celebrating its 25th

anniversary with a grand exhibition titled *Harvest 2025* at the Salarjung Museum in Hyderabad. Reminiscing about how the exhibition came to be, Payal Kapoor, director of Arushi Arts Gallery, says that it was the late eminent art critic Suneet Chopra who suggested the idea for such an exhibition. "From then to now, the



## LE!SURE

This exhibition rejects the charge that Indian modernism is only about nationalism and colonialism

only with colonial and nationalist narratives, Indian modernism has often been cast in the shadow of the West. This exhibition places Indian modernists in equal dialogue with their European contemporaries. Here, Picasso converses with Souza, and Renoir's 1880 work 'Têtes de fillettes' is

juxtaposed with a Tyeb Mehta face lithograph, reframing modernism as a shared, simultaneous movement rather than a one-way inheritance. "We have put together works where there is a common thread. All works are at the same level and there's no importance given to one work over the other..." adds Jain.

The series will unfold through salon-style shows, curated sales and advisory services, creating a trusted space for discerning collectors and institutions to engage meaningfully with art. "Most of the current show is painting-heavy; I'm hoping we will have more installation pieces the next time around and more international art," says Jain.

**—Prachi Joshi**  
The exhibition will be on display till Sept. 15

show has grown and we have different genres such as tribal art, contemporary art, abstract art, sculptures and artworks by masters," she says.

With more than 125 artworks on display, Harvest '25 will see works by S.H. Raza, Krishen Khanna, Ram Kumar, Tyeb Mehta, Bhupen Khakhar, J. Swaminathan, Jangarh Singh Shyam, Sanjay Bhattacharya, Laxma Goud, Satish Gujral, Satish Gupta, K.G. Subramanyan, Manu Parekh, Shobha Broota and Sakti Burman.

**Highlights of the show include sculptor Alex Davis's 'Marigold Stack', artist Venkat Bothsa's sculpture 'Head' and Pichwai work by Vinod Sharma.**

"One of the aims of Arushi Arts is to address the larger concerns of society through art. Our agenda also includes art workshops and specialised training for art lovers," adds Kapoor. ■  
**—Deepali Dhingra**  
The exhibition is on at Salarjung Museum, Hyderabad, till Sept. 13

## PHOTO EXHIBITION ▼

# Legacy in Light

A NEW EXHIBITION SHOWS INDIA'S VISUAL HISTORY WITH PORTRAITS AND EXPERIMENTAL PRINTS

**A**s photography nears its 200th anniversary, Museo Camera in Gurugram presents *TOUCHING LIGHT: A Prelude to the Bicentennial of Photography (1827–2027)*. Curated by Museo's founding director, Aditya Arya, the show (Aug. 23–Sept. 29) celebrates India's rich analog photography tradition.

"I come from the analog times, when



Studio, albumen prints from the People of India series, and the Beauties of Lucknow series. Complementing these are analog silver prints, chemigrams and dia-positives by 28 leading practitioners, including Arya, Akash Das,



**FROZEN IN TIME** Photos on display by (clockwise) Akash Das, Bandeep Singh and Parthiv Shah

photography was not only about the image but about the experience," says Arya.

"The dark-room was a place of alchemy—film chemists, developer trays, the smell of chemicals, and the red glow that revealed images slowly, like secrets surfacing from silence."

The exhibition brings together rare historical photographs, including Carte de Visites from Bourne & Shepherd

Bandeep Singh and Mahesh Bhatt. "The scratches, the grain, the uneven tones; these are not flaws but fingerprints of presence. They remind us that photography is not just a machine's record of light, but a dialogue between the world and the maker," observes Arya. Ultimately, the exhibition celebrates the photograph as both image and object. ■

**—Geetika Sachdev**

# FASTER, HIGHER

A new generation  
of Indian athletes is  
breaking records



ANI

◀ **VAIBHAV SURYAVANSHI, 14**  
Cricket

## The Sound of the Knock

**E**ven before he stepped out on the field alongside the big boys last season, Vaibhav Suryavanshi had registered his first record—at 13 years, he became the youngest to earn an IPL contract when he was signed by the Rajasthan Royals. He announced his arrival with a monster knock of 101 runs off 38 balls against an experienced Gujarat Titans bowling attack. More records tumbled—the youngest centurion with the second-fastest ton in IPL history. He continued his blistering form for India in July, scoring a 52-ball century against England U-19, the fastest youth ODI hundred. With Suryavanshi's rise, expect statisticians to have sleepless nights soon.



▲ **DIVYANSHI BHOWMICK, 15**  
Table Tennis

## For the Blazing Smash

**D**uring the pandemic, her father brought home a table that allowed Divyanshi Bhowmick to hone her skills. By 2022, she was the U-13 winner at the National Ranking Championships (Central Zone). She celebrated her senior debut at 14 this year with a win over experienced opponent Giorgia Piccolin. In July, she clinched gold in the U-15 category of the Asian Youth Championships. There's certainly much in store for the young pro.

