

SPECIAL ISSUE

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FEBRUARY 24, 2025 ₹100

INDIA TODAY



Prime Minister
Narendra Modi

MOOD OF THE NATION POLL

BACK WITH A BANG

THE BJP REGAINS ELECTORAL GROUND AND WILL WIN A
MAJORITY ON ITS OWN BUT THE ECONOMY CONTINUES
TO BE A WORRY FOR THE MODI GOVERNMENT

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SPIRIT OF EXCELLENCE

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Decades of Perfection



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BARRELS

IN last year's Lok Sabha election, the Narendra Modi government was nudged from its comfort zone. The catchy slogan of "char sau paar" (400-plus) envisaged a domineering majority. Eventually, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won only 240 seats, 63 less than in 2019 and 32 short of a majority on its own. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) got its historic third term but only as a coalition with just 293 seats. Dependent on demanding allies for the first time, Modi was forced onto the back foot to navigate the dynamics of coalition politics. But that rare moment of vulnerability is truly past. The BJP learned from its setback and shed its overconfidence. Subsequently, a thaw with its ideological mentor, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), revived last-mile connectivity for the party's formidable electoral machine. The result was a trio of utterly emphatic assembly poll victories in Haryana, Maharashtra and Delhi, which delivered to the BJP the aura of unshakeable national dominance it desired.

The latest India Today-CVoter Mood of the Nation (MOTN) survey tracks this remarkable comeback that sees Modi fully recovering his mojo. If a general election were to be held now, the BJP would win a comfortable majority on its own, with a tally of 281, a gain of 41 seats. The NDA combine would amass a formidable 343 seats, close to its 2019 peak of 353. The Congress-led Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) bloc seems to have paid the price of complacency after winning a creditable 234 Lok Sabha seats last summer: its tally drops to 188. The Grand Old Party is the main defaulter; its numbers dwindle from 99 seats to 78. The biannual MOTN reflects the NDA government's renewed solidity in satisfaction ratings of 62.1 per cent, up from 58.6 per cent in August 2024. Modi's personal ratings gild this turnaround: 62 per cent say his performance as prime minister is either outstanding or good, 50.7 per cent think he has been the best PM ever, and 51.2 per cent even feel he is best suited to be the next PM. The only notable point of comparison is Rahul Gandhi; all other contenders languish in the single digits. Those who pick the Congress leader as the next PM has risen from 22.4 per cent in August to 24.9 per cent now. These are Rahul's best figures outside of the two MOTNs conducted in the run-up to the 2019 general election, a rise even from August. However, with the Congress's skills at hara-kiri, he appears like a charioteer without a *rath*.

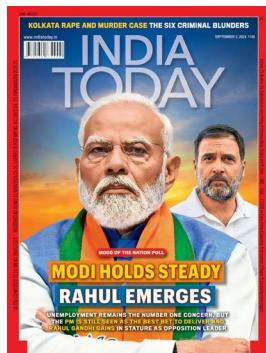
Nevertheless, a perceptible gap lingers between the Modi government's armour-plated aura and its governance report card. Asked for its single most significant achievement, the Ram temple takes the highest spot with 15.2 per cent; political stability comes in next; all growth outcomes trail behind. Both attainments are prone to diminishing returns at a time when economic worries are

expected to take centre stage. The MOTN reconfirms unemployment and inflation as India's two biggest problems; they also figure as the Modi government's biggest failures in the public eye, though ticking a range lower than before. The survey reflects an overall pessimism on the economic front: a good 56.9 per cent believe the situation would either stagnate or get worse. That's a slide back from 50.6 per cent in August.

Worryingly for the government, some 62.7 per cent feel their economic status has either stayed static or worsened in the Modi years. Only 26.5 per cent feel their household incomes will improve in the next six months; 33.8 per cent foresee no change, and 31.2 per cent fear it will worsen. Budget 2025, though, receives a thumbs up from 68.1 per cent of the respondents; 43.6 per cent also foresee savings on account of the income tax exemptions. Surprisingly, however, even though 813 million people are getting free food rations in addition to other welfare

measures for the poor, the Modi government cannot shake off the perception that its policies benefit big business. The proportion of those who believe so stands at 51.2 per cent. Though a sharp fall from 58.3 per cent in August, this figure has not dipped below 50 per cent in six MOTN cycles.

Encouragingly for the Modi government, the public reposes faith in it as the best hand at the ship's helm for turbulent seas ahead: 52.3 per cent peg its handling of the economy as outstanding or good. The public assents to questions allied to Hindutva: 72.6 per cent favour a Uniform Civil Code, 68.9 per cent back intervention on Waqf lands, and 57.9 per cent endorse petitions reopening temple-mosque disputes. Yet caution would be wise. A majority also back RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's call to end the temple-mosque disputes. Others disapprove of the political use of agencies like the Enforcement Directorate and frown on the perceived diminishing independence of the judiciary. They also want statehood restored for Jammu and Kashmir. The precarious state of collective economic well-being is highlighted by the fact that an overwhelming 82 per cent feel India must have a universal basic income scheme. The government's priority has to be to fix the nuts and bolts of the economy and secure livelihoods, as Hindutva may have limited traction in the years to come. The renewed mandate for Modi 3.0 that the MOTN reveals, in implicit and explicit ways, is for it to go boldly forward with reforms and deliver big on growth. For the Opposition, there is a clear message, too: the killer instinct is not to be practised on the self.



September 02, 2024

(Aroon Purie)

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Volume 50-Number 8; For the week

February 18-24, 2025, published on every Friday

• Editorial/Corporate Office Living Media India Ltd., India Today Group
 Mediaplex, FC-8, Sector-16A, Film City, Noida - 201301; Phone: 0120-4807100

• Subscriptions: For assistance contact, Customer Care, India Today Group,
 C-9, Sector-10, Noida (UP) - 201301, email: [weare@intoday.com](mailto:wecare@intoday.com);
 Phone / WhatsApp: +91 8597 778 778 (Monday to Friday, 10 am - 6 pm).

• Sales: Direct all trade enquiries to General Manager (Sales), Living Media India Limited, C-9, Sector-10, Noida-201301 (UP).

• Regd. Office: F-26, First Floor, Connaught Place, New Delhi-110001.

• Impact Offices: 1201, 12th Floor, Tower 2 A, One Indubells Centre, (Jupiter Mills), S.B. Marg, Lower Parel (West), Mumbai-400013; Phone: 02269193355; Fax: 66063226

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House, Panchwati, Office C.G. Road, Ahmedabad-380006; Phone: 26560393,

26560929; Fax: 26565293 • Copyright Living Media India Ltd. All rights

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Printed and published by Manoj Sharma on behalf of Living Media

India Limited. Printed at Thomson Press India Limited,

18-35 Milestone, Delhi Mathura Road, Faridabad-121007, (Haryana)

and at Rajhans Enterprises, 134, Industrial Town, 4th Main Road, Rajajinagar,

Bengaluru-560044, (Karnataka).

Published at F-26, First Floor, Connaught Place, New Delhi-110001.

Editor: Raj Chengappa.

• INDIA TODAY does not take the responsibility for returning unsolicited publication material.

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RAJWANT RAWAT

MOOD OF THE NATION POLL

BACK WITH A BANG

The BJP regains electoral ground and will win a majority on its own but the economy continues to be a worry for the Modi government

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Cover Photograph by ARUN KUMAR; Digital Imaging by AMARJEET SINGH NAGI



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UPFRONT

PRESIDENT'S RULE

MENDING MANIPUR

By Kaushik Deka



CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

DIVISIVE RUN
Ex-CM Biren Singh

Around the same time in the evening when President's Rule was imposed in Manipur on February 13, N. Biren Singh, who had stepped down as chief minister just four days earlier, took to social media platform X with a lengthy post addressing his "indigenous" friends. Referencing a 2022 post about the arrest of a Myanmar national with a fake Aadhaar card, he urged authorities to take stringent action and ramp up efforts to deport illegal immigrants from Manipur. Describing illegal immigration as a crisis, he recounted how he had

gone after said illegals until ethnic violence erupted on May 3, 2023, following which the state machinery struggled to keep up. Biren warned that Manipur's unguarded 398-km border with Myanmar and the Free Movement Regime (FMR) pact were rapidly altering the state's demographic composition, posing an existential threat to the local population. And then he vowed to continue this fight "in every way he can".

Biren's post offers an implicit rationale for why the BJP-led central government hesitated for 21 months before considering a leadership change in a state

where ethnic violence has killed over 250, displaced more than 60,000, and redrawn its geography along communal lines. At the heart of the conflict is the Meitei community's fear of demographic shifts due to alleged illegal immigration of Kuki-Zo-Hmar people from Myanmar—a claim whose scale remains contested but was amplified into a rallying call by the Biren Singh government.

To the Kuki population, this was less about border security and more about ethnic persecution by a Meitei-dominated state. Biren's aggressive crackdowns on alleged drug trafficking and forest

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THE MANIPUR IMPASSE

► Legal ambiguity around the Governor's authority to delay the assembly session may have pushed the Centre to impose President's Rule

► News that Biren's voice was a 93% match in the audio tape where he allegedly admits to instigating the violence shocked the party

► Biren's resignation was to be a strategic move to pre-empt a legal and political crisis that could have embarrassed the party

► Central rule may only exacerbate the wounds inflicted over the past 21 months. Ethnic divisions remain as stark as ever

encroachments, widely seen as targeting the Kuki-dominated areas, only deepened the divide—a charge he strenuously denied. Yet, while his stand made him an enemy among the Kukis, it reinforced his standing with the Meitei electorate, which dominates the 60-member assembly with 40 seats from the valley.

The BJP's dilemma was clear: removing Biren risked alienating the Meiteis, who make up over half of Manipur's population, while keeping him in power further alienated the Kukis—including BJP's own Kuki MLAs, who blamed him for the violence. The ex-CM's defiant post now suggests he won't exit quietly, making the Centre's job even harder.

Biren's departure was not an act of owning moral responsibility for his actions. The BJP, which had steadfastly shielded him all along, was finally forced into action when internal discontent reached a breaking point, particularly after assembly speaker Thokchom Satyabrata Singh, in the words of a BJP insider, "turned rogue". Party MLAs opposed to Biren, sensing an opening, had threatened to back a no-confidence motion by the Congress. With Biren realising he had the support of only around 20 of the 52 NDA MLAs (in the 60-member house), the high command thought it fit to orchestrate his exit.

Thus the central leadership had another concern: ensuring that Manipur's assembly session, set for February 10, did not become a stage for political humiliation. To neutralise the threat, Governor

Ajay Kumar Bhalla—considered a close Modi confidant—revoked the assembly session. This move effectively shut down any immediate opposition challenge, ensuring that the BJP remained in control, even if temporarily leaderless.

Another trigger came from a Supreme Court-ordered forensic investigation into a leaked audio tape allegedly featuring Biren, in which he purportedly admitted to instigating violence. The February 3 revelation that the voice in the recording had a 93 per cent match

THE BJP, DESPITE ITS ASSEMBLY MAJORITY, FOUND IT HARD TO FIND A CONSENSUS REPLACEMENT, MAKING PRESIDENT'S RULE INEVITABLE

with Biren's sent shockwaves through the party. Heightening concerns in the BJP central leadership, the potential legal ramifications made his continuation as CM untenable. Biren's resignation, then, was also a strategic move to pre-empt a legal and political crisis and further embarrassment.

The BJP, despite having a clear majority in the assembly, struggled to find a consensus replacement, making President's Rule inevitable. However, the next course of action is not without its complications.

It would mean the Union government taking direct control, a move that risks alienating both Meitei and Kuki-Zo groups. The ethnic divisions that split Manipur into two distinct regions—the Meitei-controlled Imphal Valley and the Kuki-dominated hill districts—remain as stark as ever. The Kuki-Zo community continues to demand a separate administration, citing the irreversibility of the ethnic conflict.

The Meitei population, meanwhile, remains deeply anxious about demographic security. Meitei hardliners, who viewed Biren as their protector, may perceive his removal as a weakening of their political influence. For the Centre, Biren was a convenient scapegoat—even as law and order remained under its direct watch, with the state's top cop and chief secretary reporting to the Union home ministry. The prolonged failure to restore peace and stability was laid squarely at his feet.

Armed groups and civilian vigilantes—both Meitei and Kuki—roam unfettered by the state's official security apparatus. Many tote weapons looted from the state armouries. Without a decisive crackdown and demobilisation, any political solution will be cosmetic at best. The mass displacement of communities has also created entrenched distrust. The state's economy is in free fall, and daily life remains disrupted. Rebuilding trust requires tangible measures, from economic rehabilitation packages to ensuring fair representation of both communities in governance structures.

The political fallout of this crisis could be far-reaching. The BJP's credibility in Manipur is under great strain and with no immediate political resolution in sight, the state may be looking at prolonged central rule. Whether the BJP can salvage its position and restore a functioning government soon or whether fresh elections become inevitable will depend on the political manoeuvring of the BJP top leadership. For now, Manipur will remain a state in limbo, waiting for the next move in a long, unforgiving game of political chess. ■

HOW BJP WON DELHI

By Anilesh S. Mahajan

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address to the cadre on February 8 had more fervour than usual. After all, the party had returned to power in the national capital after 27 years, winning 48 seats in Delhi's 70-member assembly and 45.6 per cent of its popular vote. What made it sweeter was that it was a long-aspired-for moral victory over the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), with its bossman Arvind Kejriwal himself trounced by the BJP's Parvesh Verma. This is also a third endorsement of the party's new election template, after Haryana and Maharashtra. The next set of assembly polls begin with Bihar later this year. The BJP is expected to borrow lots from the Delhi campaign. The highlights:

» Strategic use of Brand

Modi: PM Modi's speeches criticised the Delhi government and the AAP leadership, using terms like 'AAP-da' (disaster) and 'sheeshmahal' (glass palace, referring to the crores spent on renovations to the CM's bungalow) but stopped short of naming Kejriwal. He also avoided directly evoking divisive agendas, leaving it to the local leaders.

» Controlling the narrative:

The party took a 'grid-like' approach, restricted the conversation to local issues and lack of delivery on promises. And while they attacked Kejriwal's policies, they didn't fall for AAP's attempts to draw them into debates about freebies or personal attacks on the ex-CM.

» Target Kejriwal: Realising there was anti-incumbency against Kejriwal, the BJP fielded their strongest candidate, the late ex-CM Sahib Singh Verma's son Parvesh Verma, against him. The sniper attacks focused on showing how the AAP leader had become the antithesis of the champion of change he was during his activist days.



BACK IN POWER
BJP workers at the party HQ in Delhi after the win, Feb. 8

ARUN KUMAR

» The RSS factor: In August '24, the RSS deployed their north India in-charge Jatin Kumar to lay the ground in the national capital. The RSS frontal organisations held some 61,000 meetings across the 70 seats. RSS volunteers were active in the slums and JJ clusters.

» Soft Hindutva: For Delhi, the BJP top leadership largely avoided the "katenge to batenge" narrative, though Uttar Pradesh CM Yogi Adityanath's rally made some noise on those lines. This helped the party minimise polarisation among the Muslims. It also helped that Kejriwal took their vote for granted and didn't campaign as much in Muslim-dominated pockets. In fact,

the BJP made some inroads in seats where Muslims were a deciding factor (over 30 per cent share). In 10 such seats, the BJP won three—Mustafabad, Rithala and Shahdara.

» Data IQ: The BJP entered the campaign with one revealing statistic: it got roughly 50 per cent vote share in Delhi in each Lok Sabha poll (2014, 2019 and 2024) but this would slip in every subsequent assembly poll. In the 2024 LS election, 50 per cent of Delhi's middle class backed the BJP; only 32 per cent voted AAP. Sifting through the data, the BJP think-tank identified a 16 per cent 'floating vote' and zeroed in on them across 3,900 of the total 13,900 booths. Teams of booth workers were deployed to identify roughly 300,000 people perceived as the 'floating vote'. In the final week of the campaign, they were aggressively pursued. "Many of these voters were not averse to supporting the BJP, and PM Modi did appeal to them. Our estimate is that half of them came out on polling day and voted for us," says a party strategist. ■

**SIFTING THROUGH
ITS DATA, THE BJP
IDENTIFIED A 16
PER CENT 'FLOATING
VOTE' AND ZEROED
IN ON THEM**



CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

AAP

AAP GUARDS FORT PUNJAB

By Avishek G. Dastidar and Anilesh S. Mahajan

For Arvind Kejriwal, the question is not whether the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has a future in Delhi—it's whether the party can continue to remain relevant as an idea in national politics. In a half-hour meeting with 86 of the 95 AAP MLAs of Punjab led by Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on February 11, three days after the party's rout in Delhi, Kejriwal apparently let on what he has in mind for the party's future.

Those present at the meeting said the main focus would be to keep alive the "AAP model of governance" carefully created over a decade's rule in Delhi. Think schools, hospitals, free power et al. The message to the MLAs was simple: now that it doesn't have Delhi anymore, Punjab will have to serve as the AAP canvas for the country

to see. The border state will be going to polls in two years—so Punjab can expect to see a lot more of Kejriwal now than it did in the past five years, say sources. Going forward, also expect good chances for that association to be formalised: there is talk in AAP ranks about Kejriwal getting himself nominated to the Rajya Sabha through the Punjab route. This will give him the eyeballs he needs on the national stage,

KEJRIWAL'S MESSAGE TO THE MLAS WAS SIMPLE: NOW THAT IT DOESN'T HAVE DELHI ANYMORE, PUNJAB MUST SERVE AS AAP'S CANVAS FOR THE COUNTRY TO SEE

and proximity to national allies. Punjab sends seven parliamentarians to the Upper House. All are AAP members now.

In politics, though, things are rarely what they seem. Many felt the meeting was called as a show of unity by the high command—a "roll call" of sorts to make sure the Punjab unit is intact. That's top priority at the moment, with Congress leaders in the state openly claiming that a number of AAP MLAs would now jump ship, a claim that CM Mann has to take pains to dismiss all too often.

The Punjab Congress's glee was there for all to see on Feb. 8 after news came that AAP had been cut down to 22 seats in the 70-member Delhi assembly, and that Kejriwal himself had lost his seat. No matter that the Congress itself failed to open its account in the national capital and managed less

than 6 per cent of the vote; the party now claims that “over 30 AAP MLAs” are in touch with them in Punjab. “The Congress has been saying this for the past three years,” Mann told the waiting media in dismissive tones after the meeting with Kejriwal. “We have built this party with our blood and sweat—leaving is out of the question.”

The body language of his legislators, though, couldn’t exactly be described as upbeat. It was, after all, the spectacular rise of AAP in Delhi circa 2013 that had sowed its seeds in Punjab: in the 2014 Lok Sabha polls, AAP candidates took four out of the state’s 13 seats. That groundswell came to full fruition by the 2022 assembly election, where AAP shocked everyone by storming to power with 92 seats in the 117-member assembly. In the past three years, these numbers have risen to 95. Last year saw a reality check, though, with AAP managing just three seats in the Lok Sabha election. It was put down to Mann’s leadership fumbles and Kejriwal’s arrest in the liquor scam case. But local morale was still intact. That gets submitted to a stern test now.

Meanwhile, in Delhi, AAP’s 22 MLAs, led by seniors like Atishi and Gopal Rai, will keep up the pressure on the BJP government. The immediate priority will be ensuring AAP gets control of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), the main hub of financial and administrative power. Tactically and materially, AAP had lost turf while being locked in a bruising war of control over administrative space with the lieutenant governor’s office. It will not want to cede more ground with the MCD. Party insiders say Kejriwal and his close aides are overseeing this priority project.

But then, the BJP also has its eyes on the MCD, and now claims to have the numbers to claim majority. The party has 120 councillors while AAP numbers are down to 122. MCD also has 14 MLA votes (proportional representation) along with seven Lok Sabha and three Rajya Sabha ones. With its present strength in the assembly and LS in Delhi, the BJP will feel con-

WHAT NEXT FOR KEJRI AND AAP

► **Rebuild party image:** Take the corruption allegations head on, fulfil unmet promises in Punjab and MCD in Delhi to regain public trust

► **Spruce up governance:** In Punjab, it’ll have to double down on the welfarism pitch, showcase the party’s governance model

► **Legal challenges:** Work closely to stay ahead in the legal cat-and-mouse game over the excise policy case a.k.a. the liquor scam

► **Political alliances:** Assess AAP’s ties within the Opposition bloc and re-engage for the long game against the BJP

► **Back to the grassroots:** AAP has to keep grassroots supporters—its core voter base in slums and unauthorised colonies—galvanised in Delhi

STABILITY IN PUNJAB IS TOP PRIORITY NOW, EVEN IF MANN DISPELS BAZAAR TALK OF A CAVE-IN. EXPECT TO SEE MORE OF KEJRIWAL THERE, MAYBE EVEN AS A RAJYA SABHA MP

fident. Sources say a no-confidence motion against Delhi’s AAP mayor Mahesh Khichi is also in the works. The idea, of course, is to further demoralise AAP’s mid-tier leadership.

Further complicating the situation for Kejriwal, the Amit Shah-led home ministry has given sanction to the Enforcement Directorate to prosecute

him in the excise policy-linked money laundering case. BJP insiders believe there is a strong possibility that he may have to face arrest again in the case.

Mann’s regime in Punjab also seems to have slid on the popularity scales. The show of solidarity in Delhi aside, sources say there is resentment among his own partymen. In October, Kejriwal, after he came out on bail, had pushed changes in the state, which included a cabinet rejig. At least four of Mann’s associates were dropped. The CM also lost the post of state unit chief to minister Aman Arora, Kejriwal’s pick. All these were seen as steps to shift the power centre from Chandigarh to Delhi. There was much buzz then that a section of AAP legislators in Punjab were building pressure on Kejriwal to replace Mann.

And that base is another source of worry. Among AAP’s 95 legislators in Punjab now, at least 40 are turncoats from various parties, chiefly the Congress. Leader of the Opposition and Congress leader Partap Singh Bajwa has now stirred the pot, claiming over 30 AAP MLAs are in touch with him. He also speculated that Mann may himself break the party to join hands with the BJP. Mind games for sure: the state BJP’s own house is not quite in order, so it may not look particularly fetching as a potential habitat to a top-level émigré.

That said, AAP’s Delhi defeat could be just the right trigger for a spot of intensified factionalism in the Punjab unit, with both the Delhi players and the Mann camp jostling for control. This may create new openings for both the state BJP and Congress.

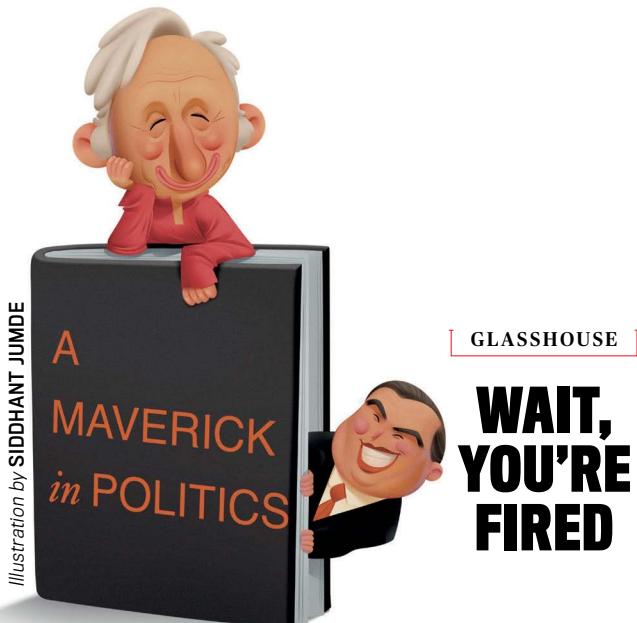
As for Kejriwal, things may not look so good right now but, as the original weathervane of Indian politics Ram Vilas Paswan used to say, no one is ever truly finished politically unless he sits at home and sulks after a defeat. Kejriwal has no such plans. He will stay in motion, in sight: visibility has been the rocket fuel of his politics. Then there are those cases. He’ll certainly have no time to sulk. ■



ALL CLEAR

Andhra Pradesh CM **N. Chandrababu Naidu**, a stickler for 'performance', has ranked his 24-member cabinet based on their efficiency in clearing files over the past six months. Topping the list is minority welfare minister N.M.D. Farooq, while Naidu himself sits at No. 6, and deputy CM Pawan Kalyan is at No. 10. Near the bottom is finance minister Payyavula Keshav, ranked second last—not for inefficiency, but because, in a cash-strapped state, his job is to hold on tight to the purse strings.

Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE



GLASSHOUSE

At the launch of *A Maverick in Politics* (Vol. 2), on-and-off Congressman **Mani Shankar Aiyar** had the packed house in splits with his trademark no-filter tales. He surmised that Sonia Gandhi did not like him initially, perhaps because her "straight, faithful and loving" husband, the late prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, was getting a tad too friendly with the "not-so-straight" Aiyar. Then came the story of the evening: as petroleum minister in UPA-1, he once made a top industrialist wait at his office while he wrapped up a meeting. That industrialist was Reliance Industries chief **Mukesh Ambani**. The fallout? Ambani, who wasn't used to waiting, did not meet Aiyar again, and the minister soon found himself out of the petroleum ministry. Aiyar now suspects it was for his unintended slight.

Haunted House

It's been over two months since the BJP-led Mahayuti won the Maharashtra polls, but CM **Devendra Fadnavis** has yet to move into Varsha, the official residence in Mumbai. Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut, never one to miss a chance at twisting

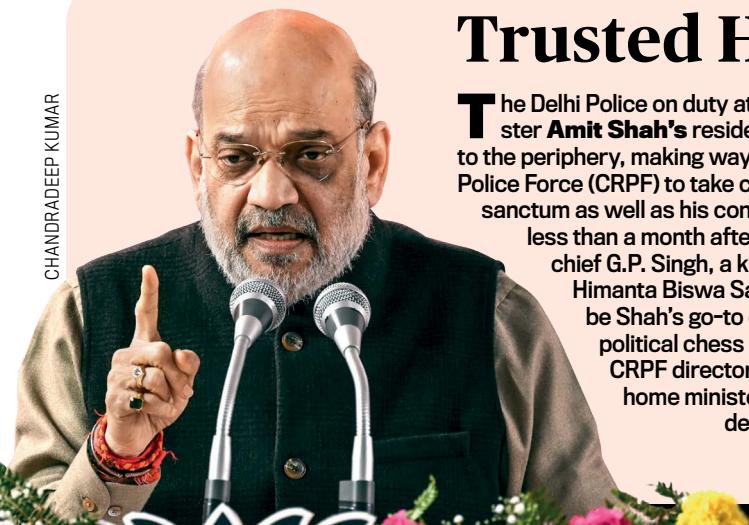
the knife, has spun a rather dark theory—claiming that former occupant and now deputy CM Eknath Shinde has performed black magic in the bungalow. Fadnavis, unsurprisingly, has dismissed the allegation. He still hasn't moved in, though.



MANDAR DEODHAR

Trusted Hands

The Delhi Police on duty at Union home minister **Amit Shah's** residence have been nudged to the periphery, making way for the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) to take charge of the inner sanctum as well as his convoy. The move comes less than a month after former Assam police chief G.P. Singh, a known confidant of CM Himanta Biswa Sarma (who happens to be Shah's go-to executor of his grand political chess moves) took over as CRPF director-general. Looks like the home minister prefers his security detail to be as trusted as his political operatives.



Silent Spectator

At the Bengal Global Business Summit 2025, state industries minister **Shashi Panja** had a front-row seat—just not the kind that mattered. While Mukesh Ambani, Sajjan Jindal and other titans of industry



shared the spotlight with CM **Mamata Banerjee**

on stage, Panja—whose department actually organises the event—was relegated to watching the action from a safe distance. Mamata, meanwhile, lavished praise on her chief economic advisor, former industries and finance minister **Amit Mitra**—her real go-to man—making it painfully obvious that the other ministers were little more than props. Panja did get a brief moment in the spotlight, though—summoned to felicitate some guests before being promptly sent back to her seat.

Kaushik Deka with Amarnath K. Menon, Dhaval S. Kulkarni and Arkamoy Datta Majumdar

Alliance University, Bengaluru, is committed to transform itself into a hub of art, culture, and intellectual discourse, reflecting the role of Bengaluru itself as the Tech Capital of India. To realize this vision, the Alliance School of Liberal Arts launched the Alliance Literary Festival (ALF) in May 2022. This festival embodies transdisciplinarity, blending literature, music, geopolitics, and technology to create a vibrant intellectual space.

Each edition of ALF has explored pressing contemporary themes. The inaugural festival, themed "Brave New World," addressed the post-pandemic reality. The second edition in November 2022, co-curated with the Asia Pacific Writers and Translators, focused on "Writing Outside the Frame." The third edition in April 2024 examined AI's societal implications. The festival has hosted luminaries like Shashi Tharoor, Vikram Sampath, Devdutt Pattnaik, Gitanjali Shree, T G Sitharam, and Kailash Nadh across all three editions, fostering discussions on history, literature, AI, and education.

The upcoming ALF 4.0 (2025), themed "Asian Century," will explore Asia's growing influence and contribution in shaping the world's geopolitics, technology, arts, and education. With sub-themes like Asian sports, AI leadership, and cultural contributions, it aims to provide a platform for intellectual exchange from multilingual, multimodal and multidisciplinary dimensions.



Beyond discussions, ALF transforms the campus into an artistic and immersive experience, building an ethos that the visitors never want to leave. The festival strengthens Bengaluru's fragmented creative economy by providing a much-needed space for dialogue. The festival also strives to be sustainable far beyond the actual extravaganza which showcases the creativity of the student and faculty. These conversations are freely accessible online, which shows Alliance University's commitment to intellectual vibrancy and public discourse, positioning itself at the forefront of next-generation thinking in the digital era which beacons to the artists, writers and other thought-leaders that Alliance University is a sincere patron of the arts.





GOING STRONG

PM Narendra
Modi at a public
meeting ahead of
the Maharashtra
election in Mumbai,
Nov. 2024

BACK WITH A BANG

THE BJP HAS RECOVERED ELECTORALLY AND WOULD WIN A MAJORITY ON ITS OWN AFTER THE SETBACK IN THE 2024 GENERAL ELECTION. BUT THE ECONOMY CONTINUES TO BE A CAUSE OF WORRY FOR THE MODI GOVERNMENT

By RAJ CHENGAPPA

R

esilience. Originating from a Latin root, the word once described the quality of materials to resist deformation under stress. In later years, psychologists and sociologists came to apply the concept to characterise individuals who could cope better with adversity than others or had the special ability to bounce back from difficult challenges, stress or trauma. It is a word that aptly sums up Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rare ability to withstand setbacks and grow even stronger, as has been evident in the recent past.

In the 2024 Lok Sabha election, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led by Modi received a rude shock when it won only 240 out of 543 seats, which was 32 short of the 272 seats needed for a simple majority to form a government on its own. But along with its National Democratic Alliance (NDA) partners, the overall tally of 293 allowed them to coast to a third consecutive term at the Centre. For Modi, however, who had pitched for a win of more than 350 seats for his party, about 50 more than

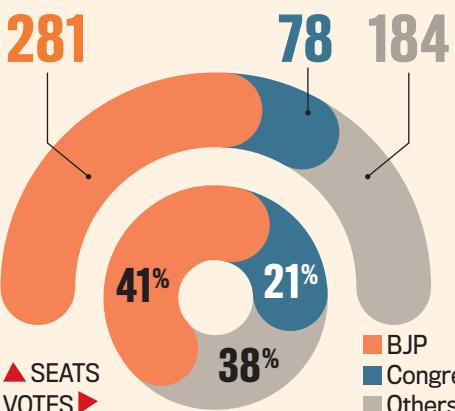
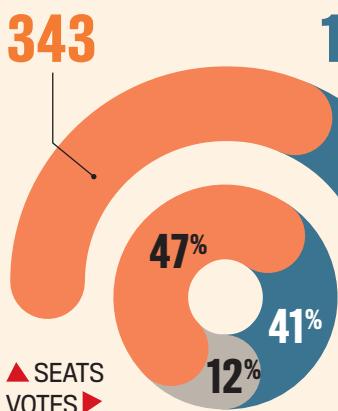
INDIA TODAY MOOD OF THE NATION (MOTN) POLL, FEB. 2025

PROJECTED RESULTS IF THE LOK SABHA ELECTION WERE TO BE HELD TODAY

ALLIANCE-WISE

TOTAL SEATS
543

PARTY-WISE



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 (Soneylal), 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, Pattali Makkal Katchi, Tamil Maanila Congress, United People's Party Liberal, Suheldev Bharatiya Samaj Party, Maharashtraadi 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 Dharma 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, Aam Aadmi Party, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, Revolutionary Socialist Party, Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi, Kerala Congress (M), Rashtriya Janata Dal, 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: Biju Janata Dal, Bahujan Samaj Party, Bharat Rashtra Samithi, YSR Congress Party, All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, 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, Swabhimani Paksha, others

All Graphics by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY AND ASIT ROY

the 303 it secured in the 2019 general election, the outcome was a setback. The Congress-led Opposition alliance, the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), took 234 seats, and for a while it seemed the BJP would become hostage to the compulsions of coalition politics.

Yet, in keeping with the season, Modi and the BJP now have a remarkable spring in their steps after a hat-trick of decisive victories in three major as-

sembly polls held after the general election: in Haryana, Maharashtra and Delhi. The BJP's elan is in sharp contrast to the fortunes of the INDIA bloc and its individual constituents, who flattered only to deceive, allowing the BJP to regain its political momentum and reassert its dominance. Its impact is reflected in the dramatic turnaround in the party's fortunes in the latest India Today-CVoter Mood of the Nation (MOTN) survey. It predicts that if a

To maintain the winning momentum, PM Modi and the BJP need to address a raft of concerns that the MOTN reveals, including ensuring economic growth

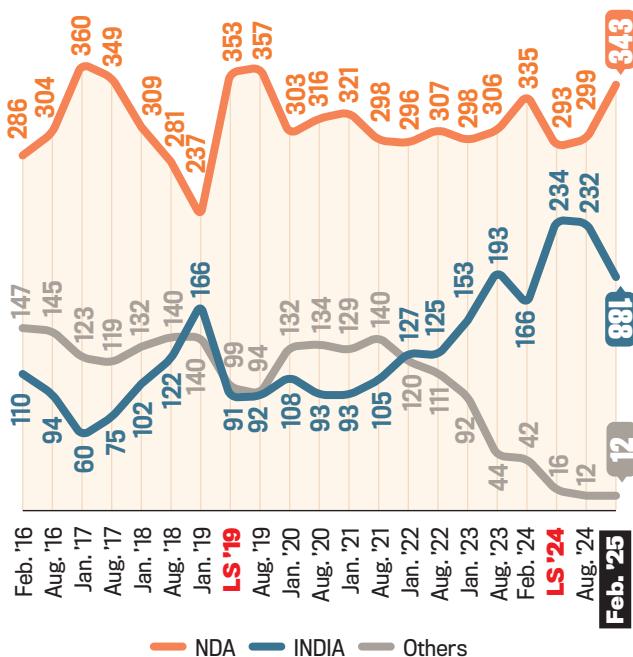
HOW THE PUBLIC MOOD HAS CHANGED

Seat and vote share projections in the past MOTN polls

TOTAL SEATS: 543

ALLIANCE-WISE

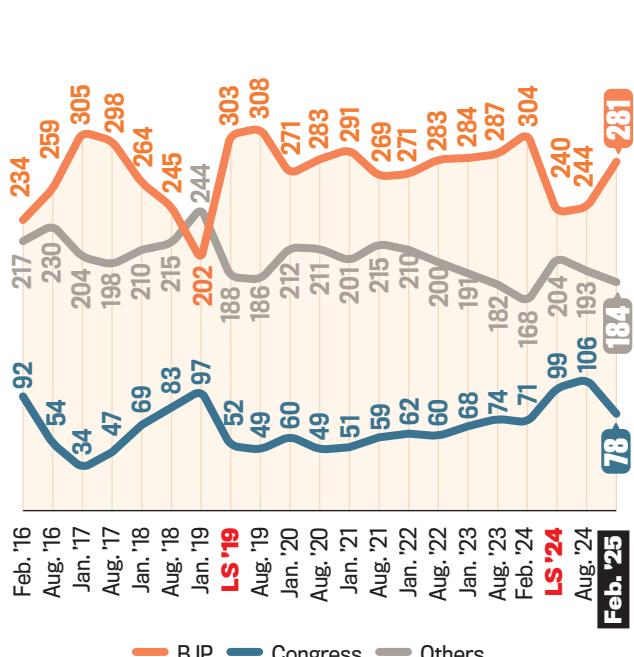
SEAT PROJECTIONS



— NDA — INDIA — Others

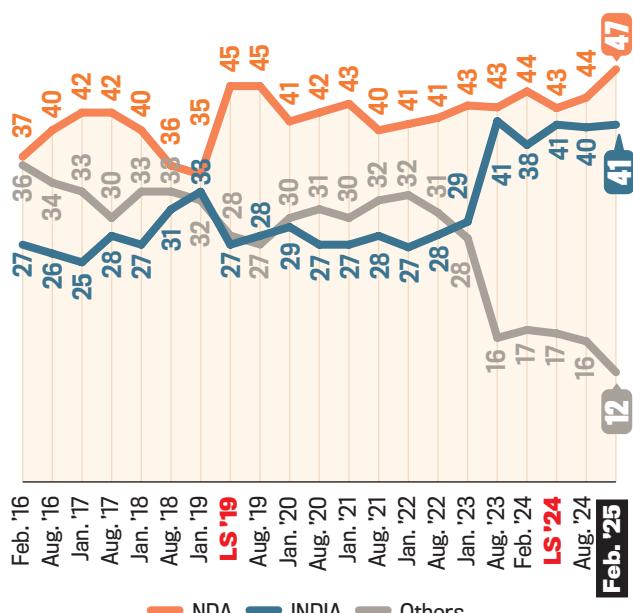
PARTY-WISE

SEAT PROJECTIONS



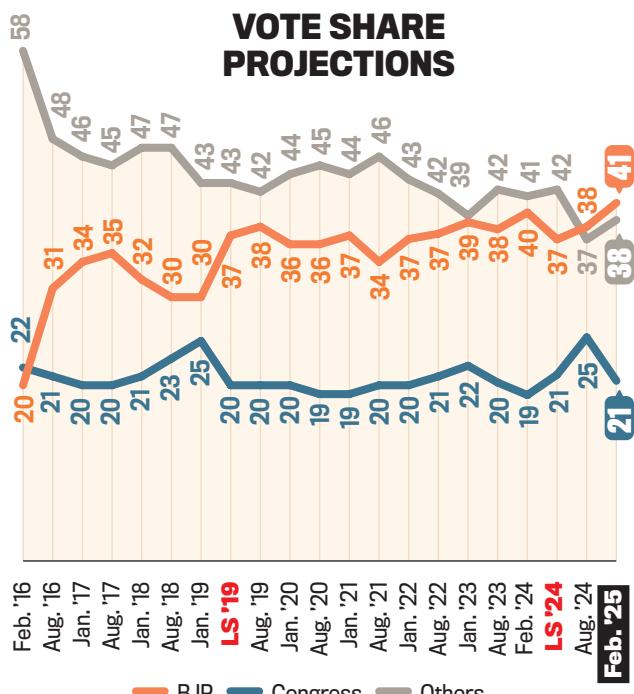
— BJP — Congress — Others

VOTE SHARE PROJECTIONS



— NDA — INDIA — Others

VOTE SHARE PROJECTIONS



— BJP — Congress — Others

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

general election was held now, the BJP would secure a majority on its own, with its tally projection growing to 281 seats. That is nine more than the simple majority of 272 and a 41-seat jump from its actual tally in the 2024 Lok Sabha election. As a result, the NDA's total seats also go up from 293 to 343—a truly comfortable majority.

Modi's performance ratings, too, have shot up in the past six months. The current MOTN reveals that 61.8 per cent of those surveyed rate his performance as either good or outstanding, compared to 58.6 per cent in August 2024. Though Modi had the highest ever rating of 78 per cent in August 2020, that too in the thick of the first wave of the Covid pandemic, getting a ringing endorsement higher than 60 per cent after being in the saddle for over 10 years can only be seen as phenomenal. Since the India Today MOTN surveys kicked off in 2003, no other Indian prime minister has sustained such high popularity ratings. By the third year of his second term as PM, Manmohan Singh's personal popularity had plunged to a nadir from which it never recovered.

Even on the question of who is best suited to be the next prime minister, 51.2 per cent, or a majority, of those surveyed want Modi to continue. The prime minister maintains a massive lead of 26 percentage points over his nearest rival, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi. Rahul's ratings have gone up by two percentage points to 24.9 per cent—largely, it seems, on the back of being Leader of the Opposition. The survey also showed that a majority (50.7 per cent) regard Modi as India's best prime minister, with Manmohan Singh coming a distant second with 13.6 per cent. The performance rating of the NDA government is also indicative of how the alliance has gained significantly after the Lok Sabha polls. Over 62 per cent of the respondents said they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the overall performance of the NDA government, up four percentage points from the August 2024 MOTN.

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

NARENDRA MODI 51

RAHUL GANDHI 25

MAMATA BANERJEE 5

AMIT SHAH 2

ARVIND KEJRIWAL 1



MANDAR DEODHAR

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

Modi retains a massive 26 percentage point lead over Rahul Gandhi. If earlier the perception was that the BJP could not do without Modi, now it seems the NDA would not be stable without him

LESSONS LEARNED WELL

The big message of the February 2025 MOTN, therefore, is that Modi and the BJP are truly back with a bang. They seem to have achieved this by learning the lessons from the general election, especially shedding the overconfidence and arrogance they exhibited. Just before the campaign, BJP president J.P. Nadda had proclaimed that the party had grown up and was no longer in need of its ideological mentor, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), to win electoral support. That tune changed shortly after, so much so that the BJP worked synergistically with the RSS for all the three assembly polls, taking their help not just to mobilise the cadres but also systematically approach voters and win them over.

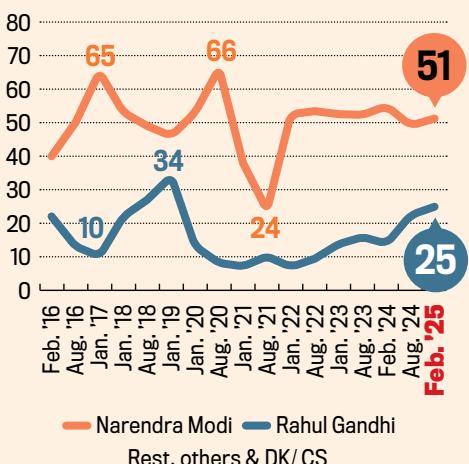
Meanwhile, even Modi did a U-turn

on his distaste for what he has earlier dismissed as the *revdi* or freebie culture of the Opposition. The NDA announced massive cash doles for women in Maharashtra, and matched or even exceeded the goodies the Aam Aadmi Party offered in Delhi. For the campaigns in these three elections, rather than the blitzkrieg approach of the Lok Sabha polls, Modi held strategic rallies and left saturation campaigning on the ground to local leaders and organisational workers from other states.

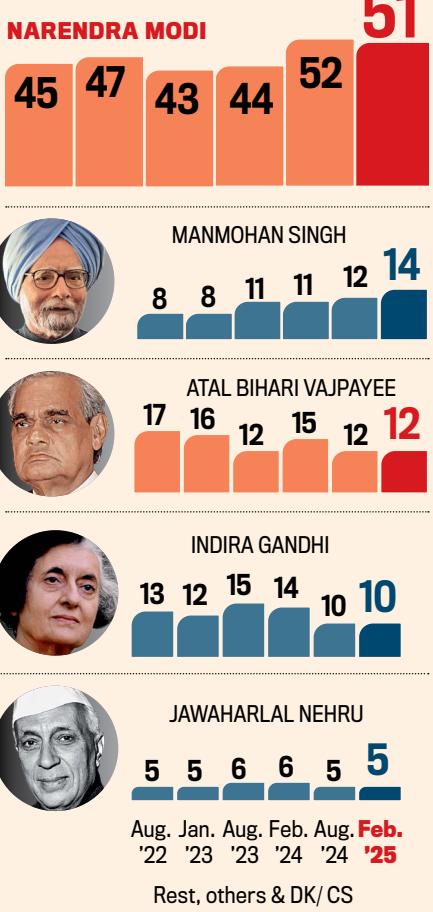
On the governance front, PM Modi pivoted to the compulsions of coalition politics, meeting most of the key demands of his two allies—the Janata Dal (United) or JD(U) in Bihar and the Telugu Desam Party in Andhra Pradesh—giving them the financial allocations they wanted. That generosity did not

NARENDRA MODI vs RAHUL GANDHI

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

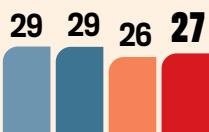


Q. Who has been India's best prime minister so far?



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

AMIT SHAH



YOGI ADITYANATH



NITIN GADKARI



RAJNATH SINGH



SHIVRAJ SINGH CHOUHAN



Aug. '23 (Blue), Feb. '24 (Blue), Aug. '24 (Orange), Feb. '25 (Red)

Rest, others & DK/CS; those with less than 5 per cent support not considered

49%

of the privileged caste Hindus view Prime Minister Narendra Modi's performance as outstanding compared to 34% SC respondents

47%

of the respondents in North India rate Modi's performance as outstanding compared to 27% in South India

extend to the distribution of cabinet portfolios, though, as the PM not only kept key ministries such as finance, home, external affairs and defence for the BJP but also retained much of his core team. In that sense, Modi 3.0 is a continuation of Modi 2.0. If earlier the perception was that the BJP could not do without Narendra Modi, now it seems that the NDA would not be stable without him.

This is in sharp contrast to where INDIA, especially the Congress, stand. Their bluster after the general election has descended into a slanging match against each other. The INDIA bloc's tally is projected as coming down from 234 to 188—a drop of 46 seats, with the Congress taking the maximum hit. The Grand Old Party's tally slips by 21 seats—from 99 to 78. INDIA's maximum losses come from Maharashtra where it won 30 of the 48 seats, compared to the NDA's 17. The MOTN indicates that the NDA's tally would now go up to 40 seats, a 23-seat addition from Maharashtra alone.

Elsewhere, in Rajasthan and Haryana, where the Congress had eaten into the BJP's tally, the saffron party seems to have rebounded. In Uttar Pradesh, where the BJP won just 33 out of the state's 80 Lok Sabha seats, it gains 11 seats in the MOTN, at the expense of the Congress and Akhilesh Yadav's Samajwadi Party, which won six and 37 seats, respectively, in last year's general election. The NDA's tally is around 44, still far short of the 64 it won in 2019. In other big states such as West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, regional parties like the Trinamool Congress and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam hold firm, with both Mamata Banerjee and M.K. Stalin figur-

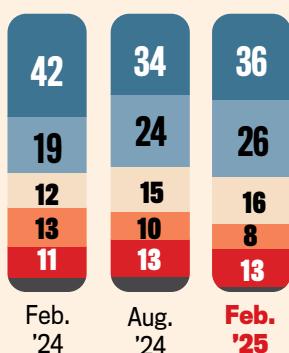
CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

FAITH FACTOR

Devotees throng the Ram temple in Ayodhya after its inauguration, Jan. 22, 2024



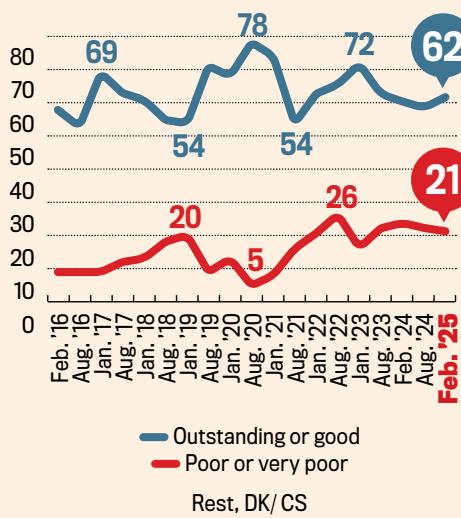
Q. How do you rate the performance of Narendra Modi as prime minister?



