AILF INSIGHTS · THE INDUSTRY

Why India's law firms need one voice

Doctors, accountants and software companies have industry bodies. Here is why India's law firms need one too, and what it should do.

Almost every large profession in India has a body that speaks for it as an industry. Software has one. Chartered accountants, company secretaries, builders and banks have theirs. Law firms, for most of their history, have not.

Advocates are regulated as individuals. The Advocates Act, 1961 enrols a person, not a firm. Bar associations are organised around courts. All of this is valuable, but none of it is designed to represent the law firm as an institution: an employer, a taxpayer, an exporter of services and a business that must invest years ahead.

What goes missing without a common voice

- **Policy.** When rules on foreign firms, advertising, taxation of professionals or data protection are drafted, firms respond one by one, if at all.
- **Data.** There is no agreed picture of how many firms exist, how many people they employ or what they contribute.
- **Standards.** Clients have no common yardstick for governance, training or conflicts procedures.
- **Talent.** Young lawyers have no sector-wide commitments on training, stipends or working conditions.

What an industry body should do

A serious association does four things. It convenes the profession, so that firms from different States and of different sizes meet as peers. It carries the profession's case into policy, with evidence. It sets voluntary standards that raise trust. And it builds platforms, events, research and international links, on which firms can grow.

Standing with the country's goals

This is not a trade union for lawyers. A strong legal sector is public infrastructure. Investors look at how contracts are enforced before they look at anything else. Faster and more predictable law brings more investment, more jobs and less friction for ordinary citizens. An industry body should therefore work with government and the judiciary, not against them, and should measure itself by what it adds to the country.

How the Association of Indian Law Firms approaches it

The Association of Indian Law Firms works as an industry body of India's law firms, with a network across 28 States. Its agenda is simple: organise the industry, improve standards, support young lawyers and help India earn a larger share of the world's legal work.

One voice does not mean one opinion. Firms will differ, and should. It means that when the profession is asked what it thinks, there is somewhere to send the question.

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