▼ **ANAHAT SINGH, 17**  
Squash

## SOLID FOREHAND



**S**ince breaking into the world top 100 in November last year, Anahat Singh has been on a roll. Her latest triumph came at the World Junior Championships in July where she took bronze, the only non-Egyptian among the semi-finalists. Other achievements this year are the U-17 British Open, the U-19 Asian Junior Championships, multiple Challenger tourneys and the women's and mixed doubles titles at the Asian Squash Doubles Championship. Winning the Asian qualifiers gave her the chance to make her World Championship debut and beat Mariana Stefanoni.



# KICKING PAST BORDERS

**HARSHIKA JAIN SIGNS WITH A TOP-TIER CLUB IN ROMANIA AND JOINS THE EVEN MORE EXCLUSIVE LEAGUE OF INDIAN FOOTBALLERS WITH FOREIGN CONTRACTS**

## A FATEFUL DROP

In February 2024, Ayush Shetty was ranked outside the top 100 of the world. Mixed results marked most of the year, with a couple of third-place finishes and quarter-final appearances. His results followed a similar pattern this year, until he struck gold at the US Open in June—his first title on the Badminton World Federation Tour. Ironically, Shetty has still to win a senior level tournament at the national level. But that should hardly matter for the second-highest ranked Indian in the world.



## ◀ ANIMESH KUJUR, 22

*Athletics*

## SHARPLY TO THE TOP

Shattering records has become routine for Animesh Kujur this year. In April, he registered a new national record in the 200 metres at the Federation Cup, and bettered it when he won a bronze at the Asian Athletics Championship the next month. In between the two events, he annexed the 4x100m national record. This month, he became the fastest Indian after registering 10.18 seconds in the 100 metres in Greece.

—Compiled by Shail Desai

There are few Indian women footballers like Ashalata Devi Loitongbam and Ngangom Bala Devi, who have plied their trade in foreign leagues. Harshika Jain joins the elite list, becoming the first Indian to play in Romania after signing for first division side, Atletico Olimpia Gherla.

The 22-year-old from Mumbai last turned out for Gokulam Kerala, winning the Indian Women's League with them in 2022-23. Mentor Varin Mehta landed her an opportunity with the Romanian club and,

after a 20-day stint, she signed a one-year contract. "The coach, Mirel Albon, saw my videos and asked me to come for trials. Playing alongside players from the Romanian national team was really good," Jain says.

Jain either played with boys or older girls on the school team. Mehta took her under his wing in the 9th grade, grooming her into a nippy striker. Her family encouraged her to turn professional and she played for Mumbai-based clubs, PIFA Colaba and Kenkre FC, besides the Maharashtra team for a while.

"I put in a lot of work during

**Jain used to play with boys or older girls, a coach took her under his wing and groomed her into a nippy striker**

my teens when most of my friends were having fun. In fact, my coach and I took on a brutal training regime during the pandemic, which transformed me into a much stronger player," she says.

Jain has picked up a smattering of Romanian to aid her on the pitch. The dream is to finish top scorer in the domestic league, qualify for the Champions League, and make the cut on the national side that will play the AFC Asian Cup next year. ■

—Shail Desai

**BEND IT LIKE HARSHIKA**  
The 22-year-old cites a "brutal training regime" in the pandemic for her wins



# BOLD, HONEST AND EVERYWHERE

**HUMA QURESHI** has a jampacked release schedule with *Jolly LLB 3*, *Maharani S4*, *Delhi Crime S3*, *Bayaan*, her home production *Baby Do Die Do*, and the juggernaut *Toxic* led by KGF star Yash

**Q. In the mainstream with *Jolly LLB 3* and *Toxic*, headlining *Maharani* and *Delhi Crime*, star of Toronto Film Festival premiere *Bayaan*, and now actor-producer of *Baby Do Die Do*. What's the idea behind casting a wide net?**

It's quite magical that such a large variety of work is coming to me. Bollywood tends to slot actors in certain templates. We used to be told actresses have a shelf life—that's an untrue, outdated model that's no longer working.

**Q. What can you tell us about your upcoming projects?**

*Bayaan* is a crime procedural, where writer-director Bikas Ranjan Mishra was mentored by *Chernobyl* creator Craig Mazin. *Baby Do Die Do* is a Mumbai-set hitwoman story. My brother Saqib Saleem is producing it. The stories go forward in *Maharani* and *Delhi Crime*. I can't say anything about *Toxic* yet.

**Q. You have written a novel, *Zeba: The Accidental Superhero*. Plans to turn it into a film?**

I am excited about using AI to turn *Zeba* into a film. I am considering writing a sequel also, but I'm not finding the time to give to *Zeba*. It was a COVID project, so I had the bandwidth then.

**Q. As a woman who is now in charge of her own work and has found success across genres and formats, what is your advice to young women who want to be as successful as you?**

Be yourself. Don't have a narrow idea of yourself based on what others tell you about your worth. It is your responsibility to yourself to tell the world to shut up. You need to be brutally honest to yourself.

—DEVARSI GHOSH



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