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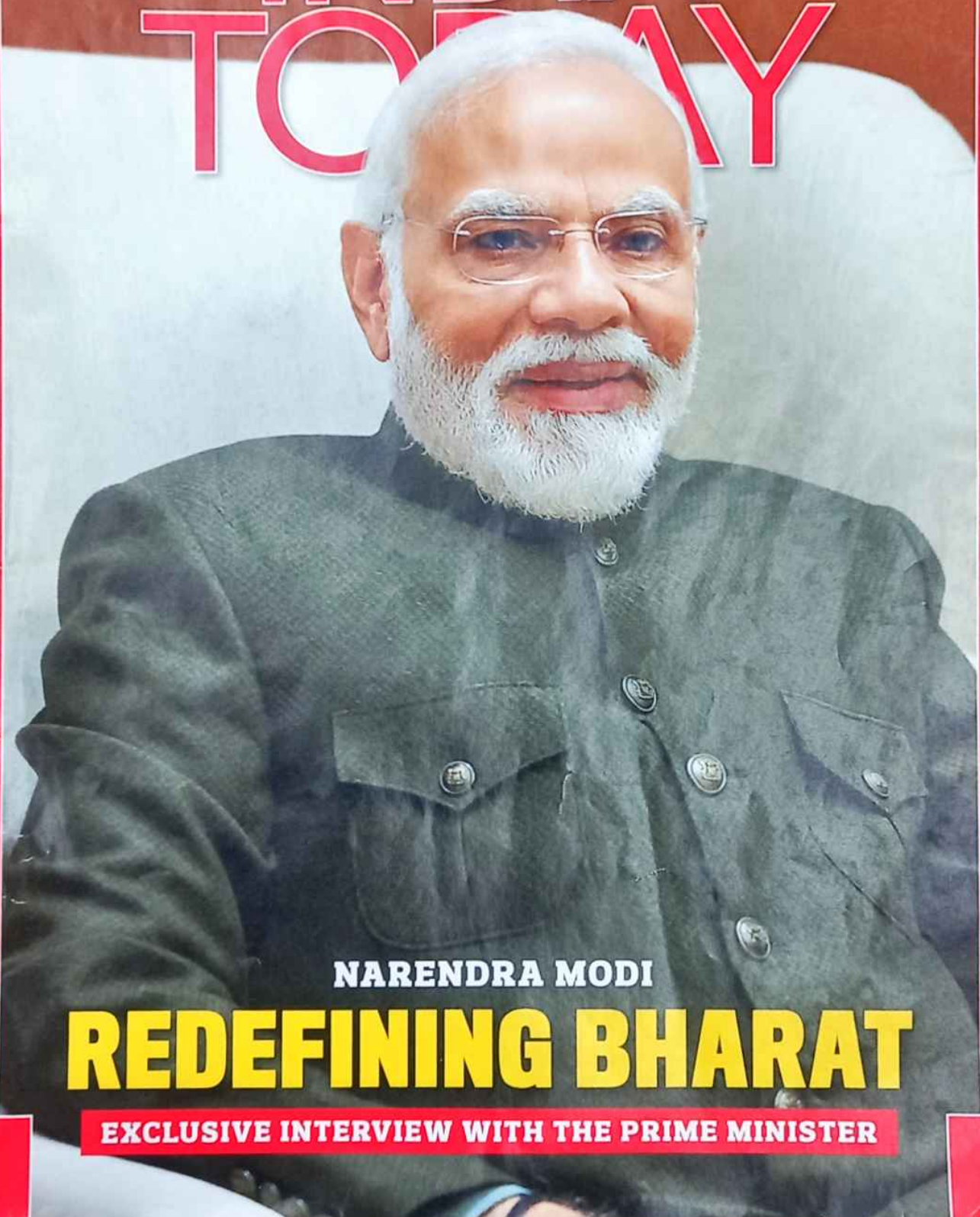
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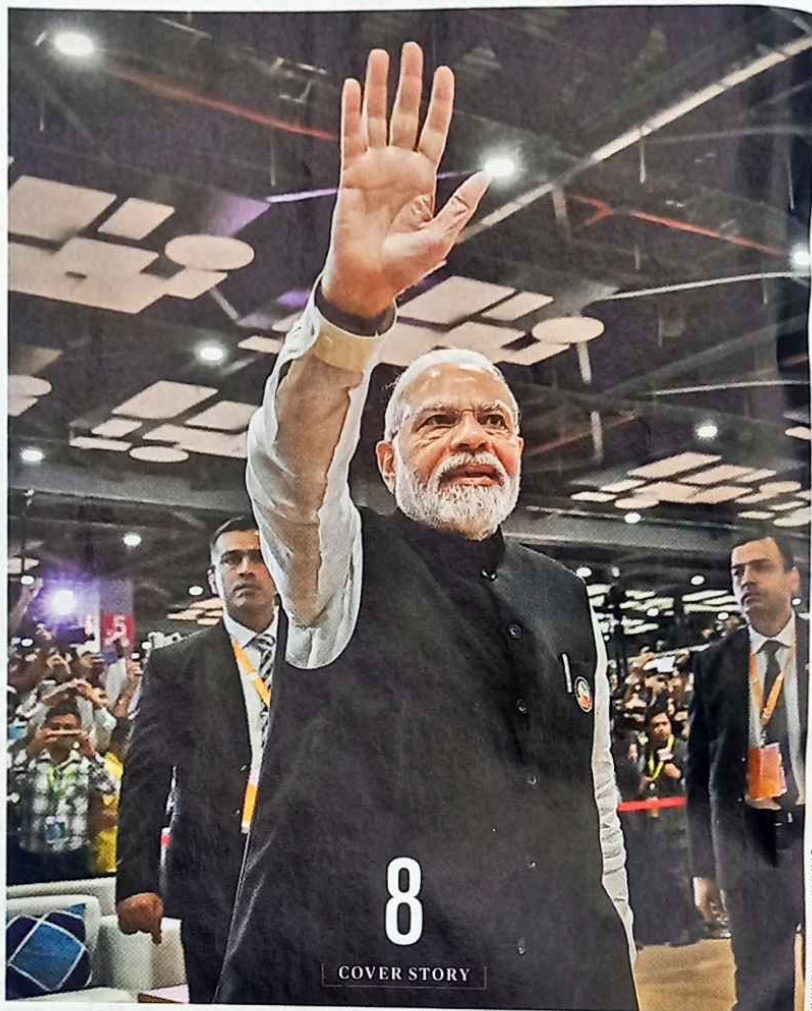
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ON THE FAST TRACK, FINALLY**