■ Outstanding ■ Good
■ Average ■ Poor
■ Very poor; Rest, DK/CS

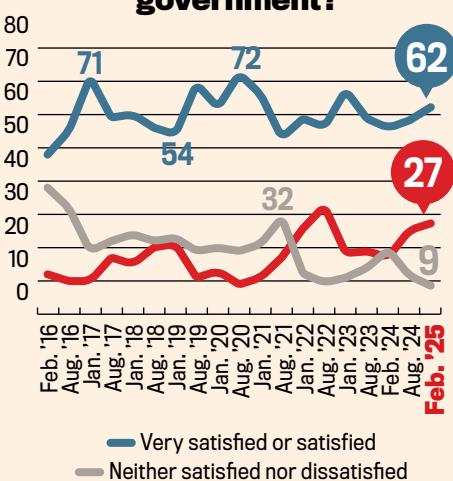
Approval of PM Modi's performance as outstanding has seen a slight rise after a sharp drop the previous MOTN

MODI'S PERFORMANCE ACROSS MOTNs



As many as 62% respondents rated Modi's performance as good or outstanding, up from 59% six months ago

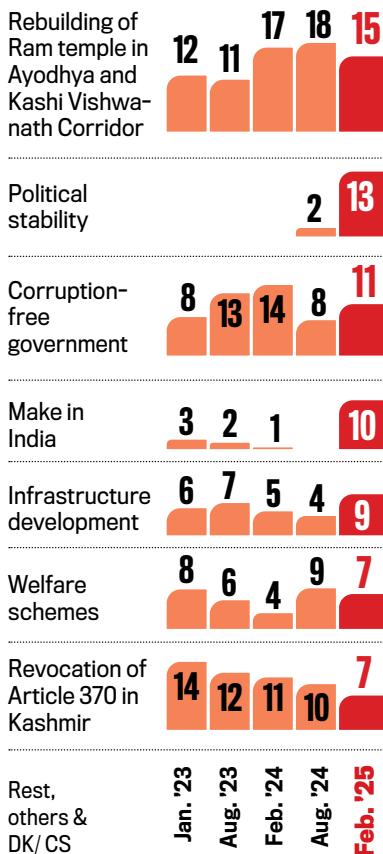
Q. How satisfied are you with the overall performance of the NDA government?



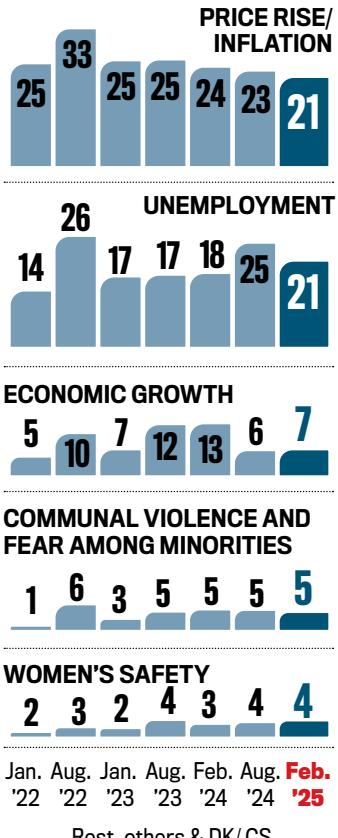
There's been a gradual rise in public satisfaction with the NDA govt's overall performance

All figures in % and rounded off

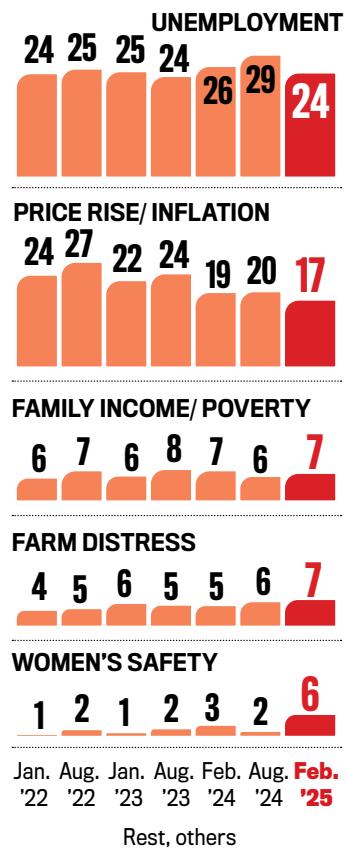
Q. What has been the single biggest achievement of the NDA government?



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



Q. What do you think is the biggest problem India faces currently?



All figures in % and rounded off

ing high in the list of CMs popular in their respective home states as well as nationally.

THE WARNING SIGNS

However, even as Modi and the BJP regain remarkable electoral ground against all odds, the MOTN brings out major concerns they would do well to address to sustain the winning momentum. The political gains from building the Ram temple, which emerges as the Modi government's topmost achievement in the MOTN, have already peaked. As has the promise of political stability that figures high on the list of pluses, logical given that INDIA has yet to establish itself as a cohesive and stable alternative. The real concern for the Modi government is that their programmes such as Make in India, infra-

While rebuilding the Ram temple and providing political stability tops the list of the Modi government's achievements, unemployment and inflation are seen as two of its biggest failures

structure development and welfare schemes figure much lower in the list of attainments.

Inflation, on the other hand, tops the list of the biggest failures, followed by unemployment and the lack of economic growth. These negatives bother a substantial 48 per cent of those surveyed and are reiterated elsewhere, with a majority maintaining that unemployment, price rise, poverty and farmers' distress are the biggest problems that the country faces. There is rising pessimism over the economy improving in the next six months, resulting in fewer people believing their economic status would improve, compared to Modi's first two terms. Worse, two-thirds believe their current expenses are getting difficult to manage and that their household income would deterio-

MOOD OF THE NATION POLL

rate or stagnate in the next six months. There is also a continuing perception that the Modi government favours big business and neglects small entrepreneurs and farmers.

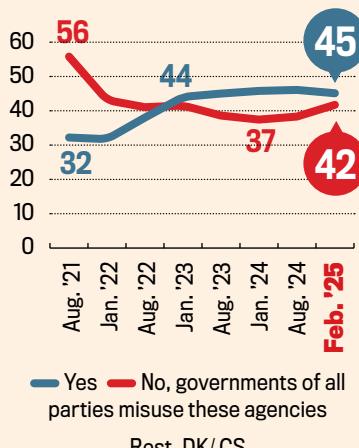
However, in a strange paradox, despite the economic woes, a majority trusts the Modi government to handle the economy. Respondents are also appreciative of the budget, especially its focus on growth and agriculture, besides the income tax concessions to the middle class, though a fourth beg to differ. The imperatives for Modi 3.0, therefore, are clear—hard focus on economic growth rather than dissipate energies elsewhere. There is concern over the focus on temple-mosques disputes and the deterioration of communal relations, for which the BJP and RSS are seen as responsible.

Anxieties over such as women's safety and a sense of democracy being in danger are other indications of that unease. There is disapproval over the perceived misuse of central investigating agencies like the Enforcement Directorate for political purposes and the deterioration of judicial independence under Modi rule. There is endorsement for enforcing a uniform civil code as well as for the abolition of Article 370, but a majority want statehood restored in Jammu and Kashmir.

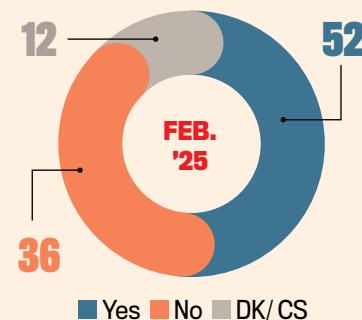
On foreign policy, while Modi gets a thumbs up, a majority believe that relations with neighbours have plummeted, and that India should resume peace talks with Pakistan and restart cultural exchanges. With China, given the thaw in relations, the view is to proceed with diplomatic dialogue and enhance trade relations but ensure that border security is strengthened. Surprisingly, a majority believe the Trump presidency to be good for India despite the brouhaha over deportations and tariffs.

Regarding the INDIA bloc, their demand for a national caste census gets a big thumbs up, with 69 per cent endorsing it. Despite the setbacks in the assembly polls, more than two-thirds believe INDIA should continue as they want a strong opposition. And whatever

Q. Do you think the BJP government misuses central investigating agencies like the ED, CBI and the I-T department more than other governments?

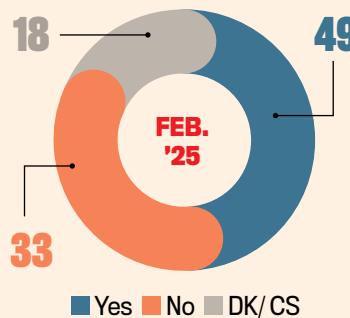


Q. Now that assembly polls have been held in J&K, should the Union government restore statehood?



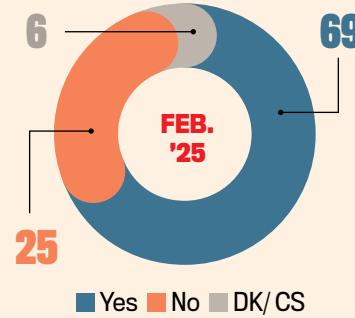
A majority backs the restoration of statehood in Jammu & Kashmir

Q. Do you think the Modi government is supporting the Adani Group amid allegations of bribery by a US court?



Nearly half the respondents believe the Centre is backing the Adani Group

Q. Do you support the government's legislation proposing to take back land owned by Waqf boards across the country?



Just one-fourth of the respondents are against the new Waqf legislation

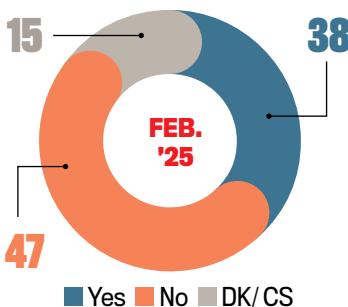
All figures in % and rounded off

The perception that the BJP government misuses central agencies like the ED, CBI and the I-T department more than other governments in the past persists

the rumblings among INDIA partners about the Congress leading the alliance, a majority believe that the Grand Old Party is the real Opposition party to challenge the BJP. Rahul Gandhi continues to be the best suited to lead the Opposition though the support has dropped by eight percentage points compared to the August 2024 MOTN. Despite the clamour for the West Bengal chief minister to lead INDIA, she is rated far below Rahul in this role, as are Arvind Kejriwal and Akhilesh Yadav. Rahul's rating as a leader of the Opposition continues to be high, with 49 per cent endorsing it as good or outstanding. Rahul is also seen as the best to lead the Congress at a high 36.4 per cent, with Priyanka coming second, followed by Sachin Pilot and Mallikarjun Kharge.

When it comes to leadership in the

Q. Do you agree with the BJP's allegation about the Congress taking funds from George Soros for anti-India activities?



Most respondents reject the BJP's allegation about a Congress-Soros nexus

BJP, Modi's ratings remain stratospheric, and Amit Shah still leads over Yogi Adityanath as the best suited to succeed the prime minister. Both are well ahead of the others, namely Nitin Gadkari, Rajnath Singh and Shivraj Singh Chouhan. Yogi Adityanath emerges as the most popular chief minister in the country, though MOTN findings show that he needs to improve his personal ratings in his home state.

Overall, the MOTN reflects an impressive comeback for Modi and the BJP after the jolt in the general election. It gives them a full mandate to execute bold reforms and ensure speedy economic growth while ensuring internal security and communal harmony. As Nelson Mandela once remarked, "The greatest glory in living lies not in never failing, but in rising every time we fall." ■

Methodology

The India Today Mood of the Nation (MOTN) poll was conducted by CVoter, a globally renowned name in the field of socio-economic research, between January 2, 2025, and February 9, 2025, interviewing 54,418 respondents covering all Lok Sabha segments across all states. In addition to these samples, 70,705 interviews from CVoter's regular tracker data over the past 24 weeks were also analysed for the long-term trendline projections of votes and seats. Thus, the opinion of a total of 125,123 respondents was considered for this MOTN report. The margin of

error is +/- 3 per cent at macro level and +/- 5 per cent at the 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 prob-

ability 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 Dialing (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 cen-

sus figures. The data is weighted to the known census profile, including gender, age, education, income, religion, caste, urban/rural and vote recalls for the past 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. ■

THE GROWTH DILEMMA

Inflation, rising unemployment and stagnant incomes continue to be matters of concern for a majority of Indians, fuelling scepticism about the long-term impact of the government's policies

By M.G. ARUN

India's post-Covid economic rebound has lost steam, weighed down by sluggish consumption, tepid private investment and an adverse global trade and geopolitical environment. Growth is projected to taper down to 6.4 per cent in FY25 from 8.2 per cent in FY24, according to government estimates. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) forecasts it to only marginally rise to 6.7 per cent in FY26. Compounding these challenges are policy uncertainties posed by the new Donald Trump regime in the US, signalling a turbulent road ahead for the Indian economy.

Against this backdrop, Budget 2025 saw the Narendra Modi government unveil an unprecedented bonanza for the salaried class, which numbers around 32 million. The budget's income tax exemptions mean that individuals earning up to Rs 12 lakh annually will pay no income tax—a move aimed at boosting disposable income and stimulating urban consumption. While this alone may not be a game-changer for growth, higher spending is expected to

spur private investment, creating a positive ripple effect on the economy. In any case, the government has sent a clear signal that its policies are geared toward addressing economic challenges and middle-class concerns—an approach that has found some resonance with the public.

When asked to rate the Modi government's handling of the economy, 52.3 per cent of the respondents in the latest Mood of the Nation (MOTN) poll describe it as outstanding or good—slightly higher than in the August 2024 survey. However, 28.8 per cent also rate it poor or very poor, up from 25 per cent previously, suggesting lingering economic concerns. That the Centre has reason to be concerned is evident from the responses on the economy's outlook for the next six months: only 34 per cent believe it will improve, while 57 per cent expect it to either worsen or remain unchanged. This persistent lack of optimism is what was reflected in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s lower-than-expected seat count in the 2024 general election. The sentiment appears to have further deteriorated since the last MOTN survey, when 38 per cent foresaw economic improvement and 50.6 per cent anticipated stagnation or decline.



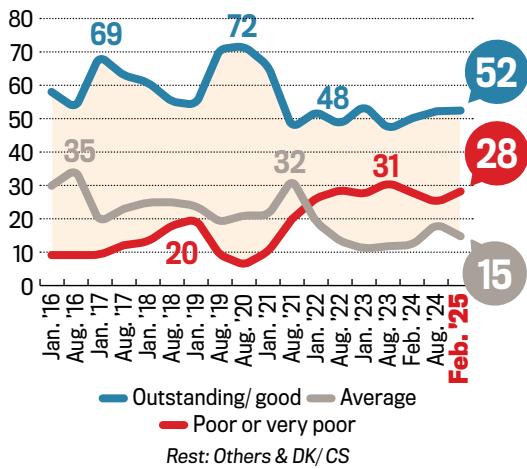
FALLING FOOTFALLS

Income squeeze dampens urban spending



CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

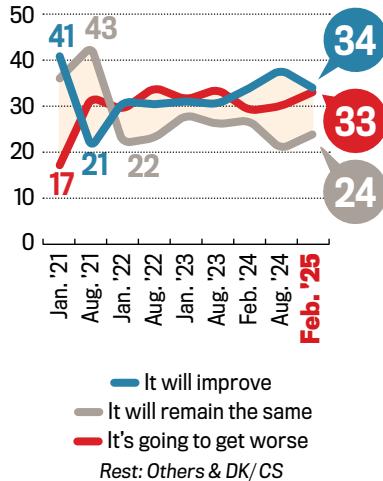
Q. How would you rate the NDA government's handling of the economy?



A slight rise in approval for Modi's economic handling contrasts with persistent economic concerns

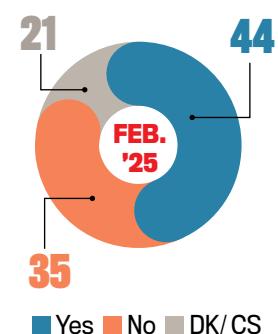
DK/ CS: Don't know/ can't say; all figures in % and rounded off

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



Rising pessimism about the economy's future signals concerns for the govt

Q. Do you think that exempting salaried income up to Rs 12 lakh per annum from income tax will increase your savings and help you spend more?



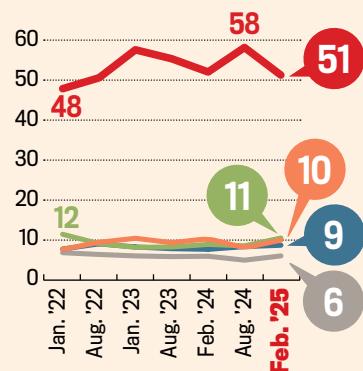
Q. What's your assessment of Budget 2025?

It will accelerate growth and generate employment	28
It will help farmers	13
It will boost manufacturing	6
It was meant to please the middle class	14
It will do all of the above	6
It will do none of the above	23

Rest others; DK/CS

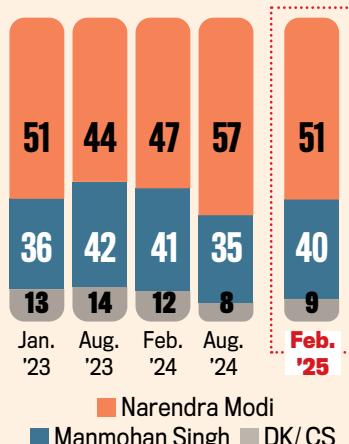
Some see growth potential in the budget, but many doubt its overall impact on the economy

Q. Who do you think has benefited the most from the NDA government's economic policies?



— Big business — Small businesses
— Farmers — Salaried class
— Daily wage earners
Rest others; DK/CS

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

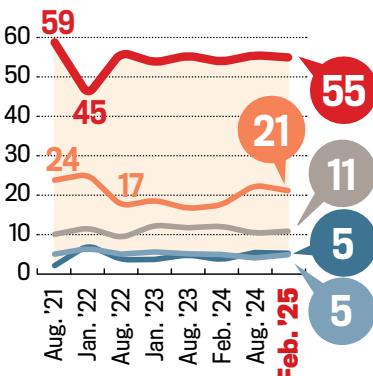


Modi remains the preferred economic manager, but Manmohan's approval has risen

TAX CUTS NOT ENOUGH

It is evident that income tax sops alone are not going to make much of a difference to the middle class's lot, which numbers 570 million, as per estimates of Delhi-based think tank People Research on India's Consumer Economy (PRICE). PRICE categorises the middle class as households with an annual income between Rs 5 lakh and Rs 30 lakh at FY21 prices, or between Rs 6 lakh and Rs 36 lakh at current prices. Although the RBI managed to rein in retail inflation to 5.2 per cent in December 2024 through a tight monetary policy, food inflation remained high at 8.4 per cent. High fuel prices are another factor that pinches the average Indian's budget. It is no surprise, therefore, that while 43.6 per cent of the respondents say the hike in the income tax exemption would boost their savings and spending, another 34.6 per cent believe it would not.

Q. How do you view the unemployment situation in the country?



— Very serious — Somewhat serious
— Not concerned — Not very serious
— Not at all serious

A majority view unemployment as serious, with concerns remaining high from last time

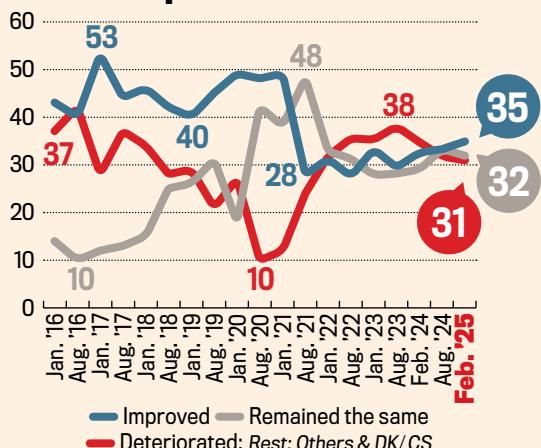
All figures in % and rounded off

A significant 68 per cent of the respondents appreciate the budget, particularly its emphasis on growth, job creation, the middle class and the farm sector. In contrast, nearly a quarter of those surveyed are sceptical about the budget's impact on India's economic development.

BOOST FOR BIG BUSINESS

The perception that the government's economic policies mostly benefit big business has remained steady across several MOTN surveys. Over half of the respondents have felt this way since the MOTN of August 2022. In the latest survey, the figure is 51.2 per cent, though this is lower than the 58.3 per cent recorded in the previous survey. Offering some relief to the Centre is the perception that small businesses and farmers are also gaining, with their share rising to 10 per cent and 10.6 per cent, respectively, compared to 8 per

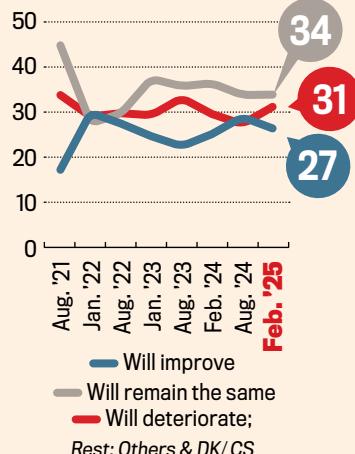
Q. How has your economic status changed since Narendra Modi took charge as prime minister?



Fewer report improvement in economic status compared to Modi's earlier years in power

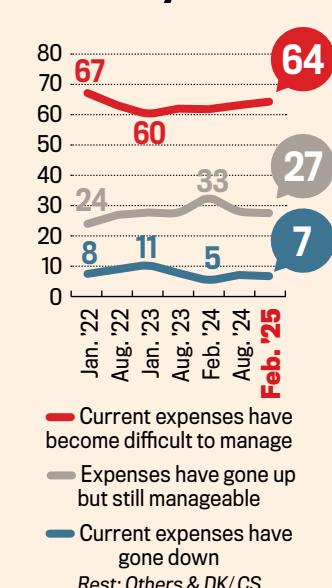
All figures in % and rounded off

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



Optimism about income recovery declines, while stagnation concerns persist

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



70%

of respondents from the lower income group say that current expenses have become difficult to manage, the highest among all income groups

43%

from the higher income group say that the economy will get worse in the next six months, the highest among all income groups

64%

in the Northeast and 60 per cent in the East see the unemployment situation as very serious compared to 48 per cent in the South

40 per cent of the respondents saying he managed the economy better, up from 35 per cent in the previous survey. However, a majority—51 per cent—still favour Modi, though this is lower than the 57.4 per cent in August 2024.

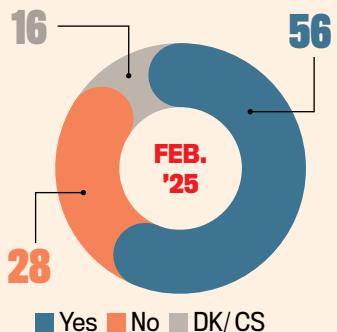
In response to a question about whether their economic status has changed since Narendra Modi became PM in 2014, opinions remain mixed, much like in the previous surveys. While 35 per cent of the respondents say it has improved—slightly up from 33.3 per cent in the previous survey—31.8 per cent report no change. The concerning news is that 31 per cent say their economic status has deteriorated. Equally worrying is the outlook on household income or salary over the next six months: 65 per cent believe it will either worsen or remain the same, up from 60.8 per cent in the previous MOTN survey, while only 26.5 per cent expect an improvement.

cent and 8.5 per cent in the previous survey. The Centre has been extending support to small businesses since the pandemic, providing collateral-free, government-backed loans. In the latest budget, it further revised investment and turnover limits to include more micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and doubled the government-backed loan limit to Rs 10 crore. Meanwhile, the farm sector, which finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman described as the first engine of growth,

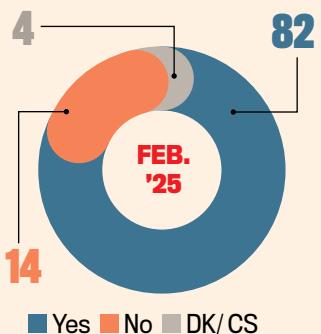
saw schemes like the PM Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana, aimed at aiding 17 million farmers across 100 districts with low crop production. The situation for daily-wage earners appears to have improved a notch perceptually, with 6 per cent of the respondents saying that this group has benefited from government schemes, up from 5 per cent in the previous survey.

