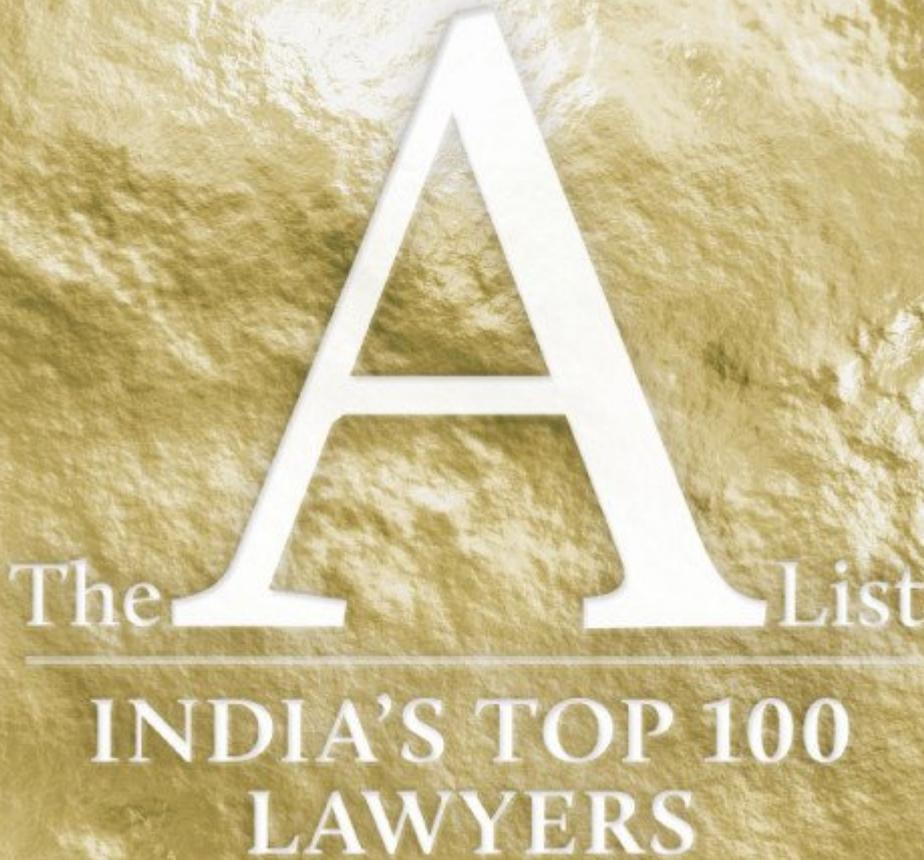


The A-List 2017: India's top 100 lawyers

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India Business Law Journal reveals its definitive list of the country's top private practice lawyers. Rebecca Abraham reports

For the second year running *India Business Law Journal* has put together a list of India's top lawyers. Identifying and honouring individual lawyers in this manner is useful and necessary given that the Indian legal market – unlike that in several other jurisdictions – continues to be dominated by personalities. Clients seek out individual lawyers and not necessarily law firms when they need legal counsel.

Law firm brands in India are growing in importance, but are yet to build the overall consistency and more importantly the clout that clients are familiar with when dealing with law firms in more developed jurisdictions. Chances are this will change when international law firms are allowed to set up offices in India and the legal market reacts to the change in status quo.

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The **A** List

INDIA'S TOP 100 LAWYERS

Rich variety of skills

What does it take to be ranked as one of India's top lawyers?

“Competency, clarity, and professionalism,” says Jack Whittier, a senior technologist at global engineering company CH2M Hill, describing [Avirup Nag](#), a partner at [IndusLaw](#). Whittier applauds Nag for his “superb language and writing skills” that allow him to “accurately convey precise meanings” and for being “timely, courteous and respectful”.

“He is hardworking, honest and agile with his deadlines,” says Luis Dias, a partner at Brazilian law firm Nankran e Mourão Sociedade de Advogados, describing [Bhumesh Verma](#), who recently set up [Corp Comm Legal](#) in New Delhi. Similarly Pramod Nair, the head of dispute resolution specialist firm Arista Chambers in Bengaluru, is praised for being “diligent, detail oriented and client friendly” by Dinesh Vijayakumar, counsel at IBM India.