**VEHICLE SCRAP POLICY  
HITTING A ROADBLOCK**

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smartphones



**↑18%**  
Premium  
cars



**↑18%**  
Bikes above  
150 cc



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RIISING INCOMES ARE  
PUSHING MIDDLE-CLASS  
INDIANS TO CHOOSE  
FANCIER, PRICIER  
PRODUCTS ACROSS  
SECTORS TO REALISE  
THEIR ASPIRATIONS FOR  
A BETTER LIFESTYLE

**↑45%** High-capacity  
washing machines



**↑22%**  
Deluxe  
residences  
(Rs 1 crore+)



**↑35%**  
Frost-free  
refrigerators



↑ All figures are growth in sales



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COVER STORY

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Rising incomes are pushing middle-class Indians to choose fancier, pricier products in their quest for a better lifestyle

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WEST BENGAL

## WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE...

By Arkamoy Datta Majumdar

**W**hen Congress leader Rahul Gandhi asked his colleagues from the West Bengal unit their opinion on joining hands with the Trinamool Congress (TMC) for the upcoming Lok Sabha election, all key leaders unanimously voted against it. That wasn't hard to predict: the TMC may now be an ally of the Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) nationally, but locally it remains a predatory foe. So, at a closed-door

pow-wow in Delhi on December 20, Bengal Congress leaders made it clear to Rahul they had no problems teaming up with the Left—as they had done in the 2016 and 2021 assembly polls—but the TMC was a different kettle of fish. And very thorny. This veto came just a day after TMC chief Mamata Banerjee had suggested, at a Delhi meet of the new Opposition bloc, that Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge be made its prime ministerial face. The state leaders told Rahul that an alliance with the TMC

would alienate their core voters—who have allegedly suffered political persecution by the ruling party—and that would only add to BJP votes. They also accused Mamata of trying to destabilise the Congress and, by extension, INDIA, by projecting Kharge, not Rahul, as PM.

It's rumoured that leaders like Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, Aam Aadmi Party chief Arvind Kejriwal and Uddhav Thackeray of the Shiv Sena (UBT) are siding with Mamata—acting as a group within a



THE GOOD NEWS ISSUE

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TWENTY EXEMPLARS WHO ARE SPREADING CHEER WITH  
A CASCADING IMPACT ON THE LIVES OF OTHERS

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Young footballers in  
Bicharpur village, MP,  
which has produced  
many national players

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 MUSIC: ANOUSHKA AT  
 LOLLAPALOOZA PG 59

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 NEHA DHUPIA

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THE HAPPINESS ISSUE

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Startup zone in Chanpatia, West Champaran, Bihar

RANJAN RAHI



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By Pradip R. Sagar  
President Mohamed Muizzu's aggressive posturing imperils decades of India-Maldives defence cooperation and gives expansionist China more opportunity to make inroads into the island nation  
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By Dhaval S. Kulkarni  
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### SPECIAL REPORT: JAGANNATH TEMPLE HERITAGE CORRIDOR

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By Arkamoy Datta Majumdar  
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By Jumana Shah  
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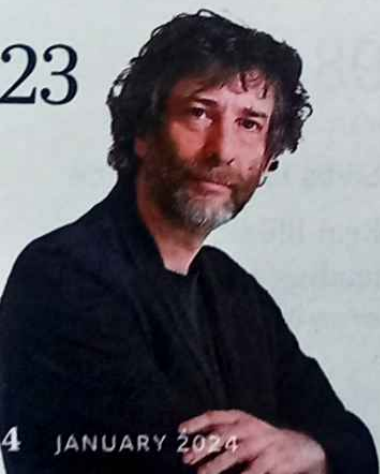
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