Praise for former prime minister Manmohan Singh, who passed away in December 2024, has gone up, with

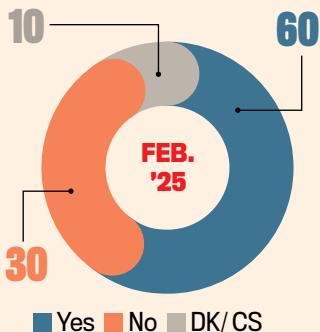
Q. Should government be disinvesting from loss-making PSUs?



Q. Should India implement a universal basic income scheme?



Q. Do you think Artificial Intelligence will replace many jobs for the youth?



Q. Which do you think is the best option for investment?

Stock market	13
Savings with banks	15
Buying land	50
Investing in gold	11
Insurance	5

Rest others; DK/CS
All figures in % and rounded off

HIT BY PRICES, JOB CUTS

The impact of high inflation is telling, with 64.3 per cent of the respondents saying their current expenses have become too difficult to manage, up from 63 per cent in the previous survey. Adding to the strain is the slowdown in wage growth. In urban areas, real wage growth in private companies has dropped from over 10 per cent until Q3FY23 to just 3-4 per cent cur-

50%

of respondents from the higher income group say their economic status has improved since the NDA government took charge in 2014

rently. While there has been some relief on the income tax front, the Centre still needs to rationalise the Goods and Services Tax and reduce the tax burden on various goods to create a more significant impact. Meanwhile, only 6.7 per cent of the respondents say their current expenses have come down.

The job situation continues to be precarious. India's unemployment rate rose to nearly 8 per cent in December

2024, the highest since August 2024, according to data from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy. It is no surprise, then, that an overwhelming 76.2 per cent of the respondents consider the unemployment situation either very serious or somewhat serious. There is little solace in the fact that this figure is slightly lower than the 78.3 per cent in the previous survey.

After the Modi government assumed office for the third time this summer, the FM in the July 2024 budget announced the PM's package—five schemes and initiatives aimed at facilitating employment, skilling and other opportunities for 41 million youth over a five-year period, with an outlay of Rs 2 lakh crore. However, this has yet to make a significant impact on the ground. Adding to concerns is the fear—justified by many—that Artificial Intelligence will replace a large number of jobs for the youth, the workforce of tomorrow, with 60.2 per cent of the respondents believing it will indeed do so. In light of this, should India implement a universal basic income? An overwhelming 82 per cent think it should.

Meanwhile, the call for the government to exit the 'business of running businesses' remains strong, with 56.3 per cent of the respondents believing it should disinvest from loss-making public sector units. The Centre's disinvestment record has been poor, achieving only 29 per cent of its target between FY21 and FY25. This year, the FM refrained from making any major announcements on disinvestment in the budget, reinforcing the impression that it may be off the table for now.

On the investment front, stability trumps everything else. Given the uncertainty and volatility in the stock market, only 13 per cent choose to put money there; gold and insurance find few takers too, while 15 per cent prefer to keep their money in the bank. The safest option? Land, it seems, as 49.7 per cent vote for it. That is, of those who can. ■



HERE'S TO
India's
FINEST YET





MOOD OF THE NATION

THE OPPOSITION

THE GRAND ILLUSION

Despite internal turmoil and electoral setbacks, **a majority of people still want the INDIA bloc to persist, valuing a strong Opposition even as doubts about its leadership and unity mount**

By KAUSHIK DEKA



The Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance, or INDIA, once heralded as the grand anti-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) coalition, now teeters at the edge of irrelevance. Its survival is hanging by the thinness of threads as internal contradictions, personal ambitions and regional rivalries chip away at its foundation. What began as an urgent alliance of necessity to counter the BJP

in the 2024 Lok Sabha election now resembles a house divided. The recent electoral drubbing in Delhi, coupled with reverses in Maharashtra and Haryana last year, has only underscored the alliance's vulnerabilities—an uneasy mix of ideological divergences, historical baggage and an utter lack of coordination, all conspiring to weaken what was touted as a formidable national alternative.

From the outset, the alliance was built on contradictions. The Congress, the largest constituent, has failed to reconcile its past dominance with the necessity of ceding space to regional outfits like the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), the Trinamool Congress (TMC) and the Samajwadi Party (SP). While they put up a surprisingly strong fight in the 2024 general election, denting the BJP's absolute majority, the cracks in their unity have since widened. The Delhi assembly polls exposed these fault lines in brutal fashion—the AAP and Congress contested separately, their mutual hostility palpable, their losses predictable. The BJP marched back to power in the capital after 27 years, an outcome that could have been avoided had the Opposition acted with a modicum of strategic foresight.

In Maharashtra, too, the Opposition failed to present a unified front against the BJP-Shiv Sena-Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) government. In Haryana,

the Congress-AAP failed its first test of unity; that presaged the BJP victory. Each failure adds to the growing disillusionment within the bloc, reinforcing the idea that the alliance is little more than a tactical convenience, crumbling the moment realpolitik takes precedence over collective ambition.

With AAP's defeat in Delhi, the count of non-BJP, non-NDA (National Democratic Alliance) states has shrunk to just nine—West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Punjab, Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Telangana, and Jammu & Kashmir. The alliance, initially envisioned as a national force, now seems reduced to a cluster of regional power centres, each protecting its own turf with little interest in sustained cooperation. Bihar, where the Congress, Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) and the Left are technically in an alliance, looms as a dicey laboratory ahead of year-end polls. If recent trends hold, the likelihood of pre-election wrangling and post-election backstabbing looks higher than any collective cheer.

Now, either the alliance must iron out internal differences, prioritise electoral pragmatism over personal ego and present a coherent alternative, or continue on its current trajectory,

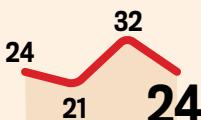
lurching from one disaster to another. The people of India want it to follow the first path. That's the reason, despite persistent scepticism from political observers and detractors about INDIA's longevity, the electorate appears to be signalling a strong preference for its continuation.

75%

of ST respondents want INDIA bloc to continue, highest among all the caste groups while 32 per cent of privileged caste respondents want it to end, the highest among all caste groups

The latest Mood of the Nation (MOTN) poll, conducted in February 2025, reaffirms this sentiment, with 65 per cent of the respondents expressing their support for the bloc's continuation. This finding reasserts the fact that the voters do not merely want the Opposition forces to engage in symbolic or superficial exercises but expect them to play a constructive role in strengthening democracy and holding the incumbent government—increasingly perceived as authoritarian—accountable on matters of public welfare and economic progress. Whenever the Opposition parties have presented a unified and coherent stance on

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



AUG. '23

FEB. '24

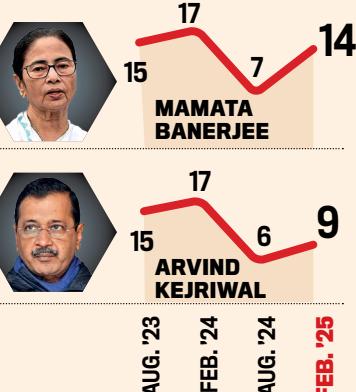
AUG. '24

FEB. '25

RAHUL GANDHI



CHANDRADEEP KUMAR



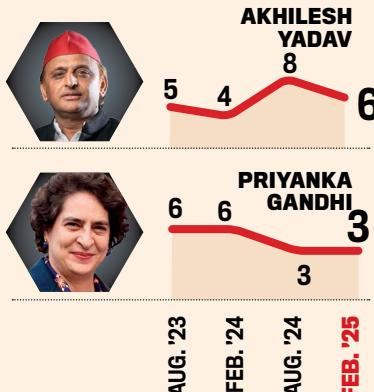
AUG. '23

FEB. '24

AUG. '24

FEB. '25

MAMATA BANERJEE



AUG. '23

FEB. '24

AUG. '24

FEB. '25

ARVIND KEJRIWAL



AUG. '23

FEB. '24

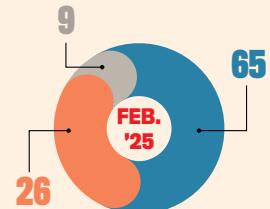
AUG. '24

FEB. '25

PRIYANKA GANDHI

Q. Should the INDIA bloc continue?

■ Yes ■ No
■ DK/CS

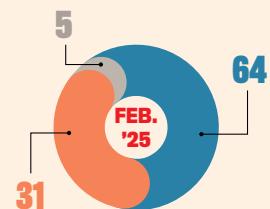


Q. How do you evaluate Rahul Gandhi's performance as Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha?



Q. Do you think Congress is the real Opposition party?

■ Yes ■ No ■ DK/CS



key issues, voters respond positively. For instance, the bloc's rhetoric on increasing economic and social disparities—particularly along caste lines—seems to have resonated with marginalised communities. Among the Scheduled Tribe respondents, 75 per cent advocate INDIA's continuation, as do 67 per cent of the Scheduled Caste respondents. In stark contrast, 32 per cent of the elite respondents want the alliance to perish, suggesting a significant socio-political divide in voter perception of the Opposition's role and effectiveness.

While several constituents are vying for greater prominence within the alliance—West Bengal chief minister Mamata Banerjee has expressed her willingness to lead INDIA, garnering support from allies such as the NCP-SP's

Sharad Pawar and RJD's Lalu Prasad Yadav—the electorate continues to see the Congress as the fulcrum of Opposition politics. In the MOTN poll, 64 per cent of the respondents identify it as the true Opposition party. This perception persists despite the Grand Old Party's own electoral struggles, largely because it remains the most vocal entity in raising national issues.

In fact, no other party has challenged the Narendra Modi government on economic policies as consistently and aggressively as the Congress. Rahul Gandhi, in his role as Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, has been instrumental in shaping the narrative that the Modi government is indifferent to the economic hardships of the poor and middle class. The government appears to have taken note, with Budget 2025 seen as an attempt to counter this perception and reclaim the trust of economically vulnerable voters.

An encouraging piece of statistics for the Congress is the fact that 68 per cent of the OBC respondents recognise it as the true Opposition party, the highest among all caste groups, reflecting the impact of Rahul's consistent push for social justice

35%

of the respondents aged 18-24 find
Rahul Gandhi's performance as Leader
of the Opposition outstanding, the
highest among all age groups

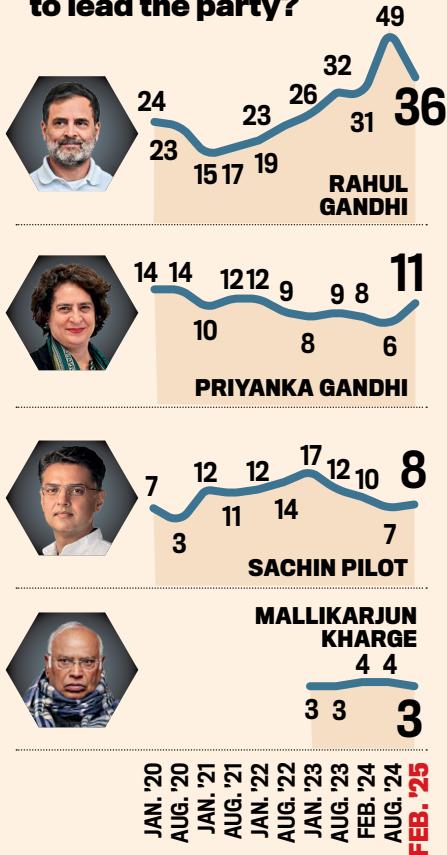
and his efforts to weave a larger image of a deprived 'bahujan'. His advocacy for a caste census and for reservation policies based on updated census data has been instrumental in this shift. Given all statistical indications that OBCs form the largest segment of India's population, Rahul's emphasis on their representation serves as a strategic political tool to expand the Congress's acceptance among this crucial voter base.

Despite the Congress's centrality in Opposition politics, voter satisfaction with the party and its leadership has shown a declining trend. Only 49 per cent of the respondents rate Rahul's performance as Leader of the Opposition as good or outstanding, down from 51 per cent six months ago. The Congress's overall performance has also taken a blow, with 34 per cent of the respondents rating it as poor or very poor—a noticeable increase from 28 per cent six months ago. Simultaneously, the share of the respondents who rate the Congress's performance as outstanding or good has dropped from 44 per cent to 40 per cent.

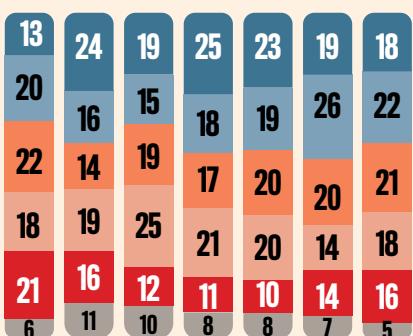
However, though Rahul at 54 is not exactly a youth leader, he appears to be gaining traction among first-time voters. Among the respondents aged 18-24, a goodly 35 per cent rate his performance as outstanding—the highest approval rating across all age groups. This indicates that while Rahul struggles to win endorsement for his leadership among traditional voter bases, he may be finding favour with young voters seeking a fresh political narrative.

The core challenge facing the Congress is its inability to translate voter recognition into electoral success—though the party raised its tally to 99 seats in the Lok Sabha, its highest in a decade. Moreover, its setbacks in state elections, particularly in Haryana and Maharashtra, indicate that it has yet to capitalise fully on

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



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



Jan. Aug. Jan. Aug. Feb. Aug. Feb.
'22 '22 '23 '23 '24 '24 '25

— Outstanding — Good — Average
— Poor — Very poor — DK/CS

All figures in % and rounded off

anti-incumbency sentiments. Political analysts attribute these failures to a combination of complacency, weak organisational structure and uninspiring leadership. The MOTN poll suggests that if elections were held today, the Congress's Lok Sabha tally would drop to 78—a grim forecast that underlines the party's desperate struggle to be a national alternative.

Rahul's standing within the Opposition has also weakened. When asked who is best suited to lead the INDIA bloc, only 24 per cent of the respondents backed him—a sharp decline from 32 per cent six months ago. Although he remains the top choice, the gap between him and his closest challenger, Mamata, has narrowed significantly. She now enjoys the support of 14 per cent of the respondents, double of what it was six months ago. This growing chorus among INDIA allies demanding a non-Congress leadership structure should be a cause for concern for Rahul.

Even within his own party, Rahul's dominance is waning, as per the MOTN poll. While he remains the Congress's strongest leader with 36 per cent backing him as the best person to lead the party, this is a significant drop from the 49 per cent who supported him in August 2024. Meanwhile, Priyanka Gandhi's entry into electoral politics has led to a surge in her popularity, with 11 per cent of the respondents favouring her as the ideal Congress leader—nearly double her rating six months ago. Beyond the Gandhi family, Sachin Pilot continues to hold his position as the third-most preferred leader within the Congress. It suggests that the Congress must look beyond dynastic politics and actively develop a strong bench of leaders capable of reinvigorating the party's prospects.

Voters have signalled a strong desire for a credible alternative political platform to strengthen Indian democracy, but persistent infighting and strategic missteps risk squandering this opportunity. ■

Q. Most popular CM (across India)

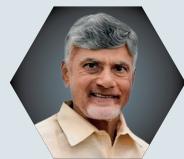
Respondents across 30 states were asked to rate the best-performing CM in the country



- 2**
MAMATA BANERJEE
West Bengal
10.6
[9.1]



- 3**
M.K. STALIN
Tamil Nadu
5.2
[4.7]



- 4**
N. CHANDRABABU NAIDU
Andhra Pradesh
5.1 [4.6]



- 5**
DEVENDRA FADNAVIS
Maharashtra
4 [3.1]



- 6**
SIDDARAMAIAH
Karnataka
3.5
[2.7]



- 7**
HIMANTA BISWA SARMA
Assam
3.4 [2]



- 8**
NITISH KUMAR
Bihar
3.4
[0.5]



- 9**
MOHAN YADAV
Madhya Pradesh
2.2
[0.33]



- 10**
A. REVANTH REDDY
Telangana
2.1 [0.25]

Rest, others & don't know/ can't say; all figures in %; Feb. '25 figures in bold, Aug. '24 in []

Note: All respondents across all states were asked to rate the performance of the 30 chief ministers in India. The ratings are the perception of all respondents across India.

So, 35.3 per cent of the 125,123 respondents in the current MOTN survey rated Yogi Adityanath as the No. 1 chief minister in India



MOOD OF THE NATION

BEST CMs

PERFECT 10 FOR YOGI

At the helm for eight years in UP, Yogi Adityanath cements his nationwide appeal with the most popular CM title for the 10th consecutive time

By KAUSHIK DEKA

A

Amid the ever-changing fortunes of regional satraps, Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath has emerged as an exception, securing the title of the most popular chief minister for the 10th consecutive time in the India Today Mood of the Nation (MOTN) poll. Adityanath's unique blend of hard-line Hindutva, strict law enforcement and infrastructure development has cemented his nationwide appeal. This, even after fingers were pointed at him for the Bharatiya Janata Party's dismal



1
YOGI ADITYANATH
Uttar Pradesh
35.3
[33.2]



1
PREM SINGH
TAMANG
Sikkim
62 [55.7]

Q. Most popular CM (in home state)

Respondents in every state were asked to rate their own chief minister

- 2 M.K. STALIN
Tamil Nadu
57
[39.9]
- 3 HIMANTA BISWA
SARMA
Assam
55 [50.8]

- 4 BHUPENDRABHAI
PATEL
Gujarat
54 [46]
- 5 N. CHANDRABABU
NAIDU
Andhra Pradesh
47 [44.4]
- 6 MAMATA
BANERJEE
West Bengal
47 [45.5]
- 7 PEMA KHANDU
*Arunachal
Pradesh*
46 [40.6]
- 8 MANIK SAHA
Tripura
42
[38.4]
- 9 VISHNU DEO SAI
Chhattisgarh
39
[36.7]
- 10 SIDDARAMAIAH
Karnataka
39
[24.3]

Lok Sabha poll performance in the state. While 35.3 per cent of the respondents back him as the best CM, up from 33.2 per cent just six months ago, Adityanath needs to focus on building more support in his home state.

West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee ranks second nationally, maintaining her stronghold in her state through fiery rhetoric, welfare schemes and grassroots engagement. However, she trails Adityanath by a significant 25 percentage points, underscoring his dominant position. The rankings also reveal a broader trend: state leadership is almost evenly split between regional players and national parties. The top 10 list features four CMs from regional parties, four from the BJP and two from the Con-

gress. With the BJP's partners in the mix, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) secures six spots, solidifying its pan-India dominance.

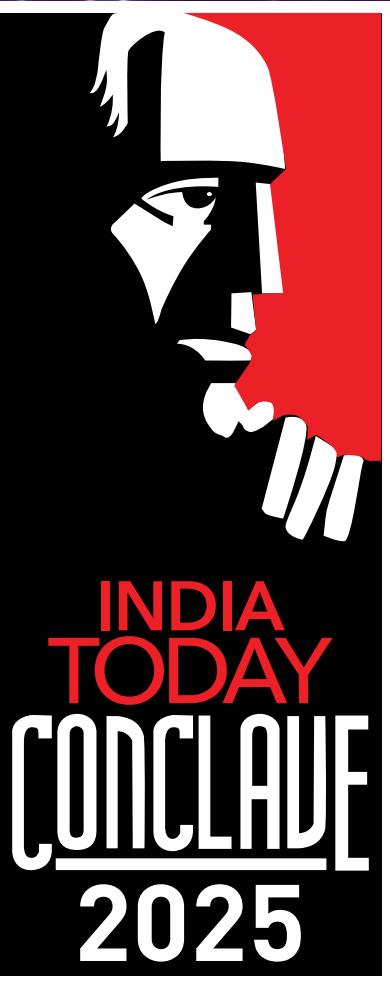
While Adityanath leads nationally, Sikkim CM Prem Singh Tamang has solidified his dominance at home, becoming the most popular CM among his electorate for the second time. His focus on economic growth, sustainable tourism and environmental conservation has boosted his approval rating to 62 per cent. Similarly, Tamil Nadu's M.K. Stalin has seen a remarkable surge in popularity within his state, rising from 39.9 per cent in August 2024 to 57 per cent. His emphasis on Dravidian identity politics, social welfare and economic growth has, in fact, positioned him as one of the most

politically stable leaders within the Opposition's Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA).

NDA ally and Andhra Pradesh CM N. Chandrababu Naidu has also reinforced his reputation as a capable administrator, ranking in the top five on both lists. Meanwhile, Assam's Himanta Biswa Sarma of the BJP has improved his home state approval rating to 55 per cent from 50.8 per cent in August 2024, driven by infrastructure development and cultural nationalism. The BJP's strong presence in the Northeast is evident with three of its CMs from the region making the top 10. Overall, the party has five CMs on this list. In contrast, the Congress struggles to make an impact, with Karnataka's Siddaramaiah being its sole representative. ■

All figures in %; Feb. '25 figures in bold, Aug. '24 in []

Note: Respondents of every state were asked to evaluate the performance of their own chief minister. For instance, 62 per cent respondents of the total of 499 from Sikkim said they were satisfied with Prem Singh Tamang while 57 per cent of the 7,456 respondents from Tamil Nadu expressed satisfaction at M.K. Stalin's performance



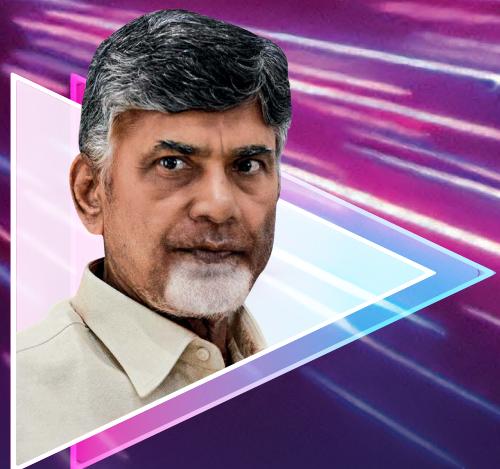
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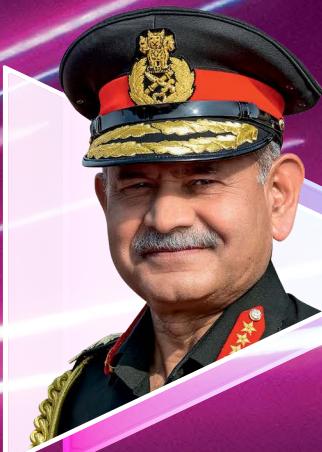


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DK SHIVAKUMAR
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HANDLE WITH CAUTION

Not many in India are concerned about Trump's disruptive presidency; with China, they prefer circumspection. The government's overall foreign policy gets a thumbs up, though not the ties with neighbours

By PRADIP R. SAGAR



No one was in any doubt that Donald Trump would keep his word at the start of his second presidency. What's taken everyone aback is the speed at which he is implementing his agenda. As the world adjusts to the new reality—of sweeping tariffs on imports, the US pulling out of WHO, USAID funds frozen and illegal immigrants deported—PM Narendra Modi met the US president in Washington D.C. on February 12-13 to discuss trade, tariffs and the next steps in the US-India strategic partnership. Respondents in the India Today Mood of the Nation (MOTN) February 2025 poll are divided over what the Trump presidency will mean for India. While 30 per cent say it will be good for India, 31.7 per cent say it would have little impact. Around 16 per cent think it does no bode well for India.

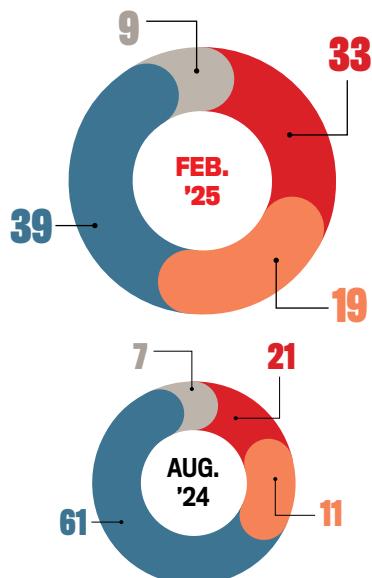
Closer home, India is keenly monitoring the turmoil in Bangladesh ever since the ouster of prime minister Sheikh Hasina in August 2024. Foreign secretary Vikram Misri's visit to Dhaka in Decem-

ber was an indication of New Delhi recalibrating its diplomatic approach and engaging cautiously with the interim government. Repeated calls for Hasina's extradition to Bangladesh and attacks on minorities, especially Hindus, have been a thorn in ties, but New Delhi is emphasising non-interference. MOTN respondents have a mixed reaction to this approach. While 20.6 per cent believe it to be sensible, over 33 per cent say New Delhi did not react strongly enough to Hindus being targeted. On India sheltering Hasina, 37.6 per cent say it is the right thing to do since she was a steadfast ally; 21.1 per cent feel she should be extradited to improve ties. Over 29 per cent say she should be asked to move to another country.

