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Som Mandal

Expanding horizons

The International Legal Alliance has selected FoxMandal Little for its Gold award for Best Law Firm in India. ACQ talks to Som Mandal, managing partner, to find out more about the award and the firm's UK expansion.

The current market

Som believes that the current market turbulence hasn't had much of an effect on the firm's activity, due to India's rapid growth and its economic policies.

"There is maybe some slow-down, but I don't think it's going to affect much. We have plans for growth, which I don't expect to change, unless the slow down becomes more severe than expected. I don't think this is the case, it's likely to bounce back. Our firm's plan includes some more offices in India, as well as in other countries, and we are also planning to increase some of the areas of practice for the firm."

The award

Som says that the ILA award is different to the awards that many magazines and companies give.

"Aside from the deals that the firm's are doing, it also takes into consideration the firm's strategy and growth. That's slightly different from other awards. Apart from doing good deals, our firm has been much more entrepreneurial in many aspects, for example the opening up of an office in London. None of the big firms in India, Singapore or Japan had any branch offices in London. A firm cannot just be looked at by what deals they are doing, it should be looked at all over."

The London office

This year, FoxMandal Little became the first Indian commercial law firm to open an office in the UK. Som says that this expansion, coupled with FoxMandal's support for foreign law firms' entry into India, leads some to believe the firm is looking to tie-up with a UK firm.

"That's not true. The whole point of opening an office in London is to send a clear message that we are an independent law firm. If we were to tie-up with a UK firm, or any other firm, we wouldn't open an office, we would just tie up."

"As we support the entry of foreign law firms, and we strongly believe that in the future India will open up, it is important for us to approach and deal directly with the clients which foreign law firms are also exposed to. Real



Som Mandal

time advice is preferred by foreign clients and law firms there as well. Physical presence in London than contacting people in India is the need of the hour. Clients feel comfortable walking across and getting advice in real time, not waiting for a call back the next day due to time zone issues. For US clients too London is a better time zone to discuss over phone or even coming over." FoxMandal Little is already geared up to compete with Foreign Law firms and is one of the very few firms in India which supports the entry of Foreign Law firm. Over the years we have built up strong Infrastructure and good quality service for our clients and we follow what most foreign Law firms do. Our London office is certainly a step to gear us for entry of foreign Law firms in India and also to create an International Indian Law firm, when Indian companies are all going International why can't an Indian Law firm go International.

The firm's strategy

Som says that the focus in the last financial year was on real estate practice, due to the volume of investments.

"Obviously with the slow-down we see a slight shift in that. I think in the coming year there may be a lot of focus on M&A. As the market is slow, a lot of people are looking at M&A opportunities in India. I think that is a market that will grow rapidly."

"In India there is a lot of infrastructure work happening, particularly roadways work. I think within India the real estate market is also growing, though there may not be much fund investment. Power projects is another big area."

Som states that the key to the firm's success is its human resources.

"We have a brilliant team of partners and associates and I think a firm success lies on the co-operation between partners and associates. It's crucial for success that there's harmony and co-operation between all the team members and the staff, and I think that's what we have in our firm. We call it an FML family. Accessibility of people within the firm is important, and that's what we give. We take care of people because they are the strength of the firm: if they are happy then the firm grows." **ACQ**

DETAILS



Som Mandal
FoxMandal Little
som.mandal@foxmandallittle.com

FoxMandal Little
FM House
A-9, Sector-9
Noida 201 301
NCR of Delhi
India
T: +91 120 4305555/
3919555 (Extn No. 282)
M: +91 9810339959
F: +91 120 2542222
www.foxmandallittle.com

Fox Mandal Little
Indian Solicitors & Advocates
Windsor House, 5th Floor
39 Kings Street
London EC2V 8DQ
Main: +44 (0)20 7600 5556
Direct: +44 (0)20 7367 5252
M: +44 (0)79 3957 0111
F: +44 (0)20 7600 2880

Also offices at: Bangalore,
Bhubaneswar, Chandigarh,
Chennai, Dhaka,
Hyderabad, Kolkata,
Mumbai, Pune