

India's top 100 lawyers and 50 Legal Icons 2021

By [Infrabuddy](#) on January 15, 2022

India's top lawyers and legal icons

[ACCESS THE A-LIST 2021](#)

What a year it's been for India's legal profession. Following the pandemic-induced paralysis of 2020, business and finance roared back to life in 2021. M&A deals were back on the table, private equity blossomed and the capital markets came back with a vengeance. Dispute resolution returned to near-normal levels, with a hybrid of physical hearings and e-courts – and some clever efficiency gains learned during the earlier stages of the pandemic.

Disruptive technology was the icing on the cake, with clients clamouring for advice on less-charted areas of law including artificial intelligence (AI), blockchain, non-fungible tokens (NFTs), drones, gaming and even business opportunities in the metaverse.

Many lawyers reported being busier than ever, but life had not returned to normal. With India and the world still in the brutal

throws of the pandemic, much of the pioneering legal work in the past year took place not in law firm offices, but in people's homes, undertaken by lawyers working in isolation from their colleagues.

If all of this is not enough to disrupt a legal market, one could argue that nothing is. So, as the dust begins to settle on a tumultuous year, it's only natural to wonder which lawyers find themselves ahead of the field.

To find out, *India Business Law Journal* turned to in-house counsel in India and around the world, as well as India-focused partners at leading international law firms. We asked them to tell us who should appear on our annual A-List of India's top lawyers, and why. We also asked them which lawyers deserve to be recognised as Legal Icons. A detailed description of the methodology can be found [here](#).

India's finest

As always, 100 lawyers feature on our A-List this year. A further 71 are honoured as Legal Icons. The analysis that follows provides highlights and includes some of the many endorsements we received during the nominations process. Unfortunately, space did not afford us the luxury of covering every A-List lawyer, or printing every endorsement, but the full list of A-List Lawyers and Legal Icons can be found [here](#).

So, what does it take to be an A-Lister in 2021? To put it simply, "quality service", says Bill Carr, a partner at CMS Cameron McKenna Nabarro Olswang, explaining why he nominated Bharat Anand, a partner at Khaitan & Co. "Outstanding lawyer," says Dhruv Chhatralia, a UK-based legal director

at Bird & Bird, speaking of Vikram Shroff, a partner at Nishith Desai Associates.

Beyond the call of duty

India has no shortage of competent legal advisers, but what sets A-List lawyers apart is their ability to go far beyond the provision of basic legal advice. “India Law Offices and Gautam Khurana have been more than just legal support for us,” says Abhijit Bhandari, president – global markets at ComPsych, a provider of employee assistance programmes. “I would credit our stupendous growth in India to the India Law Offices team. They have guided us through all strategic and financial processes.” Bhandari is one of many who nominated Khurana, the law firm’s managing partner, for inclusion on the A-List.



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Abhijit Bhandari
President – Global Markets
ComPsych



Patrick Emery, vice president for Asia and Ethiopia at SightLife, an NGO focused on eradicating corneal blindness, has similar sentiments about Aparajit Bhattacharya, a partner at DSK Legal. “Mr Bhattacharya has proven to be an incredible leader, providing invaluable guidance to organisations across a diverse list of industries, constantly going above and beyond to support clients when it is needed most,” says Emery.

Another A-Lister who wins praise for going the extra mile is Manan Lahoty, a partner at IndusLaw. Subodh Mallya, vice president at Motilal Oswal Investment Advisors,

describes him as an “excellent troubleshooter who goes beyond the call of duty to ensure that a solution is arrived at”.

Meanwhile, Clasis Law managing partner Vineet Aneja is recommended by Michael Reilly, vice president and human resources director at Wyndham Hotels & Resorts. “Vineet is always extremely responsive and provides pragmatic, thorough advice in a manner that non-legal persons can easily understand,” says Reilly. “He feels like an extension of our in-house legal team.”

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Michael Reilly
Vice President & Human Resources Director
Wyndham Hotels & Resorts



Knowledge is power

Many of those who made nominations for the A-List cited knowledge as an attribute that separates A-List lawyers from the rank-and-file of the legal profession. Saikrishna & Associates partner Ameet Datta is singled out by Nipun Gupta, a consultant at international law firm Bird & Bird, for his “deep knowledge of media and data privacy”, while Rukshad Davar, a partner at Majmudar & Partners, is appreciated for his “very thorough and deep understanding of corporate law” by Eugene Serban, senior counsel at iconectiv.