With tension in Eastern Ladakh at a low ebb now, New Delhi and Beijing have been gradually mending ties. On what should be India's priority in managing relations with China, over 53 per cent of MOTN respondents believe in strengthening border security, while 19.7 per cent favour enhancing trade ties. More than 23 per cent feel India should pursue diplomatic dialogues with Beijing.

As always, India has been maintain-

Q. How do you think India's relationship with neighbours has been in recent times?



■ It has deteriorated and it's worrisome ■ It has deteriorated but it doesn't matter ■ It has improved ■ DK/CS



Q. How do you perceive India's diplomacy with the new government in Bangladesh?

Sensible and tactical

21

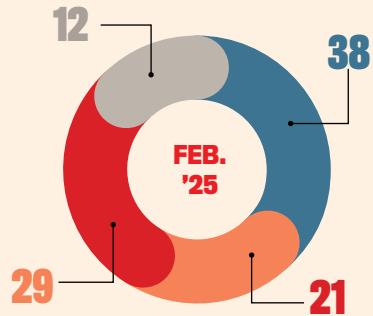
Did not react strongly enough to killing of Hindus in Bangladesh

32

Must not interfere in internal affairs of Bangladesh

29

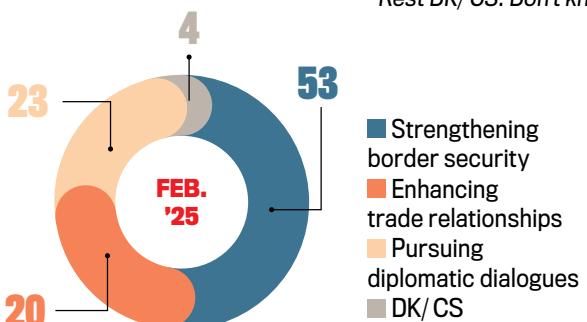
Q. What's your opinion on the Indian government sheltering former Bangladesh prime minister Sheikh Hasina?



■ She was an ally of India, so it's the right thing to do ■ She should be sent back to Bangladesh to improve India's ties with the current dispensation ■ She should not be sent back but should be asked to go to another country
■ DK / CS

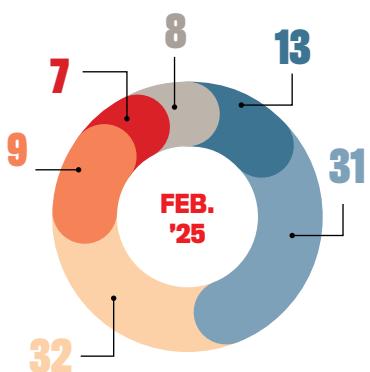
Rest DK / CS: Don't know/ can't say; All figures in % and rounded off

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



Q. How do you think US president Donald Trump will be for India?

■ Very good ■ Good ■ No impact ■ Bad ■ Disastrous ■ DK / CS



Not many have total confidence in India's prosperity during the Trump presidency; two-thirds are cautiously optimistic, and say it won't matter

45%

feel India should have peace talks with Pakistan; 39 per cent disagree; 14 per cent are for cultural exchanges only

73%

think India's foreign policy under Modi has strengthened its global standing; a quarter disagrees

ing an astute balance in ties with its old ally Russia, and that with the West and the US. This was taken note of by 72.6 per cent of respondents, who think India's foreign policy under PM Modi has increased the country's global stature. However, 24 per cent disagree.

On peace talks with Pakistan, India swears by its principled stand: talks and Pakistan-sponsored terrorism on its soil cannot co-exist. On whether India should talk with Pakistan even as it pushes terrorism, a surprising 44.7 per cent say yes, while 38.5 per cent reject the idea. Interestingly, 13.8 per cent of MOTN respondents are against talks, but are open to the two nations having cultural exchanges, including hosting each other's cricket teams.

India shares good relations with its other neighbours—Nepal, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Maldives—though there have been occasional difficulties. However, only 39.2 per cent say ties with neighbours have improved, compared to 60.9 per cent in August 2024. Ties have deteriorated or are worrisome, say 32.6 per cent of respondents, compared to 21 per cent in August 2024. ■

DISPUTED LEGACY

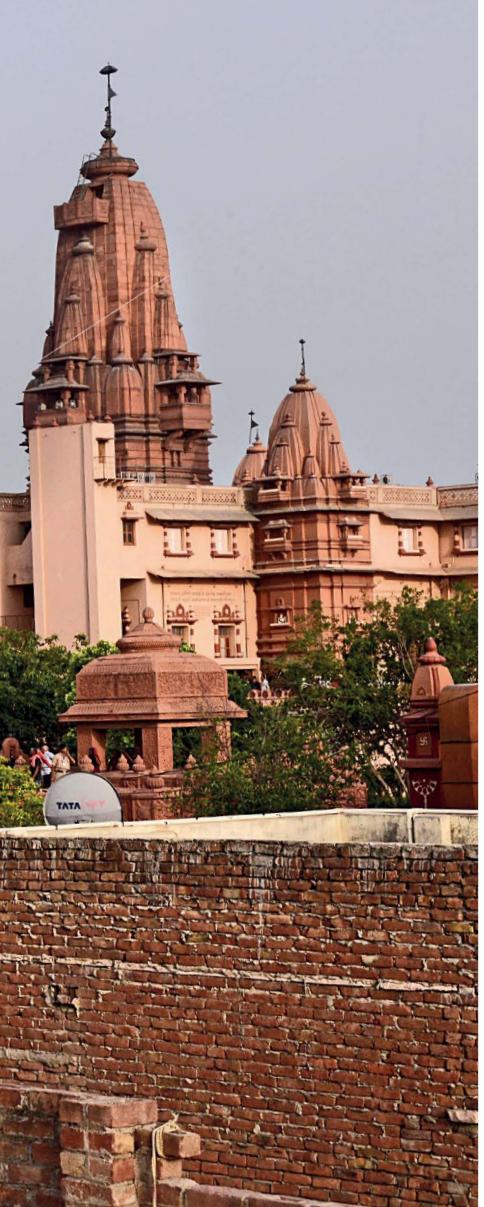
The Shahi Idgah mosque next to the Krishna Janmabhoomi temple in Mathura

**MOOD OF THE NATION****SOCIO-POLITICAL**

IN A STATE OF FLUX

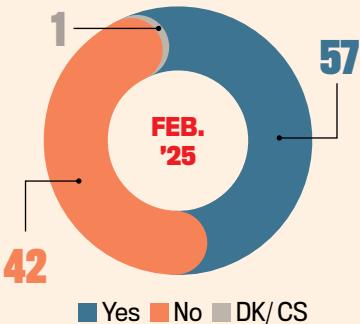
While support for socio-political reforms remains robust, concerns about democracy, religious polarisation and women's safety indicate persistent disquiet

By AMARNATH K. MENON

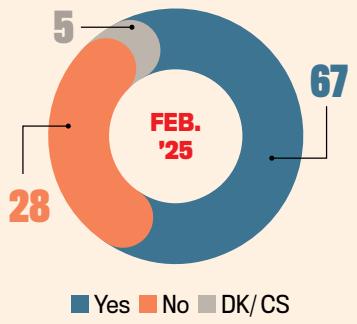


CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

Q. Is RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat justified in asking Indians to have three children to prevent a decline in the country's population?



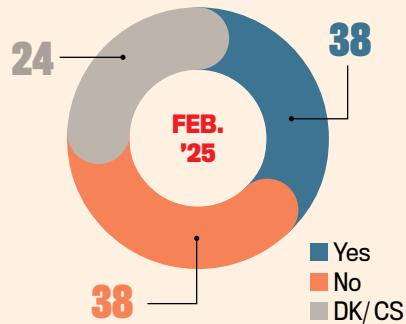
Q. Do you support Bhagwat's call for an end to temple-mosque disputes?



Q. Do you agree with the petitions filed in Indian courts asserting that mosques were historically built above temples?



Q. Do you think it's fine to destroy an existing religious structure if the courts find that it was built on an older structure belonging to a different religion?



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

T

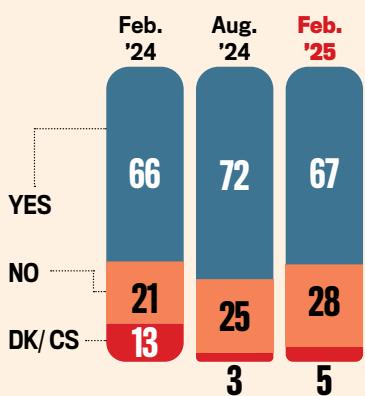
he concept of 'Hum Do, Hamare Do', which symbolised planned parenthood and was once central to development initiatives, now appears to be under scrutiny. The latest India Today Mood of the Nation (MOTN) poll reveals that a majority—56.5 per cent—of the respondents agree with Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat's call for families to have three children to prevent a population decline. Notably, that support is highest among those with lower education levels, with 63 per cent endorsing the idea. Regional variations are evident, with as many as 50 per cent of the respondents from the East opposing the proposition.

Bhagwat's call for an end to temple-mosque disputes finds significant backing too, with 67 per cent supporting it. But the survey also highlights strong support—57.9 per cent—for litigations asserting that mosques were historically built over temples. At the same time, opinions are evenly split on whether existing religious structures should be dismantled if courts

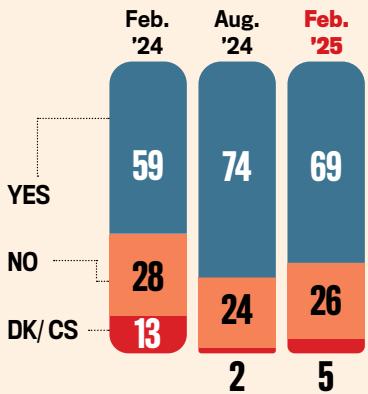
confirm such claims, with 38 per cent on each side. Further polarising the debate is the government's proposal to reclaim land owned by Waqf boards. While 56 per cent of the Muslim respondents oppose the move, it finds the highest support—78 per cent—among Other Backward Classes (OBCs).

The idea of 'One Nation, One Poll' continues to garner strong support, with 66.8 per cent backing it. However, there's a 5.6 percentage point drop from the findings of the previous MOTN poll in August 2024. Despite some states conducting caste-based surveys, Telangana being the most recent, national support for a pan-India count has also dropped to 69.3 per cent from 73.8 per cent six months ago. The strongest backing comes from Scheduled Castes (77 per cent), Scheduled Tribes (75 per cent) and OBCs (71 per cent), while elite-caste respondents show comparatively lower support at 62 per cent. On the other hand, a nationwide Uniform Civil Code (UCC)—rolled out

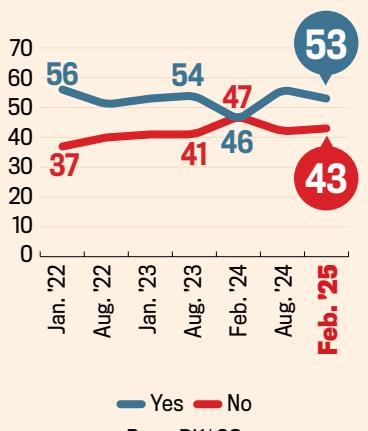
Q. Do you support the idea of One Nation, One Poll?



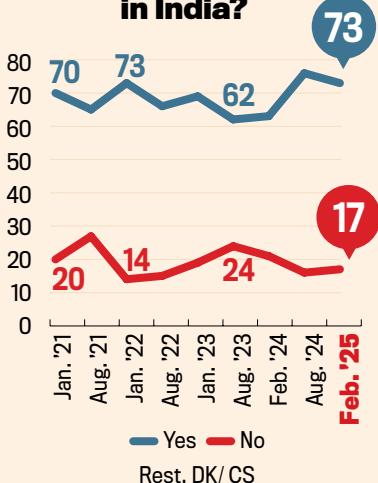
Q. Do you think there should be caste census across the country?



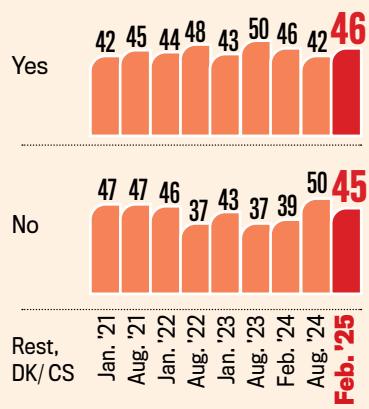
Q. Has the Modi government been able to reduce corruption in India?



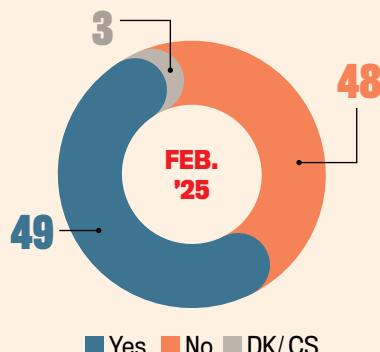
Q. Should a Uniform Civil Code be implemented in India?



Q. Do you think democracy in India is currently in danger?



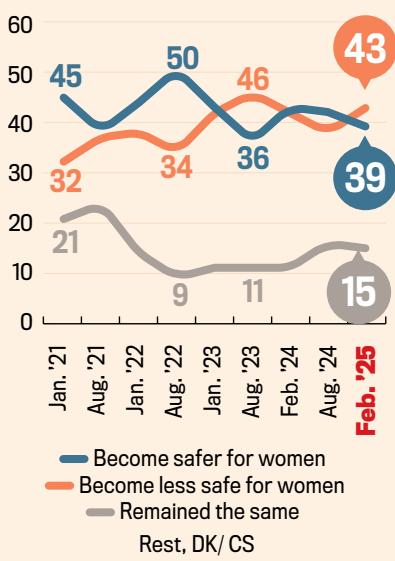
Q. Do you agree with the Opposition's claim that judicial independence has diminished during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's rule?



respondents feel that minimum support price (MSP) for agricultural produce should be legally guaranteed; 11% are not in its favour

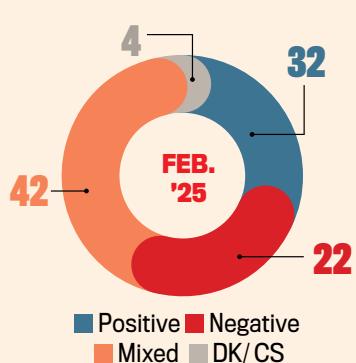
80% respondents believe electronic voting machines (EVMs) can be manipulated; 53% think it is not possible

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

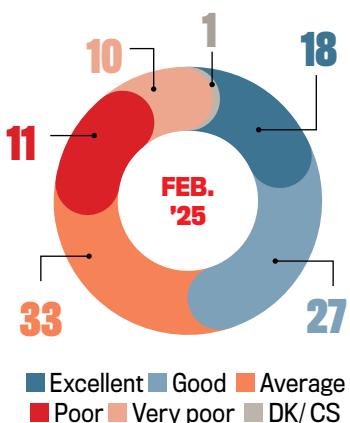


All figures in % and rounded off

Q. What kind of influence does social media have in shaping public opinion in India?



Q. How would you rate the quality of public transport systems in urban India?

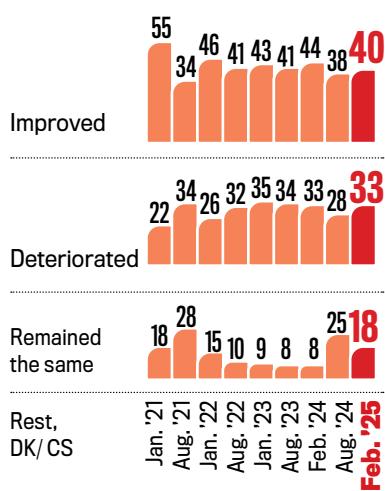


in Uttarakhand just recently—has considerable backing, with 72.6 per cent supporting its enforcement. But that number, too, was as high as 76.4 per cent in the previous poll.

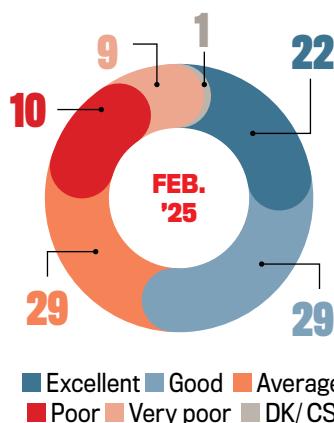
Perceptions of the government's success in tackling corruption have slightly weakened as well. While 52.7 per cent believe the Narendra Modi government has reduced corruption, down from 55.7 per cent in August 2024, 47.3 per cent either say no or remain sceptical. Concerns about democratic freedoms persist. While the proportion of respondents who believe democracy is in danger has climbed to 46.3 per cent from 41.9 per cent, the number is highest among SC respondents (52 per cent). Concerns over judicial independence are also evident, with 48.8 per cent agreeing with the Opposition's claim that it has diminished under Modi's tenure, slightly higher than the 48 per cent who disagree.

Opinions are divided on the question of communal harmony. While 39.8 per cent believe it has improved, up from 37.9 per cent in August 2024, another 32.7 per cent think it has deteriorated, also an uptick from 28.1 per cent. But minorities express particular concern, with 61 per cent of Christian respon-

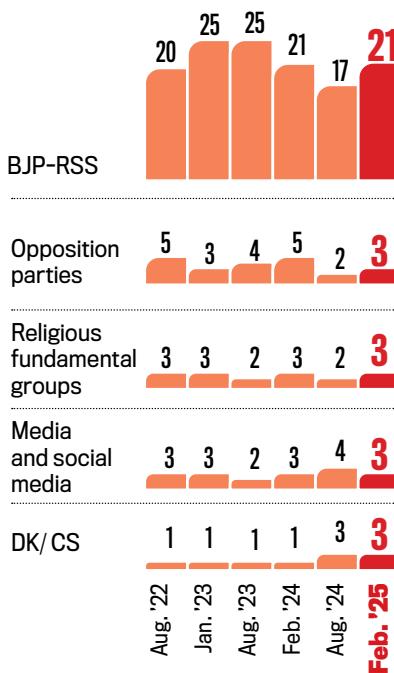
Q. What do you think of communal harmony under the NDA-led Union government?



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



Q. If you think communal harmony in the country has deteriorated, who is responsible for it?



Note: This is the break-up of those who think communal harmony has deteriorated

All figures in % and rounded off

49%

respondents oppose the privatisation of Indian Railways; 35% support it and 13% are neutral

dents and 56 per cent of Muslims indicating a worsening situation.

Perceptions of women's safety have worsened, with 42.9 per cent believing that the country has become less safe for them, up from 37.9 per cent six months ago. Regional disparities exist, with 52 per cent of the respondents in the Northeast and 50 per cent in the West expressing concerns. Amid the brouhaha over social media's influence, 31.6 per cent perceive it to have a positive impact on shaping public opinion while 21.8 per cent see it as negative.

On a positive note, public transport systems receive a favourable assessment. Nearly 45 per cent rate them as either good or excellent and only 20.8 per cent call them poor or very poor. Roads and infrastructural development receive even higher ratings, with 50.7 per cent rating them good or excellent. Indian Railways, amid the expansion of Vande Bharat Express trains, sees only 34.6 per cent support for privatisation, suggesting continued public preference for government control. ■

BLOCK THE BURNOUT

As stress impacts more than half the workforce and every fourth employee fails to strike work-life balance, more and more back shorter work weeks

By SONAL KHETARPAL

Work-life balance has been a topic of intense debate in India for the past year. More recently, Larsen & Toubro (L&T) chairman S.N. Subrahmanyam endorsed a 90-hour work week, suggesting employees should also pitch in on Sundays. This came months after the tragic death of 26-year-old Anna Sebastian Perayil, an employee at Ernst & Young's member firm office in Pune, brought workplace stress into sharp focus. Earlier, Infosys founder N.R. Narayana Murthy's proposal for 70-hour work weeks had already stirred controversy.

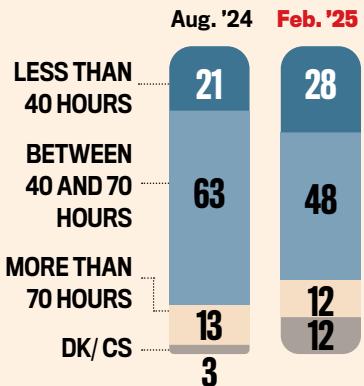
The India Today Mood of the Nation (MOTN) poll highlights a divided workforce. While 48.1 per cent of the respondents are fine with working 40-70 hours per week (i.e. 8-14 hours daily, in case of five-day work weeks), there's a clear shift in attitudes. Their percentage has dropped from 62.7 per cent in August 2024, suggesting growing awareness of burnout. At the same time, preference for less than 40-hour work weeks has gone up by seven percentage points—from 20.9 per cent to 27.8 per cent. A smaller but significant 12.2 per cent still support Murthy's 70-hour work-week proposal, highlighting a group that believes extreme dedication is key to success.