An ability to provide “strategic input”, an in-depth knowledge of “the lay of the land” and “fantastic connections” with senior advocates are what Himavat Chaudhuri, chief legal and regulatory affairs officer at Tata Sky was particularly impressed with while nominating Mahesh Agarwal, a partner at [Agarwal Law Associates](#) in New Delhi.

“Commitment to her clients” is what sets Ruby Singh Ahuja, a partner at litigation firm [Karanjawala & Co](#), apart according to Shukla Wassan, executive director of legal and corporate affairs for South Asia at Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages. Wassan singles her out for the fact that she “takes ownership of [her] client’s case as her personal case and delivers to her client’s expectation”.

Reading between the lines of these comments and the many others sent with nominations for India Business Law Journal’s A-List of the top 100 lawyers in India suggests that to be recognized as one of India’s top lawyers requires a lot more than legal experience and expertise. (see page 50 for the list of all 100 lawyers and the key practice areas for which they are endorsed).

Clusters of excellence

The overwhelming majority of A-List lawyers practice in Mumbai and Delhi. This will come as no surprise as the regulators and all-important arms of ministries that oversee investment are located in these two cities. Among these lawyers are the heads of India's top law firms, both full-service firms and those that provide services in niche areas.



Shukla Wassan

Executive Director, Legal and Corporate Affairs, South Asia
Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages

[Ruby Singh Ahuja] takes ownership of [her] client's case as her personal case and delivers to her client's expectation

Zia Mody, managing partner of one of India's most respected full-service law firm [AZB & Partners](#), is "the best lawyer to go to for really complex/material matters" according to Richard Gubbins, a partner at Ashurst in the UK who heads the firm's India practice. Adding to that, Shraddha Mor, head of legal at Mizuho Bank in India, says Mody is a "fantastic lawyer" and that it is "very comforting to have her on your side".

Rohit Kochhar, managing partner of [Kochhar & Co](#), is described as the "best lawyer in India" by Kenneth Cutshaw, president and CEO of Garden City Group, which administers class action settlements and provides other services in the US. Cutshaw singles him out for being "intelligent, responsive, and service driven".

[Suhail Nathani](#), managing partner of [Economic Laws Practice](#), receives praise from Marten Hepkema, chief counsel, Middle East, Africa and Asia, at APM Terminals, who compliments him for being "always available for his clients" and for providing "pragmatic advice".

Yusuf Khwaja Hamied, chairman of Cipla, is all praise for Abhijit Joshi, managing partner of [Veritas Legal](#), whom he describes as his "adviser, mentor and confidant" for the past 10 years. "During this period he has assisted me personally and my company in many ways that have benefited us," says Hamied.

Meanwhile, Suraj Singh, vice president and head of legal at Wells Fargo in India, describes Shuva Mandal, managing partner of Fox Mandal & Associates in Bengaluru, as the "complete lawyer".



Richard Gubbins

Partner, Ashurst

[Zia Mody is] the best lawyer to go for really complex/material matters

Legal and regulatory sherpas

International clients in particular value lawyers who have a particular skill for instilling confidence and for hand holding.

Gavin Charlston, trademark counsel at Google in the US, singles out [Shwetasree Majumder](#), founding partner of Fidus Law Chambers, whom he describes as “a fantastic business counselor and litigator”. According to Charlston, she is “the go-to for many of the world’s top companies when they face challenging trademark issues in India”. Jonas Koelle, general counsel for trademarks at Merck in Germany, echoes these sentiments when he says she “convinces with analytical skills and sound advice on complex IP issues. Her creativity deeply impresses our global team ... It is no surprise that many international players trust her with their valuable IP”.

Gaurav Patel, group counsel at BlueScope Steel, is similarly all praise for [Gopika Pant](#), who heads Indian Law Partners with which international law firm Ashurst has a non-exclusive best-friend referral arrangement. Describing her as “a trusted adviser” who “provides BlueScope with good, practical advice” he adds: “As a foreign company, it is sometimes a challenge to navigate the laws and regulations in India, and Gopika has proved invaluable in assisting us in this.”