Sonali Mahapatra, a partner at Talwar Thakore & Associates, is recognised for her “excellent understanding of the Indian regulatory regime” by Shibani Rao, a director and associate general counsel at Deutsche Bank, while Vineet Vij, global

general counsel at Tech Mahindra, praises two of his nominees – Ajay Bhargava, a partner at Khaitan & Co, and Safir Anand a partner at Anand and Anand – for their “excellence in legal knowledge and management of client expectations”.

Vinayak Burman, the managing partner of Vertices Partners, is another A-List lawyer who is commended for his superior knowledge. Hitesh Sachdev, head of startup engagement, innovation and investments at ICICI Bank, describes him as “very responsive, knowledgeable and solution-oriented”, adding that he has a “disciplined approach to finishing assignments within defined timelines”, is “sensitive to client needs” and has a “very good team”.

Vijay Sambamurthi, the founder and managing partner at Lexygen, is commended by Rashmi Shivashankar, vice president at Sequoia Capital, for his “very sound knowledge” and for being “an excellent deal maker”.

Masters of complexity

Of course, knowledge is only as useful as the beholder’s ability to use it. A common trait among A-List lawyers is a talent for applying specialist legal knowledge to complex situations and achieving the desired outcomes.

Abhishek Malhotra, the managing partner of TMT Law Practice, is one lawyer who has done just this. He is praised by John McWaters, the finance controller at ITC Satellite Solutions, for his “exceptional diligence and legal support with aligning ITC Global’s Indian entity with the ITC Global group”. McWaters notes that “there were multiple corporate and government roadblocks to overcome during this time”.

Amit Aggarwal, partner and head of the corporate practice at SNG & Partners, is another lawyer who has impressed in this area. “Amit is very professional and has the ability to work our bespoke structures and solutions,” says happy client Arindam Sengupta, a senior vice president at Taipei Fubon Commercial Bank.

Poornima Hatti, a partner at Samvad Partners, “has done a fantastic job advising on various matters over the years in multiple industries and a variety of issues,” according to Deena Jacob, CFO of Open Financial Technologies.

Meanwhile, Gopika Pant, a partner at Indian Law Partners, wins praise from Anshul Jain, general manager and director at Merlin Entertainments, for “brilliantly working on real estate and restructuring matters for Merlin India”.

Sethuram Srivardhan, director at Green Light Foods, commends Shwetasree Majumder, founding partner at IP boutique Fidus Law Chambers. “She has represented us very well and been a great resource,” says Srivardhan.

The successful resolution of complex legal matters often requires a combination of attributes. A-List Lawyer Ruby Ahuja, a senior partner at Karanjawala & Co, is described as being “versatile with her profile” and “known for her legal acumen and in-depth knowledge”. These are the observations of Jatin Julundhwala, joint president, legal, at Adani Enterprises, who adds that Ahuja is “well connected with counsel and delivers for the client”.

Courtroom might

In times of conflict, good legal representation is more important than ever. Arish Bharucha, partner and chair of the India practice at UK-based law firm Howard Kennedy, has praise for several Indian lawyers in this area. Among them are Vivek Vashi, the founder of Vashi and Vashi, who he describes as “a very good lawyer with a varied practice and top-quality cases”, and ALMT Legal senior partner Sameer Tapia, who he describes as “a strong disputes lawyer acting on cutting edge cases”.

For IP disputes, Vaishali Mittal, a partner at Anand and Anand, wins praise from Marcus Heifetz, senior litigation counsel at AstraZeneca. “Ms Mittal is the strongest IP counsel in giving business-centred advice to clients,” he says. “She is a friend and ally at every stage of patent litigation proceedings.”

Trusting relationships

Of all the traits one may look for in a lawyer, trust may be top of the list.

Srinivas Upadhyayula, the head of legal, compliance and secretarial at NIIF Infrastructure Finance, clearly has a lot of trust in Anjan Dasgupta, a partner at DSK Legal. “He is the best performer for the results in a given timeframe,” he says.

Similarly, Phoenix Legal partner Abhishek Saxena, has seemingly won the trust of Shashi Baliyan, managing director of ClearMedi Healthcare in the UK. “We are extremely happy with the professional work done by Abhishek and his team for all of our legal work in drafting contracts,” says Baliyan.

Ryo Kotoura, a partner at Anderson Mori & Tomotsune in Tokyo, commends Trilegal senior partner Nisha Uberoi as an “excellent competition lawyer”, while Rajiv Choubey, chief legal officer at ACC, says Ashwath Rau, a partner at AZB & Partners, is “one of the best M&A lawyers in India”. Choubey also has high praise for Amit Kapur, the joint managing partner of JSA, whom he describes as “one of the top and most sought-after energy lawyers in India, and who has the entire [list of] power companies as his clients”.