The survey also shows a decline in employee satisfaction with work-life balance in their current job. Over the past six months, it has fallen from 74.3 per cent to 65.7 per cent. One out of every four respondents struggles to maintain balance, pointing to challenges in certain roles, industries or workplace policies. Stress levels further emphasise the issue: 23.6 per cent feel stressed frequently, while 30 per cent experience it occasionally, meaning for over half the workforce, stress is a common experience. On a positive note, 40 per cent report rare to no stress, suggesting manageable workloads or effective coping strategies. However, with declining enthusiasm for long hours, it's imperative that companies start focusing on productivity rather than simply counting hours. ■

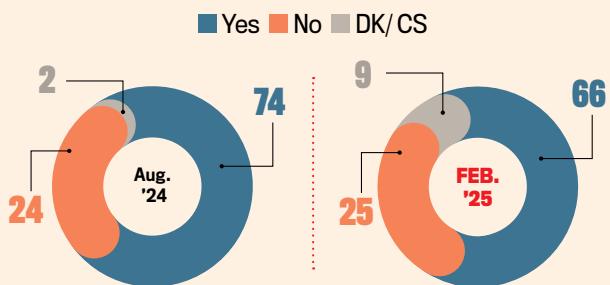
GETTY IMAGES



Q. What should be the ideal weekly work hours to maintain required productivity at work and lead a happy personal life?

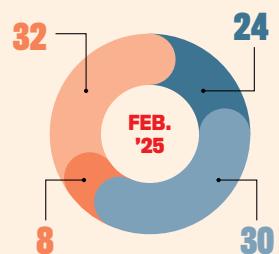


Q. Is it possible to maintain work-life balance in your current job?



Q. Do you feel stressed at work?

■ Yes, frequently
■ Occasionally
■ Rarely
■ Never
■ Rest, DK/ CS & doesn't apply



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



देश का नं. 1 हिंदी न्यूज ऐप

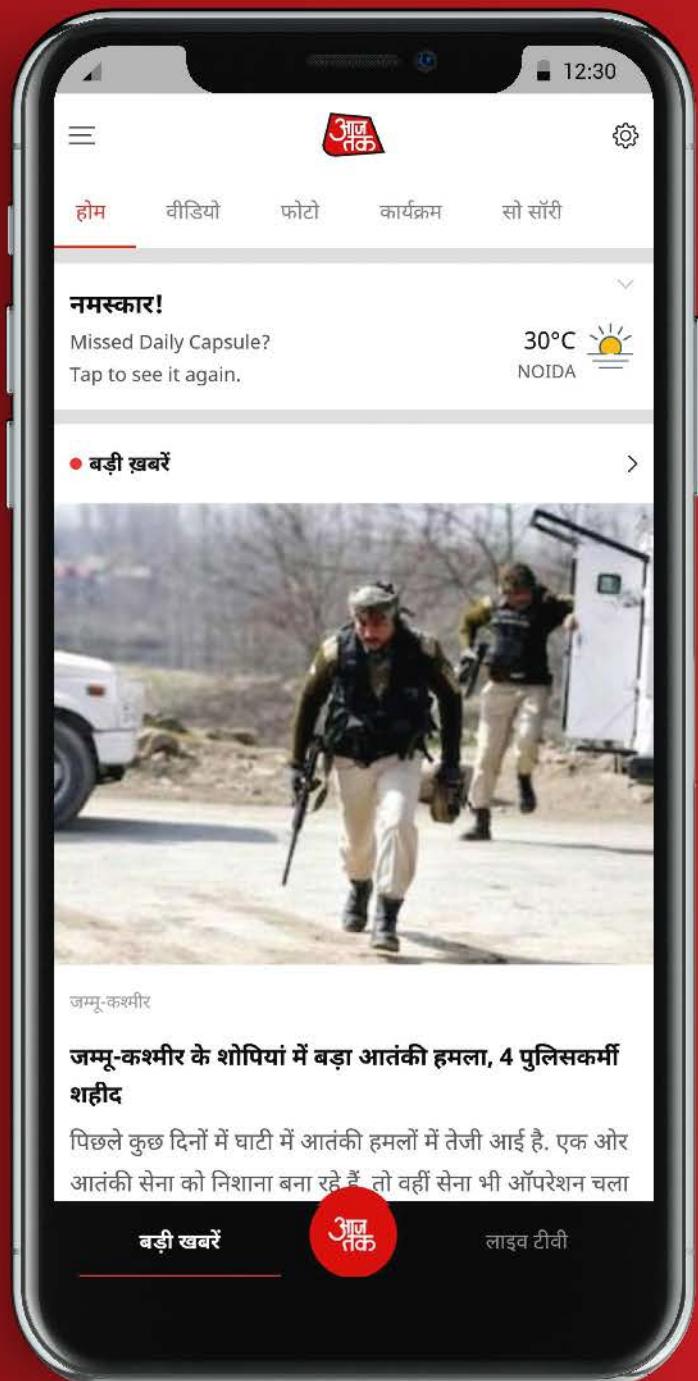
जुड़े रहिए हर खबर से,
कहीं भी, कभी भी

अभी डाउनलोड करें

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उपलब्ध है



MOOD OF THE NATION

SPORTS

KNIGHTS OF THE ARENA

World chess champion D. Gukesh and para archer Sheetal Devi are new favourites, as cricket's top stars retain their positions amongst both men and women. Sindhu and Neeraj, too, head their respective lists by long margins

By SUHANI SINGH

T

Two 17-year-olds captivated Indian sport last year and both have made their debut in the India Today Mood of the Nation Poll. Para archer Sheetal Devi may not have bagged an Olympic medal but her heroics won hearts in Paris after her very first arrow, fired from her legs, scored a bull's eye. In April 2024, D. Gukesh became the youngest win-

ner of Candidates, the tournament which decides the challenger to the world champion. By December 16, he became the game's youngest world champion. While Sheetal broke new ground as the first para athlete to debut in the female sportspersons list, Gukesh entered straight at No. 3 in the male field. The teens show that the future of Indian sport is in safe hands.

Among female sportspersons, P.V. Sindhu, the de facto number one, is followed by double Olympics bronze winner Manu Bhaker (No. 2)

Q. Who is India's No. 1 male cricketer?



2
M.S. DHONI
22.3
[29.6]



4
SHUBMAN
GILL
8
[1.5]



3
ROHIT
SHARMA
11.2
[11.9]



5
SURYAKUMAR
YADAV
Bihar
3.2 [3.3]

Q. Who is India's No. 1 female cricketer?



2
SHAFALI VERMA
13.1
[10]



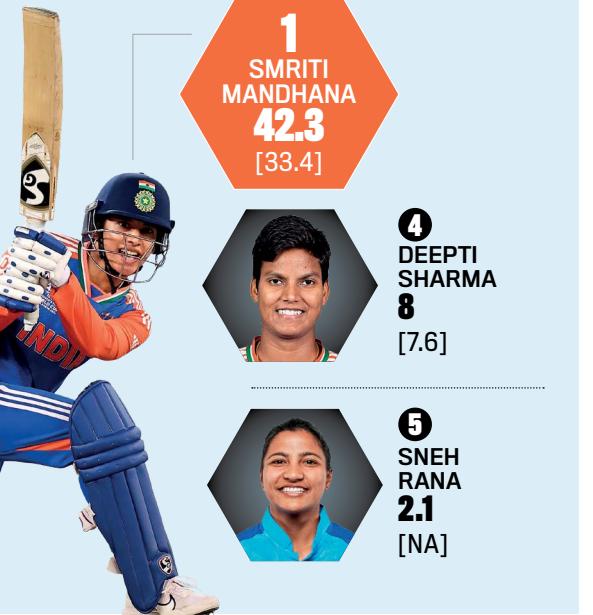
3
HARMANPREET
KAUR
8.7 [11]



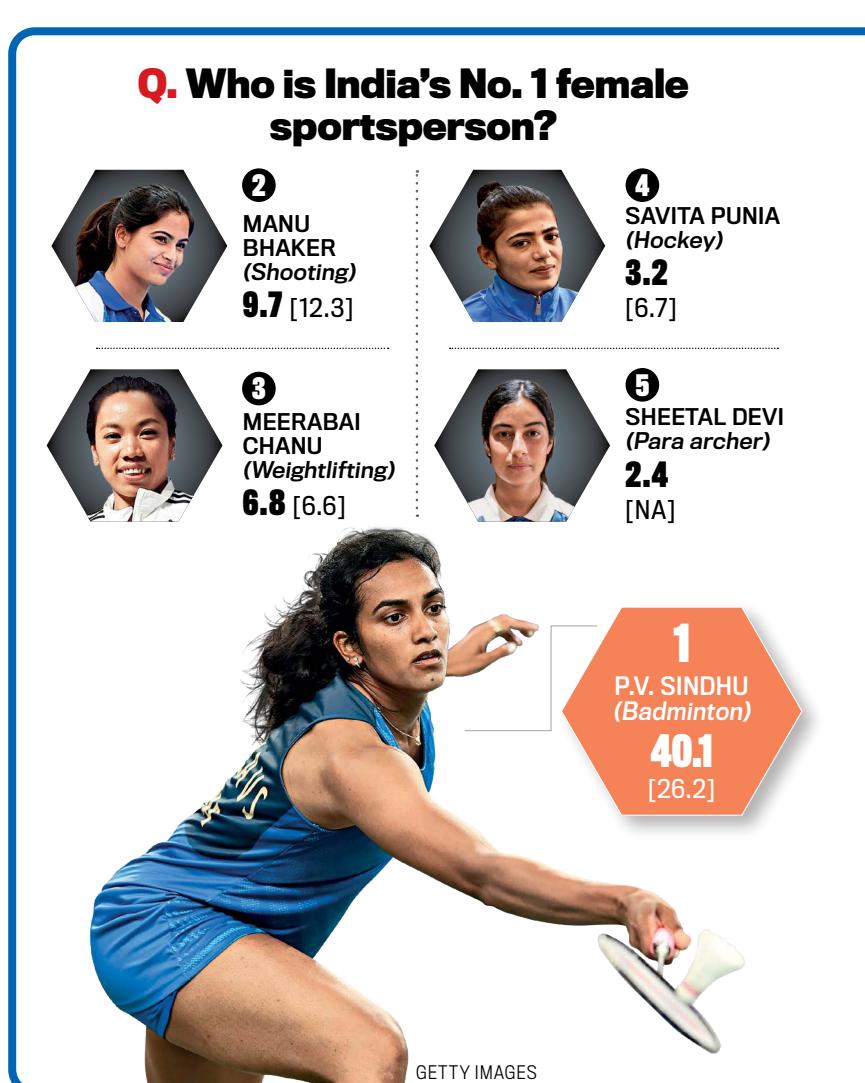
All figures in %;
rest, others &
don't know/can't
say (DK/CS);
Feb. '25 figures in
bold, Aug. '24 in []



1
VIRAT KOHLI
39.4
[39.3]



Q. Who is India's No. 1 sportsperson (male)?



GETTY IMAGES

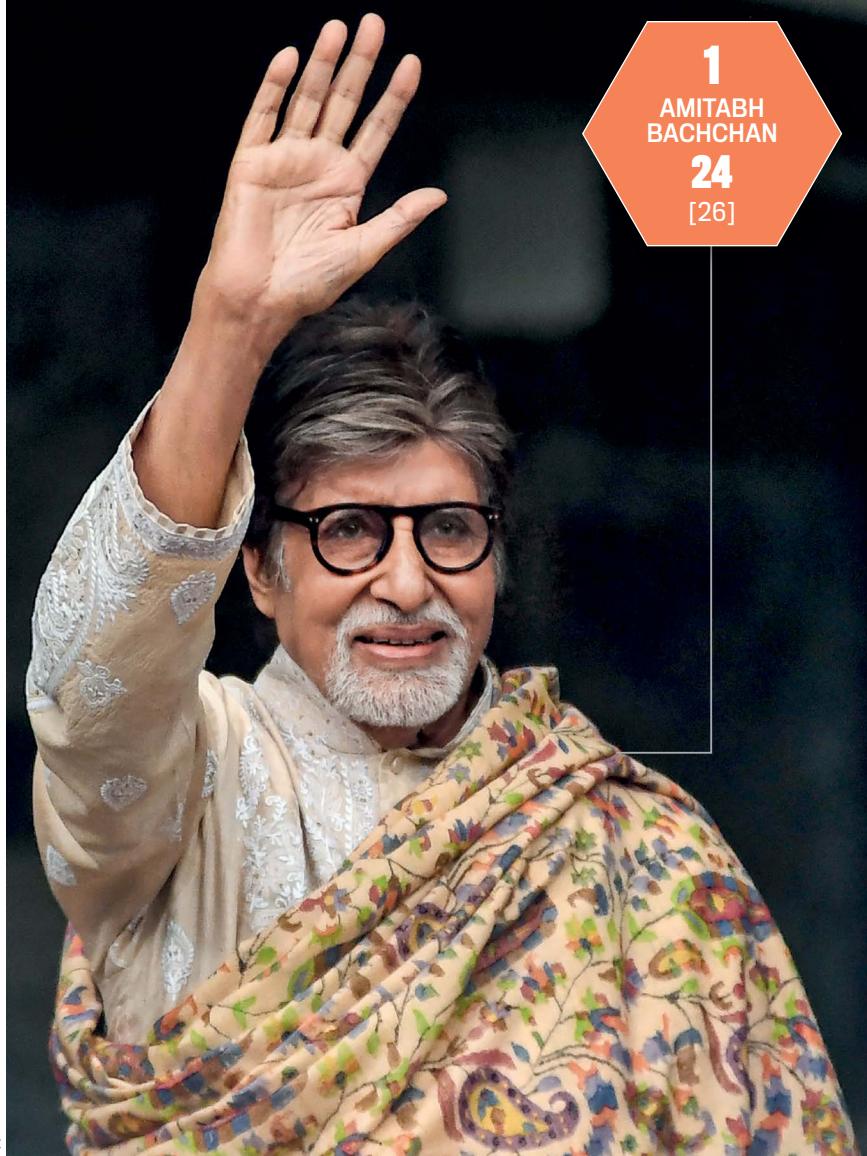
All figures in %; rest, others & DK/CS;
Feb.'25 figures in bold, Aug.'24 in []

and weightlifter Meerabai Chanu (No. 3). Sindhu and Chanu fell short of the podium in 2024 but put in inspired performances. Among men, javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra is going strong at the top; the second spot is taken by former football captain Sunil Chhetri, with hockey skipper and two-time Olympic bronze medallist Harmanpreet Singh at No. 4.

In cricket, three of the star batsmen from the T20I World Cup-winning team feature in the poll, with Virat Kohli, despite having a forgettable tour to Australia, again topping the list. Enthusiasm for big hitters was evident in the poll as the charismatic M.S. Dhoni (No. 2), whose power play in the IPL continues to pull crowds to stadiums, Rohit Sharma (No. 3) and newest

T20I captain Suryakumar Yadav (No. 5) round up the top five alongside Shubman Gill (No. 4).

While ICC Cricketer of the Year Jasprit Bumrah is surprisingly missing from the top five, it isn't the case for women, where Smriti Mandhana, the ICC ODI Cricketer of the Year of 2024, emerges on top, as she did in August 2024. Mandhana has already beaten Kohli to at least one feat—winning the IPL with Royal Challengers Bengaluru—and she will be hoping to lead the team once again to the title as the third season kicks off. The women's line-up shows some versatility, as apart from batters Shafali Verma and Harmanpreet Kaur, all-rounder Deepti Sharma (No. 4) and spinner Sneh Rana (No. 5) make the cut. ■



Q. Who is the No. 1 hero in the country?



2
SHAH RUKH
KHAN
14
[24.5]



3
ALLU
ARJUN
8.9
[6]



4
SALMAN
KHAN
8.8
[7.9]



5
AKSHAY
KUMAR
8.4
[7.7]

PTI

MOOD OF THE NATION

ENTERTAINMENT

NEW STARS RISING

Pushpa stars Allu Arjun and Rashmika Mandanna emerge at the No. 3 spot in the No. 1 actor/actress stakes, but cannot dislodge the royals—Big B, SRK or Deepika Padukone

By SUHANI SINGH

Pushpa fire nahin, wildfire hai (Pushpa is not fire, it's wildfire)," says Allu Arjun's character in *Pushpa 2-The Rule*, the highest grossing Indian film of all time. It is no surprise, therefore, to see him rise to No. 3 in the India Today Mood of the Nation poll. Amitabh Bachchan, of course, continues to be the eternal flame that shines the

brightest. To reign supreme, the veteran doesn't even need to be as prolific as Akshay Kumar (No. 5) or charm audiences like Shah Rukh Khan (No. 2). The masses are still under the spell of the 82-year-old's cinematic stature. Behind him after a sizeable gap comes Shah Rukh 'Badshah' Khan. SRK didn't have a release last year and

1
DEEPIKA
PADUKONE

9.8
[24.7]



Q. Who is the No. 1 heroine in the country?

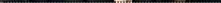
2
AISHWARYA
RAI
BACHCHAN
9.7 [6.6]



3
RASHMIKA
MANDANNA
7.8
[7]



4
KATRINA
KAIF
5.9
[10.3]



All figures in %; rest, others; Feb.
'25 figures in bold, Aug. '24 in []



Q. Who is India's No. 1 male OTT star?

1
PANKAJ
TRIPATHI
15.6
[19.2]



2
MANOJ
BAJPAYEE
12.8 [13.4]



3
ABHISHEK
BACHCHAN
10.3 [13.1]



4
RAVI KISHAN
9 [NA]



5
JITENDRA
KUMAR
3.4 [3]

will be missing from the big screen in 2025, but that's irrelevant, for he is a master at the game of staying relevant by being seen, whether at the IPL matches of Kolkata Knight Riders, or supporting son Aryan at a Netflix India shindig.

Among actresses, Deepika Padukone continues to be the darling among respondents, while Aishwarya Rai Bachchan, who last appeared in Mani Ratnam's *Ponniyin Selvan* films, jumped to No. 2. Kangana Ranaut sneaks in at No. 4, even if her prosthetic-heavy act as Indira Gandhi in *Emergency* failed to light up the box office. The revelation is Rashmika Mandanna, or Srivalli in the *Pushpa* films, who like her co-star takes the third spot. It's likely she will be a permanent fixture in coming MOTN rankings.

On OTTs, Bihari babus dominate the favourite male star field. While Pankaj Tripathi and Manoj Bajpayee held steady as No. 1 and 2, Ravi Kishan was a new entrant courtesy comedy *Maamla Legal Hai*. Joining him is another first-timer—Jitendra Kumar (No. 5),

Q. Who is India's No. 1 female OTT star?

2
SUSHMITA SEN
13.7 [13.2]



3
SAMANTHA
PRABHU
9.5 [NA]



4
KAJOL
8.6 [9.9]



5
SONAKASHI
SINHA
8.2 [NA]



1
RAVEENA
TANDON
13.8
[11.9]



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



1
ARIJIT SINGH
36.6
[37.1]

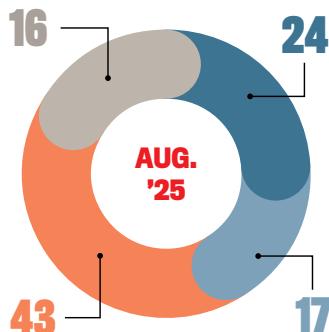
2
SONU NIGAM
32.7 [13.3]

3
JUBIN NAUTIYAL
8.8 [5.5]

4
YO YO HONEY SINGH
3.8 [NA]

5
DILJIT DOSANJH
3.6 [NA]

Q. Where do you prefer watching films?



■ Cinema ■ OTT/Streaming platforms ■ TV ■ DK/CS

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

2
ALKY YAGNIK
14.9 [11.9]

1
SHREYA GHOSHAL
27.1
[36.8]

3
NEHA KAKKAR
9.7 [11.6]

4
SUNIDHI CHAUHAN
5.2 [6.8]



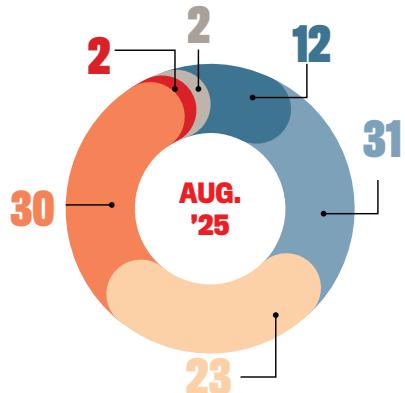
All figures in %; rest, others; Feb. '25 figures in bold, Aug. '24 in []

known for his roles in *Panchayat* and *Kota Factory*. Raveena Tandon and Sushmita Sen continue to occupy the top two spots but the biggest gainer is Samantha Ruth Prabhu, star of *Citadel: Honey Bunny*. Also making her debut is Sonakshi Sinha, who plays a flamboyant courtesan in the lavishly produced *Heeramandi* (2024).

As for singers, the MOTN poll shows that the immensely popular Arijit Singh

isn't infallible; Sonu Nigam has closed the gap on him. What's noteworthy this time around are rapper Yo Yo Honey Singh (No. 4) and Punjabi pop sensation Diljit Dosanjh (No. 5) making their debuts. Shreya Ghoshal cedes some ground in her numero uno status, and is followed by Alka Yagnik, Neha Kakkar and Sunidhi Chauhan (No. 4), whose dance moves wowed as much as her voice in the catchy 'Aankh' (2024).

Q. Where do you get your news from?



■ Newspapers/ magazines ■ Mobile apps ■ Social media ■ TV ■ Radio ■ DK/ CS

All figures in % and rounded off

When asked where they preferred watching films, 42.7 per cent respondents named the television, while theatres and streaming platforms were the choice of 23.6 per cent and 16.6 per cent respectively. On where they read news and current affairs, mobile apps were the choice of 31.4 per cent MOTN respondents, while social media catered to 23.2 per cent. Only 11.8 per cent read newspapers and magazines. ■

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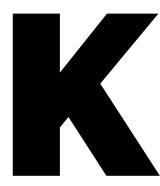




AN ECOLOGICAL EQUILIBRIUM

The first ever India Today Environment Conclave, held in Bengaluru, focused on some of the pressing green challenges facing Karnataka and the country, including climate change, man-animal conflict and the state capital's woes

Photographs by CHANDRADEEP KUMAR, JITHENDRA M



Karnataka is home to 60 per cent of the Western Ghats but it is also the state with the second largest area of arid land in the country after Rajasthan. Thanks to this unique geography, it has always been susceptible to the adverse effects of climate change, the state's minister for forests, environment and ecology Eshwar Khandre pointed out at the first India

Today Environment Conclave held in Bengaluru on February 4.

The conclave, spanning a wide spectrum of themes from human-animal conflict to e-waste to climate change mitigation, was inaugurated by Karnataka deputy chief minister D.K. Shivakumar who holds the two key portfolios of water resources and Bengaluru city develop-

“Bengaluru was called the garden city earlier...25 years back, we had 70 lakh people living here, now we have 1.4 crore. Last year, we saw 7,000 borewells drying up...now I’m trying to fix the water bodies, rejuvenate the water table. We’ll change the image of Bengaluru”

- D.K. SHIVAKUMAR, Deputy Chief Minister, Karnataka



ESHWAR KHANDRE
Minister of Forest, Ecology and Environment, Karnataka

“We are planting 30 million saplings this year and about 70 million in 2026. Our aim is to improve the forest green cover of the state from around 21-22% now to 25% by the end of 2028”

ment. Top on his agenda is a comprehensive plan to change the city’s image as a metropolis struggling with traffic congestion and water shortages. Pointing out that Bengaluru, with a population of 14 million, is home to 11 million vehicles, Shivakumar said: “We plan to spend almost Rs 80,000-100,000 crore on urban development in Bengaluru.” Apart from new flyovers and metro rail lines, the focus is also on augmenting the city’s water supply network through the Cauvery 6th Stage scheme—which is currently in the drawing board stage—and finalising the location for a second greenfield airport for Bengaluru.

In his keynote address, Khandre said the push has been towards increasing the state’s forest cover through an afforestation drive, cracking down on forest land encroachment and pursuing sustainable practices both in the agriculture-dependent rural parts and the ever-expanding urban agglomerations. The goal, says Khandre, is to increase the forest cover to 25 per cent of the state’s total geographical area by 2028 from around 22 per cent at present. “We must balance economic growth with environmental

sustainability by addressing key risks such as pollution, resource overuse and waste management,” said Khandre, adding that Karnataka achieved a good score of 75 on the sustainable development goals (SDG) index for the year 2023-24. The overall SDG score for the country was 71 during the same period.

Karnataka is also home to one-fourth of India’s elephant population and has the second largest tiger count in the country after Madhya Pradesh. The conclave featured tiger biologists, elephant researchers and senior forest department officials who analysed the pressing problems relating to human-animal conflict and wildlife conservation. A corresponding view came from four legislators hailing from the districts of Kodagu, Shivamogga and Mysuru where human-animal conflict has been rising—most visibly in the phenomenon of wild elephant herds that are now permanent residents of plantations in the Western Ghats region. As wildlife biologist Ravi Chellam noted, “The fact is, for many species, up to 50 per cent, even 60 per cent,



of their populations are not within protected areas. They are either in reserved forests or in human-dominated habitat." The key takeaway from these sessions was the need for a landscape approach in conservation and going beyond short-term initiatives such as trenches and barricades to fence in wildlife.

Meanwhile, in the session, 'How to Clean up Bengaluru', experts outlined the big challenges facing the city, saying it needs a governance overhaul if it has to deliver on the infrastructural revamp required to keep pace with its rapid growth. The key takeaways from the discussion included: the urgent need to bring in a new planning paradigm given that a clutch of parastatals—which are in charge of providing civic amenities in Bengaluru such as transport, water supply, power, waste management—currently work in silos; the need to push people towards mass rapid transit systems so as to reduce the dependence on personal vehicles; invest in an integrated urban water management system by strengthening the Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board; and give more teeth to the city's climate action cell in order to implement the action plan that has been drawn up. The conclave also featured eco-warriors working in the areas of decentralised waste management and restoration of lakes and water bodies.

Khandre said that 153 acres of land in Bengaluru's peripheral areas is being developed into a lung space which, when fully developed, will contribute to carbon sequestration. Though Karnataka has 43,000 sq. km of forests, there are 16 districts where the forest cover is less than 10 per cent, Khandre said, noting that the forest department planted 54.8 million saplings across the state in 2023 and 30 million in 2024.

