

# CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC

**60TH ANNIVERSARY** India's senior citizens have taken the changes overtaking their lives in their stride, but they feel the new India can do more to make them feel secure

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They're immensely proud of India and the country's achievements. They've come to terms with much of the technology that has taken over their lives.

They also take immense pride in the dynamism of today's youth.

But deep down somewhere, they feel a void — stemming from physical insecurity, emotional insecurity and financial insecurity.

The *Hindustan Times*-CNN IBN poll of 1,224 senior citizens across four metros (Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Kolkata), large towns (Patna and Bhopal) and small towns (Surat and Vijaywada) on the occasion of the Indian republic's 60th anniversary threw up these and many other interesting findings (see graphics for details). GfK Mode was our knowledge partner for this exercise.

An overwhelming 68 per cent, or more than two-thirds, of India's 81 million senior citizens (defined as those

who are 60 years old or more) feel the country should rely on younger people to run the country.

They are also immensely proud of the strides made by the country in the last two decades. Four out of five senior citizens (82 per cent) feel India is already a superpower. This feeling is most pronounced in the metros and large towns. Small town India is a little more sceptical. This is probably a function of the fact that the benefits of economic reforms are most visible in the former two.

In fact, 89 per cent, or nine out of 10 senior citizens would like to remain in India than in any other part of the world.

The wisdom of years comes through in the survey findings. Senior citizens rate developmental issues that impact their lives directly higher than other national achievements.

About half the senior citizens are most proud of the infrastructure that the country has developed over the last 60 years (26 per cent votes), the uplift in the quality of life (15 per cent) and increased job opportunities for the young (9 per cent).

**DESPITE HAVING PRIDE IN INDIA'S DEVELOPMENT, SENIOR CITIZENS FEEL LEFT OUT. THEY FEEL NO ONE THINKS OF THEM WHEN THEY TALK OF THE COUNTRY'S DEVELOPMENT. ABOUT 47% OF THEM FEEL THEY ARE MISFITS IN CHANGING INDIA.**

However, despite this pride in the new India, senior citizens also feel a little left out. Seventy one per cent feel that no one thinks of them when they talk of the country's development. Although a small majority (52 per cent) does not feel they are misfits in the changing India, a very large minority (47 per cent) feels they are.

So, even though they enjoy a better quality of life than they did earlier (66 per cent feel they do), they do feel an emotional void.

Ironically, despite this, the survey debunks the commonly held percep-



Harish Chander Kharbanda, 70, at the Ashiana Utsav retirement resort in Bhiwadi.

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tion that the nuclearisation of families is breaking down traditional family ties. Eighty three per cent of respondents said their children take the same or greater care of them compared to how children of earlier generations treated their parents.

The older generation is also surprisingly tech-savvy, albeit only with things like cell phones and ATMs. Sixty per cent are comfortable with technology. Senior citizens in South India are the most tech-savvy (79 per cent) while those in the west are the least (40 per cent).

But a majority is still uncomfortable

with the internet and escalators.

It has become fashionable to say that emerging India is a meritocracy as 40 per cent of its population is young (under 35). But senior citizens also respect merit, albeit by a small margin — 54 per cent of those polled chose ability over experience as a trait they would like to see India's leaders possess.

Former president A.P.J. Abdul Kalam may have demitted office three years ago, but he remains an icon for India's elderly across metros, large and small towns by a wide margin. He polled 40 per cent of all votes.

Rahul Gandhi, with 13 per cent of

votes, was a distant second. Former cop Kiran Bedi edged out Tata Group Chairman Tata and came third with 9 per cent of the votes, one percentage point clear of Tata. Cricketing icons Sachin Tendulkar and Sourav Ganguly came next in the icon sweepstakes.

The survey shows that though senior citizens are coming to terms with the changing world around them, the negation of yesterday's certitudes are making them insecure and nervous.

Maybe it is time for India's youth to take some time out from their pursuit of global excellence and spend it with their parents and other elders.