Senvion Wind Technology general counsel Pathik Arora recommends Naina Krishna Murthy, founder and managing partner at Krishnamurthy & Co. “Naina brings her vast experience to get the best out of her clients, with a focused approach towards the successful closure of the transaction.”

The Icons

If A-List Lawyers are at the forefront of crafting cutting-edge legal solutions, Legal Icons are the luminaries who mentor the profession and lead the country’s most admired legal teams.

Rajiv Luthra, the founder and managing partner of L&L Partners, is described by Sanjeev Sachdeva, the head of legal at Emaar India, as “an icon in the legal fraternity”, while Khaitan & Co managing partner Haigreve Khaitan is described by Praveen Thomas, executive director and senior counsel at SSG Advisors, as the “most admired [lawyer] across generations of legal practitioners in India”.

Sanjay Tandon, CEO of the Indian Singers’ Rights Association, sings the praises of

Pravin Anand, the managing partner of Anand and Anand, applauding him for his “immense contribution to intellectual property”.

Pankaj Bhargava, vice president and senior counsel at American Express, has commendations for Rajesh Narain Gupta, the managing partner of SNG & Partners. “Rajesh has led the firm successfully for over three decades,” he says. “He is a respected and trusted professional for a large number of corporate houses, banks and financial institutions, domestic as well as international”.

Pallavi Shroff, managing partner at Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas & Co, is described by Gupta at Bird & Bird as “cutting-edge and seasoned,” while Devottam Sengupta, a partner at Hill Dickinson, has this to say about Pallavi Shroff’s husband, the firm’s executive chairman, Shardul Shroff: “Mr Shroff has changed the face of Indian law firms several times during his stewardship of the firm. A great manager and a respected lawyer, he earns the respect of anyone who has worked with him, whether as a client or as an associate.”

Mukesh Butani, managing partner at BMR Legal, win’s his place on the list, in the words of Simmons & Simmons partner Nick Skerrett, for his “authoritative knowledge on all taxation matters”. Butani is also described as “collaborative and extremely professional”.

**‘Is everywhere ...
knows everybody’**

According to Ernst-Markus Schuberth, a partner at CMS, Cyril Shroff, the managing

partner of Cyril Amarchand Mangaldas, “is everywhere” and “knows everybody”, while Anand Desai, managing partner of DSK Legal, is described simply as “efficient and meaningful” by Nasser Kabir, the group general counsel at TV Today.

Chhatralia, at Bird & Bird, endorses HSA Advocates founding partner Hemant Sahai as a “world-class lawyer,” while Rabindra Jhunjhunwala at Khaitan & Co is applauded by Bharucha at Howard Kennedy as a “tremendous rainmaker and trusted adviser to many corporate houses”.

Manoj Kumar, the managing partner of Hammurabi & Solomon Partners, is singled out by Ankur Jolly, the head of legal and external affairs for Southeast Asia and India at Bacardi, as an “excellent leader with an ability to lead the firm to the right path and curate the results in accordance with the complexity of the matter”.

A “legend in tax law” is how Harish Ramu, the deputy general manager for indirect taxation at Bosch, describes V Lakshmikumaran, the managing partner of Lakshmikumaran & Sridharan, adding that Lakshmikumaran has made a “great contribution to the tax jurisprudence for three to four decades”.



No explanation should be needed for nominating Zia Mody [managing partner of AZB & Partners] as a Legal Icon

Devottam Sengupta
Partner
Hill Dickinson

“No explanation should be needed for nominating Zia Mody [managing partner of AZB & Partners] as a Legal Icon,” says Sengupta, at Hill Dickinson. “Her track record of concluding groundbreaking deals,

building up one of India's best law firms and mentoring several legal luminaries speaks for itself.”

And with that, we rest our case.

ACCESS THE A-LIST 2021

A-List methodology

To determine India's top lawyers, *India Business Law Journal* turned to thousands of in-house counsel in India and around the world – as well as India-focused partners at international law firms – and asked them to tell us which lawyers should make the cut.

A nomination form was posted on our website and promoted by email and social media in October 2021. Respondents were invited to nominate lawyers to appear on the A-List, and provide a justification as to why each one should be included. They were also invited to nominate lawyers to be recognised as India's Legal Icons.