"Sustainable development is not an isolated concept," agreed Khandre. "Any good sustainability model of today should include a mitigation plan to combat climate change, a plan for conservation of natural resources, a plan to promote eco-friendly practices and to drive innovation." As the experts put it, it has to be taken up with alacrity. ■

-Ajay Sukumaran



A.S. PONNANNA

MLA, Virajpet

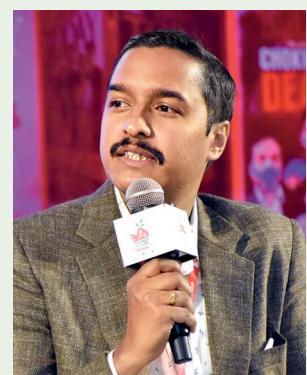
“The area of conflict is expanding... We must look at policy decisions that go beyond just creating boundaries. Coexistence is an area we can work on”

LIVING WITH THE WILD: PREPARING FOR A

ARITRA KSHETTRY

National Lead for Elephant Conservation, WWF-India

“If conservation efforts are to be sustained, local communities must be at the centrestage...they are the people actually sharing space with wildlife and bearing the brunt of conservation goals”



RAVI CHELLAM

Wildlife Biologist and Conservation Scientist, CEO, Metastring Foundation

“We have to take a landscape approach. The average size of a protected area is too small to hold viable populations of most of our large mammal species”



GROUND ZERO: MAN-ANIMAL CONFLICT



MANTAR GOWDA
MLA, Madikeri

“Our policies can't be only short term, it should be a 20-year strategy...the (forest) department can buy large land parcels...cordon it off, let vegetation grow”

DARSHAN DHRUVANARAYANA
MLA, Nanjangud

“We need to coordinate with the people living around forest areas, the department, local representatives and farmers to mitigate these problems”

DR DHANANJAY SARJI Member of Karnataka Legislative Council

“We have to improve water resources inside forests, we have to prevent fire incidents... and hire a good number of staff. We also need more elephant camps across the state”

FUTURE WHERE MAN-ANIMAL CONFLICT IS NEW NORMAL

SUBHASH K. MALKHEDA
IFS, Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Head of Forest Force)

“Unless we consider the economic valuation of ecological services, we will not be able to tackle any problem, leave alone human-animal conflict. With new irrigation facilities, cropping patterns have changed drastically. So, they (elephants) come to eat banana, arecanut and any other available food...we are changing our life patterns, so animals are also modifying their behaviour”



LEARNING FROM GREEN WARRIORS

HARSHA TEJ
Director, BlueDot Foundation

“To get youngsters in, we have to make conservation activity, or a sustainable lifestyle cool”

PADMASHREE BALARAM
Solid Waste Management Practitioner & Climate Actioneer



“Behavioral change is the biggest thing because, for most people, my waste is not my responsibility”

HOW TO CLEAN UP BANGALORE

“We have to push people towards MRTS system, convert buses to electric to gain maximum ...and reduce cars in the city”

PROF. ASHISH VERMA

Head, IISc Sustainable Transportation Lab

“The city has a climate action cell... but it falls far below the capability of what such a powerful action plan can achieve if they had some powers”

REVATHY ASHOK

CEO, Bangalore Political Action Committee (B.PAC)



NARESH V. NARASIMHAN

Architect, Urbanist and Entrepreneur

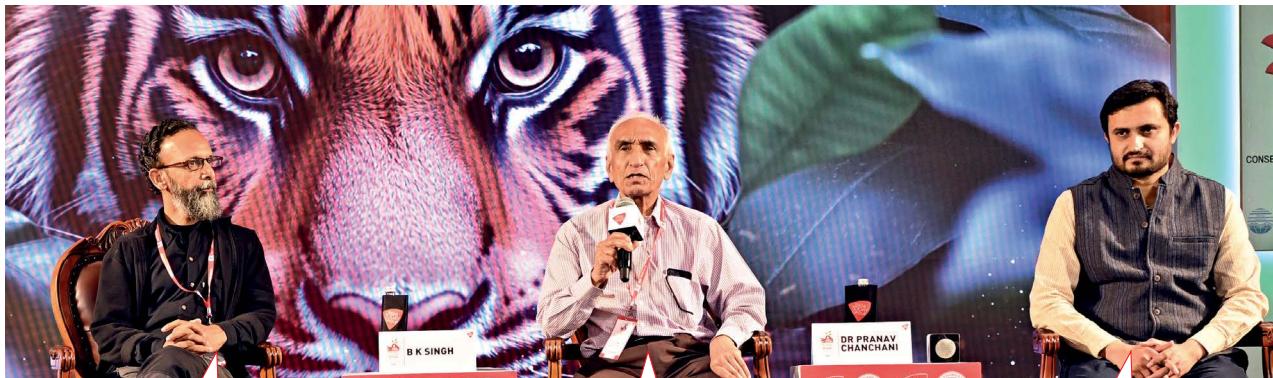
“We need a new planning paradigm. The Bengaluru masterplan expired in 2015. Now it's just a bunch of ideas coming from a bunch of different departments”

S. VISHWANATH

Water Conservation Expert

“We lack an imagination based on integrated urban water management... and we lack investment in a sector which is absolutely crucial for Bengaluru”

THE TIGER CONSERVATION: THE CHALLENGES AHEAD



JOSEPH VATTAKAVEN

Tiger Biologist

“There is no place for complacency. In terms of numbers, conservationists talk of the possibility of 10,000 tigers in India. So we still have a long way to go”

B.K. SINGH

Former Chief of Karnataka Forest Force

“The Forests Rights Act, although it is very good to keep the community onboard, has been one of the drivers of accelerated deforestation”

DR PRANAV CHANCHANI

Head, Species Conservation, WWF India

“Tigers still only occur in about 30% of surveyed habitats across India. So, the fact is there are vast areas of the habitat that do not sustain the species today”

E-WASTE: THE MOUNTING THREAT



PAWANDEEP SINGH BAWA

V-P and Head,
Sourcing, Attero

“The mandate is that by 2027 a percentage of recycled materials has to be incorporated in the manufacturing supply chain. If implemented well, it will create a circular economy”



RAVI KUMAR NEELADRI

CEO, Pegasus
Waste Management

“The biggest challenge is collection...85% of electronic waste generated lands up with the informal segment. We need integration between the informal and formal segment”



VIKRAM PRABAKAR

Co-founder &
CTO, Recykal

“It's a reverse supply chain problem.... What really happens post-consumption is something we still haven't solved. That's the biggest challenge and it's not simple”

FIRESIDE CHAT: TRIBAL REHABILITATION AND WELFARE OF ADIVASIS IN KARNATAKA



ANJUM PARVEZ

Additional Chief Secretary,
Forest, Ecology and Environment Department, Karnataka

“In Karnataka, we have gone a step further...50% of the (forest) watcher posts are reserved for the tribal population”

CLIMATE CHANGE: LOCAL ACTION IN A GLOBAL CRISIS



“None of the Indian cities today build physical infrastructure that follows the latest flood codes in the country. What that means is we are building infrastructure that is not going to be climate-resilient”

EASWARAN J. NARASSIMHAN

Fellow and Coordinator, Climate Policy,
Sustainable Futures Collaborative

“In the Tungabhadra command area, farmers alternate between wet and dry paddy cultivation... water is saved, methane reduced, and nutrient uptake is up. Now it's just a question of how to upscale”

RAVI B.P.

Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Evaluation, Working Plan, Research and Training)



WILDLIFE THROUGH MY LENS



AMOGHAVARSHA J.S.
Filmmaker

“Now the era is of storytelling.... how do we tell much better wildlife stories that connect with audience at an emotional level”

SIDLIGHTS



1

GREEN ZONE

Featuring conservation experts, wildlife biologists, green warriors, civic groups and even a filmmaker, discussions at the India Today Environment Conclave spanned a wide arc of themes and issues



2

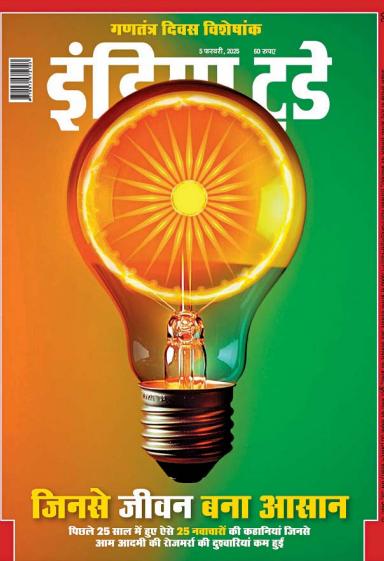


4



3

1. Jenu Kuruba tribal dancers set the tone 2. Karnataka Deputy CM D.K. Shivakumar lights the lamp as colleagues Mantar Gowda, Eshwar Khadre, A.S. Ponnanna and India Today's Raj Chengappa look on 3. Senior officials of the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board 4. Conservation experts Pranav Chanchani, Joseph Vattakaven, Aritra Kshettry and Raman Sukumar



जिनसे जीवन बना आसान

पिछले 25 साल में हुए ऐसे 25 नवाचाहों की कहानियां जिनसे आप आदमी की रोजमर्झ की दुश्वारियां कम हुईं



वजूद की जंग

बोलो वह कौसी के दिए बेदाम में और अटोटे के गोलाल को भाजा ने चाहे और से पेत।

रिपोर्टरी जीवन के इस जासों उठिन पहाड़ को बेदाम बता रहा है। फिर विजेता बन पाएगे?

फिटनी: आरियर वयों पहुँचे लगे दोरे

विद्यार्थी: उद्धवर खड़े होने की अंतर्भीन आस

सिनेमा: पूर्वोत्तर में शूटिंग की बात ही ओर



इंडिया टुडे

इंडिया टुडे

सबसे भरोसेमंद खोतों से, सबसे सटीक जानकारी

सब्सक्राइब करें और पाएं 68% तक की छूट

पिछले 25 साल में हुए ऐसे 25 नवाचाहों की कहानियां जिनसे आप आदमी की रोजमर्झ की दुश्वारियां कम हुईं

चौथी बार कृषी के दिए बेदाम में और आरियर के गोलाल को भाजा ने चाहे और से पेत।
रिपोर्टरी जीवन के इस जासों उठिन पहाड़ को बेदाम बता रहा है। फिर विजेता बन पाएगे?



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

अपनी पसंद के सब्सक्रिप्शन को टिक करें और फॉर्म को इस पर भेज दें— वी केअर, लिविंग मीडिया इंडिया लि. सी-९, सेक्टर-१०, नोएडा २०१३०१ (भारत)

टिक करें	अवधि	कुल अंक	कवर प्राइस (₹)	ऑफर प्राइस (₹)	प्लान	डिस्काउंट
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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 जोड़ें, समान मूल्य के चेक मान्य नहीं होंगे) के लिए बनवाया गया है।

नाम..... पता.....

..... शहर..... राज्य..... पिन.....

मोबाइल..... ईमेल.....



सब्सक्राइब करने के लिए यहां स्कैन करें।

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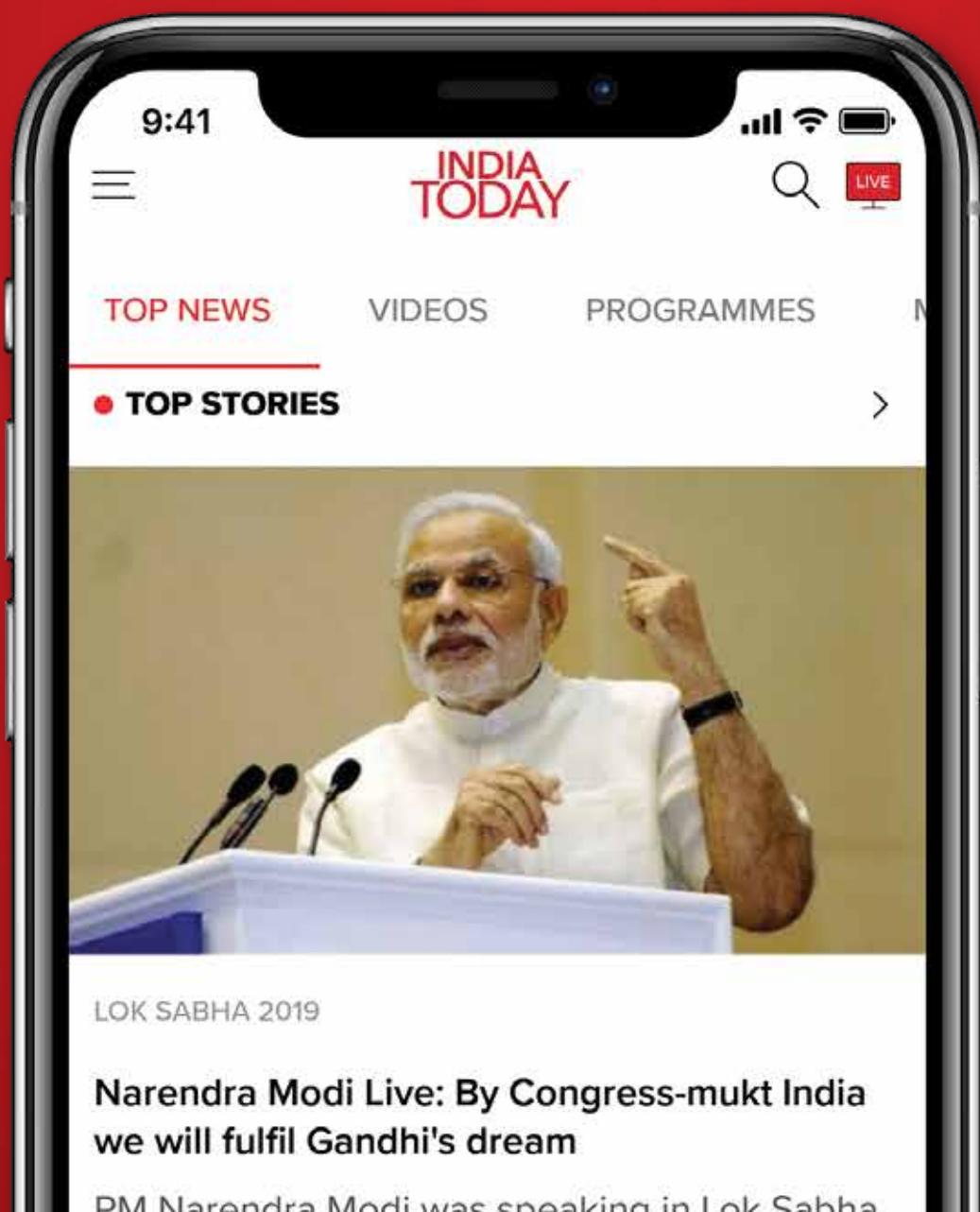


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SHEIKH PG 70

LEISURE

Ibtida
Ek Mehfil



PERFECT PITCH
Hariharan
performing at an
'Ibtida - Ek Mehfil'
programme in
Mumbai

MUSIC

Baithaks Are Back

Once on the verge of extinction, the culture of intimate
musical gatherings is making a strong comeback

Photograph by MANDAR DEODHAR

A

s a senior artist, Usha Uthup has performed on many stages, but it is the recent experiences of her singing in musical baithaks that she talks of with utmost joy. "It is a great experience to be singing to a diverse audience who engage and enjoy my music so much and are fantastically receptive to it," she says. Musical baithaks and mehfils have been a part of India's cultural repertoire for centuries but never before have they seen such a vast outreach—both in terms of the audience demographic and the variety of artists performing for them.

Delhi-based Ibtida – Ek Mehfil, which hosted these baithaks with Uthup, is among the frontrunners of this resurgence. They have brought a host of senior artists like Uthup, Hariharan, Shilpa Rao, Kavita Seth and Papon to a select audience via thoughtfully curated shows. "Ibtida – Ek Mehfil was born out of the need to revive the culture of musical gatherings. We wanted to bridge the gap between the artist and listeners that exists in large-scale performances through a format where both could converse," says co-founder Tanyi Singh Bhatia.

While Bhatia, along with her partner Anubhav Jain, started the franchise in 2019, Tales Of A City began curating baithaks about eight years ago. Most of these were for high net-worth individuals who had sound knowledge of music and organised them in their own homes. "By definition, a baithak or mehfil is always hosted at home. The concept was developed back in the day when people got together in their courtyards to enjoy an evening of music or dance," says Abu Sufiyan, founder, Tales Of A City. He has organised hundreds of private baithaks and now also hosts the occasional public event.

MUSICAL BAITHAKS AND MEHFILS HAVE NEVER BEFORE SEEN SUCH A VAST OUTREACH



"Having smaller gatherings allows us to have meaningful conversations with our performers and audience without the pressure of filling up a large hall," says Madhavi Kuckreja, founder, Lucknow Bioscope, which has been organising such gatherings for over five years in the city. Held either in the courtyard or the drawing room of her home, the baithaks are priced nominally. The idea, shares Kuckreja, is to celebrate Lucknow's vibrant musical traditions which have been fading from public memory. So, there is thumri and sozkhwani, ghazal and poetry that one can listen to here.

Of genres pulling listeners to these musical gatherings, ghazals, sufi music, qawwali and tributes to masters are the most popular. Some experts, however, believe that baithaks should retain their original purpose of bringing pure classical music to serious patrons. This has led to a small, parallel ecosystem where only classical music—both vocal and instrumental—is practised and performed.

In Pune, Mandar Karanjkar has been organising such baithaks for almost a decade. "The idea is to make classical music accessible to everyone," says founder of the Baithak Foundation, who himself is a classical singer. In Ahmedabad, meanwhile, Mihir Thakore, a septuagenarian lawyer, has been organising baithaks for over eight years, where the finest artists are invited to perform regularly.

Artists have benefitted from this growing craze. If the local talent gets pa-



tronage, seniors are drawn for the connection they can establish with their listeners. "These baithaks remind me of the time we did such gatherings in our home in Bareilly. I am glad the tradition is being revived," says noted singer Kavita Seth. Her son Kavish Seth is among the most sought-after artists with youngsters. Nisschal Zaveri, also a regular, cites them as not just performances but shared experiences with the audience. And US-born, New Zealand-based Amrita Kaur, who has been performing in private homes across the two countries, feels the experience is much more personal in India due to the proximity to the crowd and the ambience created using flowers, candles, carpets, chandeliers and even seating.

The setup is a key element of the new-age baithak and just the cost of the décor, apart from the equipment and food, can run into lakhs. Since most of these are for invited guests with no tickets, like-minded brands sometimes step in as sponsors. "Just as we were looking at ways of exploring the connection of culture with textiles, we noticed a resur-



HITTING THE RIGHT NOTE
Clockwise from above, Usha Uthup at an 'Ibtida - Ek Mehfil' programme in Delhi; a Tales Of A City mehfil; a Baithak Foundation gathering in Pune

gence of baithaks in the country and that gave us an opportunity to work in this space," explains Manish Saksena, lead advisor for Aadyam Handwoven, a corporate social enterprise working with weaver communities. He has organised and co-curated many baithaks with prominent artists that have showcased their products in their natural environment—sometimes worn by the performer and key guests and sometimes used in the setup.

Apart from the décor, baithak etiquette forms an integral part of the experience—reaching on time, adhering to the dress code, keeping the phones switched off and not eating during the performance. With so much going for it, the baithak culture is undoubtedly here to stay, although how it evolves remains to be seen. ■

-Anubhuti Krishna

LEISURE

Duo Lingo

Music composer pair **Naren Chandavarkar** and **Benedict Taylor** have managed to make their long-distance collaboration work

If you're a fan of screenwriters such as Sudip Sharma (*Paatal Lok, Kohrra*) or directors like Abhishek Chaubey (*Udta Punjab, Killer Soup*), Avinash Arun (*Killa, Unpaused*) and Amit Masurkar (*Newton, Sherni*), then you've heard the work of Naren-Benedict. Each of them counts the composer duo of Mumbai-residing Naren Chandavarkar and London-based Benedict Taylor as regular collaborators.

The pair, whose latest is the music for *Paatal Lok 2*, believes they've established a comfort zone with these filmmakers. "With creative areas where things can be quite abstract, you end up going back to the same people who you can

CHORD CONNECTION
Chandavarkar and Taylor

really trust and have a creative shorthand with," says Chandavarkar, whose Marathi drama *Sabar Bonda (Cactus Pears)*, in which he's both co-producer and sound designer, recently won the World Cinema Grand Jury Prize at the Sundance Film Festival. "At the root of it is that you get along," adds Taylor. He was introduced to Chandavarkar in 2007 by a mutual friend. At the time, Taylor was teaching viola at the Mehli Mehta Music Foundation in Mumbai and Chandavarkar was an actor with The Company Theatre. "We formed a very quick friendship," says Chandavarkar. "We liked the same books, movies and music."

When Anurag Kashyap asked him to score his film *That Girl in Yellow Boots* in 2009, he couldn't "think of anyone else" to team up with. Taylor had moved back to the UK by then, but

Over the past decade and a half, Naren-Benedict have composed for productions of widely varying scales

Chandavarkar and he soon mastered the art of collaborating remotely. Taylor also visits Mumbai, where they have their studio called Moonweave, every few months.

Over the past decade and a half, they've composed for productions of widely varying scales, from the indie Marathi movie *Killa* to Sanjay Leela Bhansali's grand spectacle *Heeramandi*. Upcoming releases include the second season of *Kohrra* and the Bengali movie *Baksho Bondi (Shadow-box)*, which will premiere at the Berlin International Film Festival this month.

Though their credits list might be short on rom-coms, they say they're "open to any kind of genre". While Taylor prefers "heavy arthouse projects", Chandavarkar says if at all he has a wishlist, it's for an assignment where "you can really push the envelope, but you're also afforded the luxury of time". ■

-Amit Gurbaxani



Mapping the Mind

Sculptor **Arzan Khambatta's** first pen-and-ink drawings show is a reflection of his subconscious feelings

A

Arzan Khambatta has what he calls "fidgety hands". For as long as he can remember, the renowned sculptor has doodled on notebooks and textbooks, right from his school days to even while attending phone calls. In 2011, when his mother fell ill and was in hospital, Khambatta would spend hours sketching pen-and-ink draw-

ings as he and his siblings took turns to stay with her. All these years later, approximately 80 of his drawings are on display at Gallery Art & Soul in Mumbai as part of Khambatta's first such exhibition titled *Suspended Animation*.

Tightly composed, yet expansive, the lines on paper emerge from somewhere deep



DARK AND LIGHT Clockwise from top, 'Eye in the Sky'; Khambatta in his studio; 'Metamorphosis'

within, almost "like auto-writing", feels Khambatta. "Till the pen touches the paper, I am blank about how I am going to start. That's what makes the journey interesting for me. I just



INFLECTION OF IDENTITIES

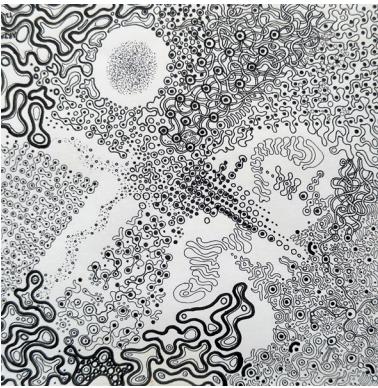
An exhibition by the Aravani Art Project shines a light on the trials and triumphs of India's trans community



BURST OF COLOUR
Clockwise from top, 'Prathi Bimba Mirror Episode 1'; 'Yellama during Margasira' by Nandini and Raji; 'Clap Part 2 Prarthana' by Jyothi and Hamsa Sriram



India's transgender community has had a different trajectory from trans people across the globe. While the latter struggled to assert identity and find community, in India, the challenge has been to break the negative shackles of their identity and celebrate the community in a new light. The Aravani Art Project, a trans and cis women art collective started by Bengaluru-based Poornima Sukumar in 2016, has sown the seeds for this and blossomed into a meaningful movement over the last nine years. Their first solo show titled



On the Cusp of the Eighth Day is on at Mumbai's Gallery XXL (21, Arsiwala Mansion First Floor, Wodehouse Road, Colaba), until February 28, 2025. Sarah Malik, curator, Gallery XXL, explains, "The title is from the story of Aravan's sacrifice, the central deity of the Aravanis. This sacrifice, which is vital for the victory of the Pandavas in the 18-day Kurukshetra war, becomes a pivotal point for the transgender community to get together and celebrate the 18-day Koovagam festival. The symbolic sacrifice puts forth different dualities at the stroke of midnight—binding the doubleness of how gender, gender

go with the flow," he says, adding that it is about what he felt within that poured out on paper. "They are a reflection of what is going on within me. It is like mapping the mind and what it is subconsciously thinking," he says.

