AILF INSIGHTS · INDIA AND THE WORLD

Indian law firms going global: why a Global Desk matters

Indian businesses are expanding abroad and foreign investors are entering India. How Indian law firms can serve cross-border work, and what a Global Desk offers.

Indian companies now buy businesses in Europe, raise money in Singapore, sell software in America and build infrastructure in Africa and West Asia. Foreign investors are entering India in every sector. Legal work follows both movements. The question is who does it.

Where Indian firms stand

A small number of large Indian firms have long handled cross-border transactions. Most firms, including many excellent ones in State capitals and industrial cities, have had little route into international work. Their clients, when they go abroad, are often referred elsewhere.

What is changing

- Trade and investment agreements are deepening India's links with major economies.
- The Bar Council's rules on foreign lawyers are built on reciprocity, which points to greater access for Indian lawyers abroad.
- Technology has made distance less important.
- Clients want one trusted adviser who can coordinate across countries.

What cross-border work needs

- Knowledge of how foreign legal systems and business customs differ.
- Reliable correspondent lawyers in key jurisdictions.
- Standards of conflict checking, confidentiality and reporting that foreign clients expect.
- Clear fee arrangements in foreign currency.
- Understanding of India's foreign exchange, tax and sectoral rules.

A single firm, particularly a small or mid-sized one, cannot easily build all of this alone.

The idea of a Global Desk

A Global Desk is shared infrastructure for Indian firms. It is intended to:

- introduce Indian firms to counterparts and business communities in major commercial centres;
- help firms understand the requirements of working with foreign clients;
- organise events abroad where Indian legal capability is presented;
- give firms of every size a credible route to cross-border mandates;
- present Indian legal services as part of the country's wider trade effort.

The Association of Indian Law Firms is taking its work abroad, with events planned in London, Japan, Singapore, Dubai and other cities, and a Global Desk to stand behind Indian firms that want to work across borders.

A word of care

International relationships must be built within professional rules. No affiliation with a foreign firm should be claimed until a formal agreement is signed. Reputation abroad depends on accuracy at home.

What firms can do now

- Identify clients with foreign plans and speak to them early.
- Build one or two real relationships abroad.
- Put the firm's own systems in order.
- Train associates in cross-border contracts and dispute resolution.

The larger goal

India has under 4 per cent of a global legal market of about ₹99 lakh crore. Indian lawyers are respected around the world as individuals. The next step is for Indian firms to be known in the same way.

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