A-List Lawyers and Legal Icons

A-List Lawyers were defined on the nomination form as: Lawyers who are currently the star performers of India's legal profession; the lawyers who are personally undertaking the country's top legal work, crafting the most cutting-edge legal solutions to complex problems, and setting the highest standards in terms of quality, innovation and the ability to handle complex matters.

Legal Icons were defined as: Lawyers who are the luminaries of India's legal profession; the titans who command the

respect of clients and juniors alike; the mentors who lead India's most admired law firms and/or legal teams, and the country's most prolific rainmakers.

Extensive consultation

More than 2,000 nominations and supporting remarks were received from professionals at a wide range of Indian and international organisations, including: ABN, Accela Fiduciary, Accenture, Acciona Energy, Adani Enterprise, Adarsh Group of Hotels, Aditya Birla Sun Life Insurance, Agriculture Insurance Company of India, Airports Economic Regulatory Authority, AkzoNobel, Alen lifesciences, Alpha Capital, Amazon, American Express, Anderson Mori & Tomotsune, Ansal Housing & Construction, Ashok Leyland, Ashurst, AstraZeneca, Aurobindo Pharma, Bajaj Electricals, Baker McKenzie, Barclays, BharatPe, Bird & Bird, Birla Sunlife Insurance, Bosch, Boston Scientific, Brambles, Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner, Burford Capital, Cadila Healthcare, Canon, Carpediem Capital, Castrol, CCPIT Patent and Trademark Law Office, Clyde & Co, CMS, Corning, Credit Suisse, Cummins, DBS Bank, Deloitte, Deutsche Bank, Dexter Capital Advisors, Dorsey & Whitney, Edelweiss Tokio Life Insurance Company, Ernst & Young, Everstone Capital Advisors, Fertilizer Corporation of India, Flipkart, Foley & Lardner, Ford, Freshfields, G4S, Gail, GoDaddy, Google, Government of India, Havells, HDFC Bank, Hengeler Mueller, Hexaware Technologies, Hitachi, Hogan Lovells, Honda, Housing and Urban Development Corporation, Hyundai, ICICI Bank, IDP Education, Indiabulls, Indus Towers, Infosys, InterGlobe, Jackson, Etti & Edu, JP Morgan Chase, Julius Baer, Karvy Capital, Kennedys, Knight Frank, KPMG, LG Electronics, Linklaters, Lodha Group, Mahindra Logistics, Malindo Air, Matrix Partners, McDonald's, Mercedes-Benz, Merlin Entertainments, Michelin Tyres,

Microsoft, Mitsubishi, Mondelez, Morgan Stanley, Mori Hamada & Matsumoto, Nestle, NIIF Infrastructure Finance, Nippon Paint, Nishimura & Asahi, Nissan, Novistra Capital, Oracle, Panasonic, Pearson, Pernod Ricard, Philips, Pillsbury Withrop Shaw Pittman, Piramal Capital & Housing Finance, PwC, Rajah & Tann, Reebok, Reliance Industries, ReNew Power, Saama Capital, Sahara, Samsung, Scania, Schenker, Sequoia Capital, Shree Ram Enterprises, Sidley Austin, Simmons & Simmons, Sony Pictures Networks, Squire Patton Boggs, Standard Chartered Bank, Star India, Stephenson Harwood, Sterlite Power Transmission, Taipei Fubon Commercial Bank, Tata Capital, Tech Mahindra, The Atlantic, The Times Group, Toshiba, TVS Automobile, UK India Business Council, UTI Capital, Veeba Food Services, Viacom 18, Walmart, Wockhardt, Xiaomi, Zee Media, and hundreds more Indian and international companies, financial institutions and foreign law firms.

Eligibility criteria

All Indian private practice lawyers who are currently associated with Indian law firms were automatically eligible for consideration for the A-List and, as always, there were no fees or any other requirements for entry.

Lawyers working at Indian law firms were not permitted to make nominations and, of course, lawyers were not allowed to nominate themselves. India-focused lawyers in other countries were permitted to participate in the nominations process.

The final list reflects the nominations and supporting remarks, combined with thorough background research and *India Business Law Journal* editorial team's more than 50 years' collective experience in documenting and analysing India's legal market.

100 lawyers feature in the A-List. A further 71 are recognised as Legal Icons. The list only contains lawyers who are currently working at Indian law firms, and does not include independent advocates or senior counsel.

The A-List is intended to provide a snapshot of current market sentiment concerning lawyers' performance in the past 12 months. There are many outstanding lawyers who do not appear on the list, and their absence should not be seen as a denigration of their skills or expertise.

[ACCESS THE A-LIST 2021](#)

[Source link](#)