The compositions themselves range from architecturally structured to organically fluid. Together, they form a lyrical quality which matches the wild poetry of the Pink Floyd song, 'Learning to Fly', from which the title has been taken. There are splashes of bright blues and pinks on the mostly monochromatic drawings, adding another dimension to the canvas. Some of them have been burnt and have a reflective surface at the back, so when one is viewing it, they can also see a reflection of themselves within the drawings. The artist has used pens with different thickness to add yet another layer to the works. There are parts that are dark and bold, and some that you have to go close to notice.

Being a sculptor, Khambatta has applied all that he learnt about composition to these works. "In a way, these drawings are the 2D expressions of my 3D work," he says. How-

identity, gender expression and sexuality is perceived and lived."

The exhibition is an evocative explosion of emotion. Be prepared to be blown away by the bold colours, vibrant lines and a certain poignance through canvases, photographs, mixed media works, testimonies and intersectional narratives. The diptych,

The exhibition, *On the Cusp of the Eighth Day*, is an evocative explosion of emotion. Be prepared to be blown away by the bold colours...



ever, the process of making these drawings is in complete contrast to his sculptures—an other reason he enjoys doing them so much. "With my sculptures, I have to pre-plan, give the sketch to the client and get approval," he says. The noise and heat generated from the grinders and welding machines adds to the intensity of the process. When it comes to his drawings, however, he can just immerse himself in a peaceful state, put on some music and draw whatever comes to his mind. "This contrast fascinates me," he shares.

Needless to say, it was Pink Floyd that he listened to a lot during the process. "They are the gods of music for me and I find so much meaning in their lyrics. The line from their song

'Learning to Fly'—'There's no sensation to compare with this suspended animation, a state of bliss'—resonates with me each time I do something which brings me joy. Working on these drawings was like being in a state of bliss and time seemed to be suspended. The words fit in beautifully with these works," he adds. ■

—Deepali Dhingra

SUSPENDED ANIMATION
is on till February
28 at Gallery
Art & Soul,
Mumbai

a glimpse into the little joys of safe spaces in Tamil Nadu's state housing for transgender individuals.

There are also attempts to change the narrative like with the clap, which has come to symbolise India's transgender community. It is being redefined as their newly found voice, one that is not always strident, but contemplative and confident in its own skin. Or the reflective acrylic-on-canvas works 'Prathi-Bimba (One's Own Reflection) Mirror Episode 1' and 'Purush-Purushi, Mirror Episode 2', which emphasise the message 'Indeterminate is also a way of being and thriving'. ■

—Priya Pathian

DOMESTIC DRUDGERY

Sanya Malhotra in a still from Mrs.



CINEMA



SOMETHING'S COOKING

Actress Sanya Malhotra shines in *Mrs.*, the Hindi remake of the 2021 Malayalam drama, *The Great Indian Kitchen*

In 2021, a Malayalam film dropped on OTT and struck a touchy nerve with women over what was either their lived reality or their worst nightmare come alive. That Jeo Baby's brutal kitchen drama, *The Great Indian Kitchen*, came in the midst of the pandemic, when everyone was cloistered in their homes, only aggravated the torment its leading lady (Nimisha Sajayan) was put through. Sanya Malhotra remembers watching and being inspired by Sajayan's class act and also "feeling trapped, uncomfortable, moved and irritated".

In *Mrs.*, a Hindi adaptation of the acclaimed drama, which released on ZEE5 recently, Sanya hopes to evoke these feelings with her portrayal of a new bride who is overwhelmed with the demands in the kitchen.

Going by the response to the trailer on her social media, she has partially succeeded as women wrote to her calling the film "triggering".

What made *The Great Indian Kitchen* particularly remarkable is how it busted the imagery of savouring food in cinema. The art of preparing food instead of giving pleasure became a source of distress and disgust when consumed. "The film makes you realise that somewhere we have been putting women on a pedestal," says Sanya. "This 'maa ke haath ka khaana, usse hi pet bharta hai' [Only food cooked by a mother is wholesome], that the way to one's heart is through the stomach, are all romanticised notions. Cooking is truly a life skill and everyone should know how to cook and nourish themselves."

Mrs. is yet another female-fronted feature in Sanya's cap, the others being *Pagglait* (2021) and *Kathal* (2023), both Netflix releases. For the actor, the films have given her the opportunity to play the kind of women she

that is reminiscent of Beyoncé. Apart from showcasing her underexplored terpsichorean talent, it also allowed her to change her look, which entailed losing four kilos and dropping the familiar girl-next-door act for a more sensuous one.

Mrs. and 'Aankh' are also not the last we will see of the actress in 2025. The *Dangal* actress also has a Dharma romcom—*Sunny Sanskari ki Tulsi Kumbari*—with Varun Dhawan, Janhvi Kapoor and Rohit Saraf; slice-of-life comedy *Toaster* on Netflix alongside Rajkummar Rao; and an Anurag Kashyap-directed thriller. Says Sanya, "I feel quite satisfied and extremely grateful at how my career is shaping up. It's all happening very organically. I'm not rushing through any of it." ■

—Suhani Singh

Mrs., streaming on ZEE5, is Sanya's yet another female-fronted feature after *Pagglait* (2021) and *Kathal* (2023)

has always wanted to portray on screen, ones that "feel confident and empowered".

More recently, though, the actor went viral for depicting those emotions in Sunidhi Chauhan's track 'Aankh'. Sanya wows in the music video with her impeccable moves and swagger

Call it serendipity or a dream come true, but a few years back, theatre writer-director Purva Naresh found herself reading a Hindi translation of Fyodor Dostoevsky's short story *White Nights* in St Petersburg, during white nights. Last year when Aadyam, an Aditya Birla initiative to promote theatre, came knocking on Purva's door seeking a pitch for a new play, she found herself returning to Dostoevsky's tragic romance. "I had seen the film [Luchino Visconti's 1957 classic] at FTII and I remember the entire batch

came out crying. The melancholia, the way it strikes you, the monochromatic white nights, it was all so compelling," says Purva. "But I couldn't find any stage adaptations." In *Chandni Raatein*, Purva's take on the tale, she deploys music to underline the emotions and make it more affecting.

Chandni Raatein marks Purva's fourth collaboration with Aadyam after *Ladies Sangeet*, *Bandish 20-20,000Hz* and *Zoon*. "I can safely say that I was one of the first original scripts [*Ladies Sangeet*] that Aadyam green lit; one of the first woman directors to be brought on board and one of the youngest theatre groups," she says. Purva's group, Aarambh, has emerged as the go-to banner for staging musicals at Aadyam. "Music is within me, so stories will come through music," says Purva, who has trained in pakhawaj and kathak. In *Chandni Raatein*, she

uses nautanki, a folk art form which she feels is closest to opera in its ability to sing the dialogue, as well as classical compositions and folk songs. Kaizad Gherda has composed the music.

Through the play, she hopes to explore what Dostoevsky tells us about love. So much so that the play's first line goes "Yeh pyaar kya hai [What is love]?" "It can be

"MUSIC IS WITHIN ME, SO STORIES WILL COME THROUGH MUSIC," SAYS PURVA, WHO HAS TRAINED IN PAKHAWAJ AND KATHAK



cheesy but it's also the most honest thing one can say," she says. "Love can make you lonelier, bheed mein bhi akele [alone even in a crowd] and still feel complete." The 170-year-old short story may not resonate with all but, for Purva, it has facets that are relevant even today.

The play comes during the 15th anniversary of Aarambh. Having dabbled in films and television, it's on stage that Purva found wings. It helped that it was more economical compared to other mediums. "Any medium that will give you money to tell a story will demand you to tell it so as to earn it back," she says. "Theatre not only allows you to tell stories which are out of the box and you really want to tell, it's also not a capital-based industry. That's why audiences go to the theatre to hear stories that are different from the mainstream." ■

-Suhani Singh

You can catch *Chandni Raatein* (left) at **Nehru Centre Auditorium, Mumbai** (Feb. 15 and 16) and at **Kamani Auditorium, Delhi** (Mar. 1 and 2)

[THEATRE]

Nights of Love

Purva Naresh makes use of nautanki in *Chandni Raatein*, her musical adaptation of Fyodor Dostoevsky's short story *White Nights*



Photographs by NEVILLE SUKHAIA

BOOKS

GEM OF A TOME

Ranjit Hoskote has curated a stellar anthology of Indian writing through the ages in this offering from the Murty Classical Library of India

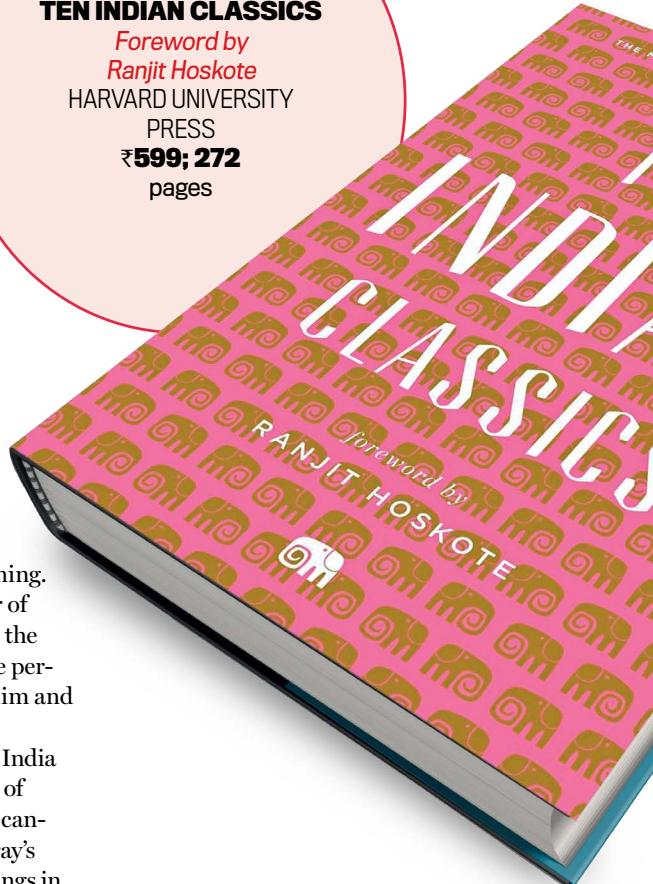
Some six decades ago, there lived an itinerant vendor called D.K. Murthy. Thin to the point of looking emaciated, wearing diamond studs in his ears, clad in collared shirt and muslin dhoti, he would take the Grand Trunk Express from Madras to 'upper India' with a small cache of classically traditional south Indian jewels. One nondescript

year, Murthy just stopped coming. But his legend as the purveyor of 'quality' gems continued. And the genuine articles still adorn the persons who bought them from him and their descendants.

Murty Classical Library of India has placed in our hands a 'box' of 10 gems of translation which I cannot but describe in Thomas Gray's famous words as being renderings in

TEN INDIAN CLASSICS

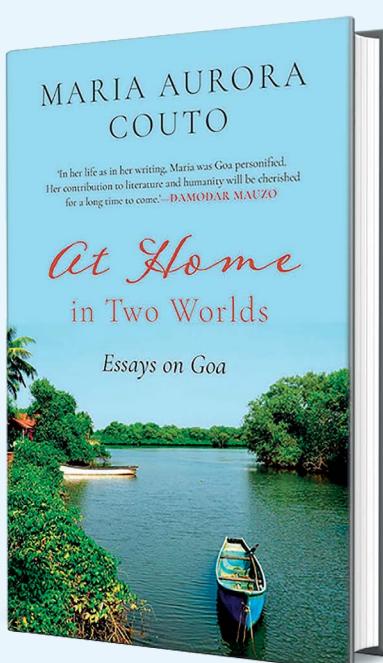
Foreword by Ranjit Hoskote
HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS
₹599; 272 pages



BOOKS

Inside Out

The late **Maria Aurora Couto's** essays belong in the long Goan tradition of memoirs as cultural history



AT HOME IN TWO WORLDS
Essays on Goa
By Maria Aurora Couto
SPEAKING TIGER
₹499;
216 pages



India's smallest state brims with paradoxes, counterfactuals, and what can seem like outright contradictions, which explains why the same is true of the life of Maria Aurora Couto (1937–2022), whose posthumously published *At Home in Two Worlds* is both her best book and the finest explainer of Goa's history and culture.

Couto was eulogised as the "grande dame of letters"

and culture of Goa" by the academic Peter Ronald de Souza, and the great Konkani writer and Jnanpith Award-winner Damodar Mauzo's assessment of her as "Goa personified" is on the cover of this new book. But a fuller assessment of this tenacious, largely self-made intellectual force must take into account her assiduously cultivated proximities to state power, partly explicable by her IAS administrator husband



**The Murty
Classical Library
of India has placed
in our hands a 'box'
of 10 gems of
translation**



English of excerpts from texts ‘of the purest ray serene’. These come not from his Elegy’s ‘dark unfathomed caves’ but from celebrated mines of undimming wealth. The excerpts are rare in their provenance, their translations are true in the fidelity of their English beings, and as a ‘set’ form a chain and yet in their distinct individualities glint in autonomous freedom.

Rohan Murty’s magnificent enterprise could not have done better than ask Ranjit Hoskote, poet and scholar, critic and translator par excellence, to curate this collection. His ‘foreword’ is itself a cabochon in design and impact. Hoskote does well in saying the terrain of the selection is South Asia, for calling it India would have restricted its geographical home to less than its dimensions spread all over that large and variegated area. From the Therigatha’s Pali to Mir Taqi Mir’s ghazals and other poems in Urdu, we have here in the space of a little over 200 pages, the gamut of the highest literary endeavours in the empires of Asoka, the Guptas, the Chalukyas, Vijayanagara, the Mughals, coming right into the times of the British Raj. And all in the highest contemporary English of the Constitution of India

and incidentally that of King Charles III.

Why Tamil and Gujarati, to mention two language groups, do not figure in the anthology is a question so predictable and trite that I will not pose it. That the book will soon be followed by a sequel covering uncovered ecologies of the written word is a hope so ardent that I will express it.

Hoskote uses the ‘we’ over ‘I’ in his ‘foreword’—a sign of becoming modesty, and a way of including the galactic array of translators into his solo expression—a handsome thing to do for the translations included are of the standard of gold, measure for measure, carat by carat, revealing both the potential and the need for that exercise.

When proof-reading leaves the odd misspelling unattended, it only makes the product look human rather than the work of an unblinking machine. *Ten Indian Classics* has been put together by skilled humans with a touch so light as to make the ‘classic’ whisper rather than climb decibels. And in that soft appeal to the sensibility of the reader, reach its goal—the rapture of the experienced word. ■

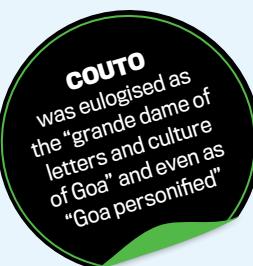
—Gopalkrishna Gandhi

Alban (a constant presence in her writings), but also the couple’s late-career, very public support of Manohar Parrikar—then the state’s ascendant political force—which they eventually came to regret.

At Home... belongs in the long Goan tradition of memoirs as cultural history, alongside fine contributions as disparate as the Pali scholar Dharmanand Kosambi’s solemn *Nivedan*, and pop star Remo’s rollicking eponymous autobiography. In his deeply affectionate foreword, Vivek Couto says this “labour of love” was crafted by his mother

as “an elegy for an older and more inclusive Goa, recognising its religious complexity and its role as the Pan-chayati Raj of Gandhiji’s dream while confronting the modern Goa, its corruption, and the destruction of much that was good, or, arguably, great”. Interestingly, he also notes the last paragraph of her last essay was judged “too depressing” so it was rewritten by Couto’s grand-daughter, but we might surmise it supplied a final judgement about what she wrote in her brave and admirably forthright press note in 2015: “I am deeply saddened by the spiralling descent

into communalism in Goa among my friends who have valiantly fought for secularism and liberal values all their lives. Intolerance which is vitiating the air nationally will do



irreparable damage to Goa’s legendary secular ethos.”

At Home... is an indispensable primer, in which the then-octo-

genarian writes about her beloved homeland with terrific acuity and elegance: “Despite political instability for two decades or more after Liberation, and early attempts to force Goa’s merger into Maharashtra (where it would have languished as a taluk or, at best, a district) the cultural strength of Goa lies in what politicians of all stripes describe as Goenkarponn, its uniqueness. This singularity is due to its history and, equally, to its landscape.... Both of these created a Goan identity, which, even now, resists all attempts at assimilation.” ■

—Vivek Menezes

WORLDLY WISE

A retrospective at the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art celebrates six decades of the creative life of eminent artist Gulammohammed Sheikh

Q.

How did you come up with the title 'Of Worlds Within Worlds' for the retrospective?

I was living in a small town in Gujarat and a world opened for me when I joined the Faculty of Fine Arts in Baroda in 1955. I went to England in 1963 and a third world opened to me. I saw all the great works of art. Then I travelled within India. This wanderlust has been with me from the beginning. 'Of Worlds Within Worlds' seemed apt for this journey.

Q. Why do maps interest you?

I was always interested in maps, but I did not find the kind of map I could work upon. In 2001 or 2002, I discovered a little booklet about maps in a British museum bookshop and found a circular map called the Ebstorf Mappa Mundi (a medieval European map of the world). It was a Christian map and I emptied it of those connotations and kept on adding and changing a few things.

Q. Why do you continue experimenting with mediums, forms and technology?

I like to explore new mediums. I like to keep my vision onto things which I am involved in at that particular moment of time. And it continues. I keep on exploring.



Q.

Your works address many contemporary issues around the world. As an artist, how do you not lose hope?

We have lost hope in most things. The world is burning in front of you, whether it is Rwanda or Ukraine or Gaza—there is so much going on and a common human being can't do anything about it. However, I believe that painting or art is equivalent to hope. It tells the story of life and will continue to do so.

Photograph by BANDEEP SINGH

—with Deepali Dhingra

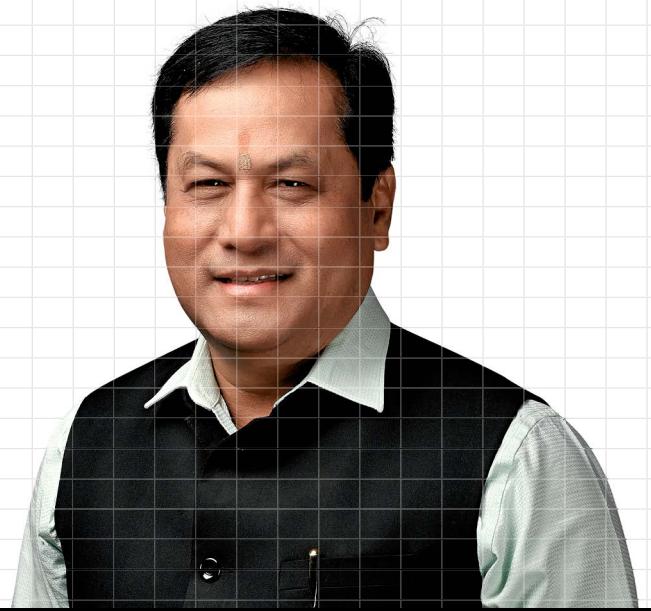
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INDIA TODAY

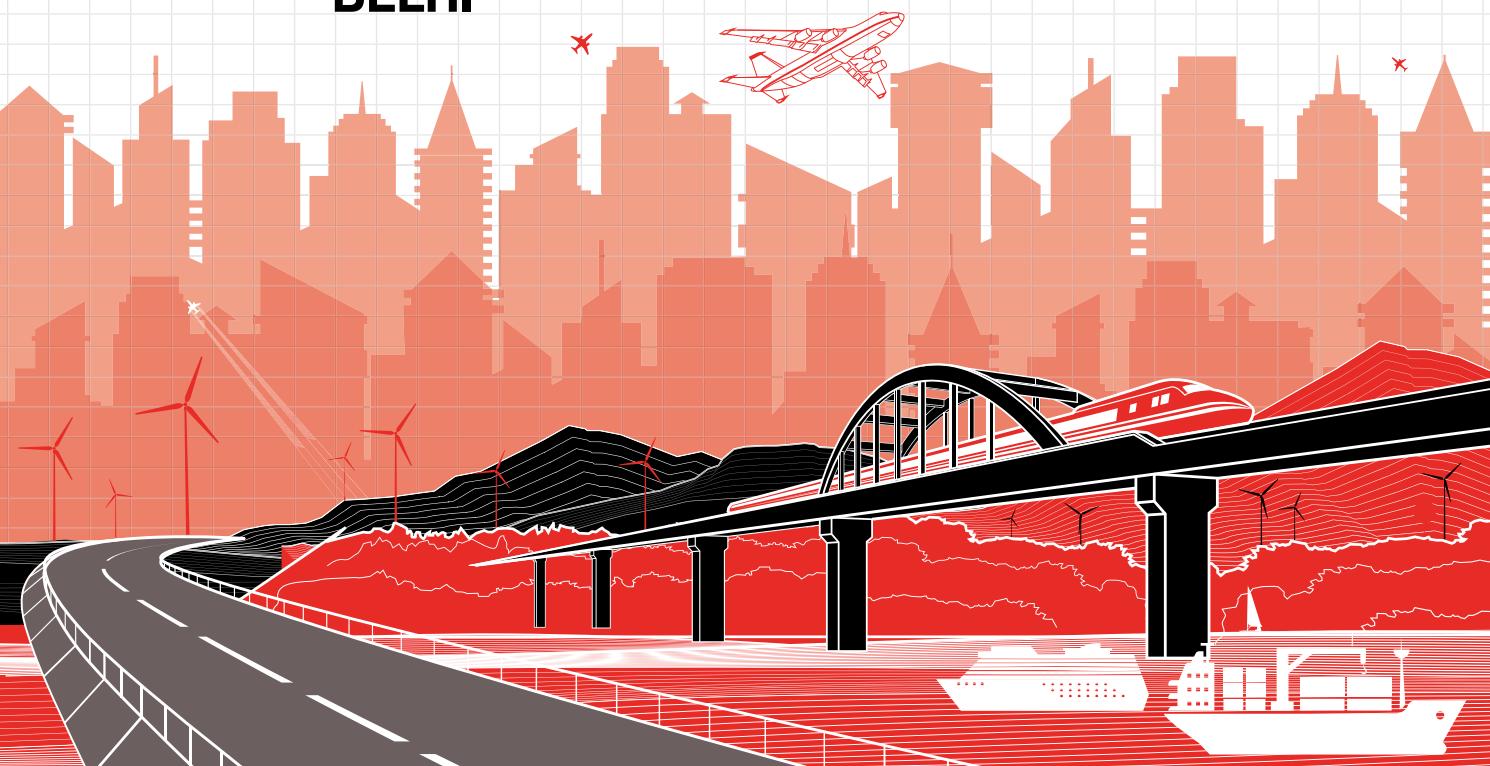
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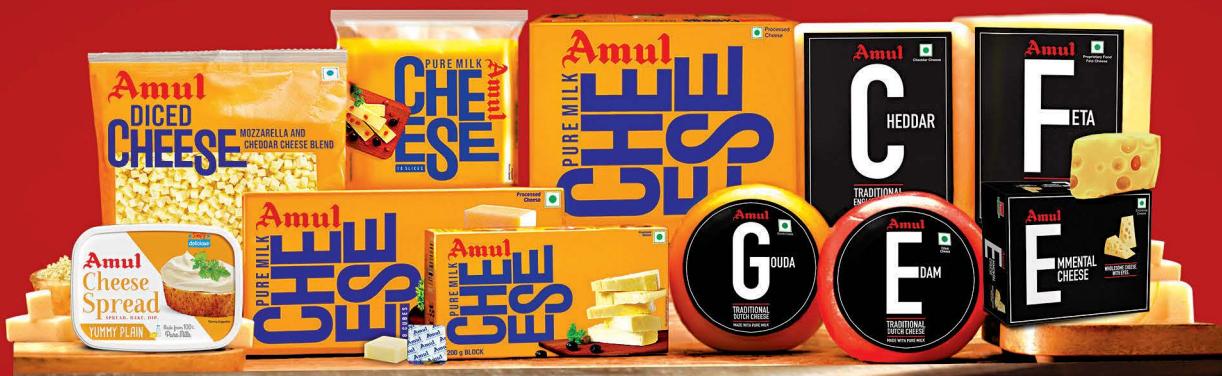


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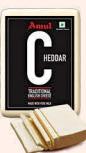
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