Similarly, Andrea Fassina, senior counsel at Assicurazioni Generali in Italy, describes A-List lawyer Kunal Thakore, a partner at Talwar Thakore & Associates, as being “always proactive in finding the best solutions to complex issues” in what she describes as “a challenging environment”.



Gaurav Patel

Group Counsel, BlueScope Steel

[Gopika Pant] provides BlueScope with good, practical advice



Akil Hirani, managing partner of Majmudar & Associates, similarly receives praise from a lawyer at an international law firm for having “the kind of attention to detail and service ethic that is needed with international clients”.

Accolades aplenty

Given the complexity and thickets of regulation that confront investors in India, it is no surprise that clients seek out lawyers who have an instinctive understanding of what works and what does not. Just as important and valued are the lawyers who know their way around the corridors of power and who have their ears to the ground, so that their clients need never be surprised by any changes in the rules of the game.

A-List lawyer [Srinath Sridevan](#), a partner at Chennai law firm [HSB Partners](#), is described as being an “excellent lawyer” and more importantly as one “who can minimize risk while considering business issues” by Bharat Krishna, general manager and vice president at Kaplan in the US.

Rajat Sethi and Sandip Bhagat founders of S&R Associates both receive high praise. While Sethi is commended for “providing advice in a timely manner ... for putting all available resources to complete critical projects” and for his “ethical values”, Jeffrey Maddox, a Singapore-based partner at Jones Day, describes Bhagat as the “the best capital markets lawyer in India”.

Mohit Saraf, senior partner at [Luthra & Luthra](#), is meanwhile lauded for his “ability to see the big picture” by Rajeev Mukundan, chief compliance officer at Mylan Laboratories for India, emerging markets and the rest of the world.

Technology lawyer Sajai Singh, a Bengaluru-based partner at [J Sagar Associates](#), is lauded for being “an excellent lawyer and networker” by Ulrich Bäumer, a partner at Osborne Clarke in Germany.

Johann Werro, head of law and tax at Würth International in Switzerland, commends Rukshad Davar, a partner at [Majmudar & Partners](#) in Mumbai, for his “good technical skills”.

[Karan Chandhiok](#), who heads competition law specialist Chandhiok & Associates receives praise from Toshiaki Okabe, a general manager at Panasonic in Japan, for his “high level of comprehension towards business situations”.



Arun Madhu

General Counsel

Nexus Venture Partners

[Harish Narasappa] focuses only on big ticket items and is geared towards getting the deal done



Similarly, A-List lawyer Stephen Matthias, a Bengaluru-based partner at Kochhar & Co, is described as “one of the most seasoned lawyers in corporate advisory and TMT practice” by Sandeep Peters, an APAC business development coordinator at Mackrell International.

Building valuable teams

Even as we celebrate individual lawyers, comments received suggest that clients value the teams that support these lawyers and ultimately propel them to greater heights.

As such, Lydia Gavalis, general counsel at Hamilton Lane, a Nasdaq listed alternative investment manager praises [Nishith Desai, managing partner of Nishith Desai Associates](#), for the fact that each of the partners within his firm are subject matter experts who offer practical advice.

Similarly, Praveen Gupta, managing director and CEO of Raheja QBE General Insurance, praises Neeraj Tuli, who heads insurance specialist firm Tuli & Associates, for “outstanding delivery, quality and dependability”.



Juliana Ingstrup
General Counsel, Titan Containers

**[Bomi Daruwala is] an
excellent attorney**



Rajeevan Nair, senior vice president, legal, at Welspun Energy, commends L Viswanathan, a partner at **Cyril Amarchand Mangaldas** who chairs the firm's finance and projects practice. Nair commends him for his role in one of the largest M&A deal in recent times: the US\$1.4 billion acquisition of the renewable energy business of Welspun Enterprise by Tata Power.

Describing Harish Narasappa, a founding partner of Samvad Partners, as an “experienced and commercially savvy lawyer”, Arun Madhu, general counsel of Nexus Venture Partners a VC fund, says he “focuses only on big-ticket items and is geared towards getting the deal done”.

Juliana Ingstrup, general counsel at Titan Containers in Denmark, describes Bomi Daruwala, a partner at Vaish Associates, as “an excellent attorney”.

Satisfied clients and the ability to go that extra mile are what make many of these lawyers one of India's top 100.