

Nishith Desai: 'Distributed' model designed to absorb exits, Delhi remains 'vibrant' • Fills corp gap with Actis' Ratnadeep Roychowdhury

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Nishith Desai explains why firm

Nishith Desai Associates has hired Actis Capital India legal head Ratnadeep Roychowdhury to join and replenish its recently depleted senior headcounts in funds and corporate, following the [departure of Delhi leader Pratibha Jain and Mumbai M&A leader Simone Reis](#).

NDA managing partner had confirmed on Monday: "He joins NDA after leading the legal function for Actis in India for more than three years. Actis is a growth fund focusing on responsible investing with AUM of USD 10b. Prior to that he was a partner at AZB where he specialised in PE, M&A and disputes.

"We are excited to have Ratnadeep join us as leader in the PE/M&A practice. His specialised knowledge of the PE industry would be very helpful to us. His significant experience advising on marquee disputes will be an additional bonus to the team," he added.

Roychowdhury added in a statement: "I am excited to be joining Nishith Desai Associates, a research based IndiaCentric Global law firm with offices in Silicon Valley, NY, Munich/Amsterdam and Singapore besides India. I eagerly look forward to starting work with the "firm of the future" and being a part of this fantastic firm that drives itself with the purpose to change the world for the better-together."

Desai added: "We don't make usual recruitment plans. We typically try to create higher expertise among existing professionals. Thereafter, we fill in only strategic gaps. If any right candidate approaches us, we hire her or him (even though we may not need him at that time - we believe right person will always keep himself constructively occupied)."

Desai has often stated that the firm did not poach from other firms for talent. "We have a formal policy not to poach or head hunt people from other law firms. We have never done it in the last 30 years of the firm's foundation. We still believe we are in the professional of law and not in the business of law. People seek us out and join with passion to do highest quality complex work and change the world for the better- together."

Delhi office remains strong: Desai

Despite the departure of the Delhi offices' founder, Pratibha Jain, in-house to Everstone, Desai said that "our Delhi office, as always, is buzzing with vibrant activities".

"We have a number of leaders in Delhi who seamlessly work globally. They independently, yet collaboratively and without hierarchy work together," he added.

Desai listed some of the Delhi-based lawyers at the firm as:

Moazzam Khan with 15 years experience leads our global litigation practice, along with Alipak Banerjee who specialises in international disputes and investigation practice, Mohd Kamran who leads security enforcement and shareholder disputes practice, and Shweta Sahu, leader in cross border judgement enforcement practice.

Our funds and international tax practice in Delhi is led by Parul Jain, who is a globally renowned lawyer with background in Chartered Accountancy and CPA from the US and has 20 years of professional experience. Prashant Prakhar leads our Public Market Funds and Global Capital Markets Practice; Varsha Bhattacharya is leader in our international tax litigation and US-India tax issues specialist having done her masters from Harvard university.

Rahul Rishi, 15 years experienced well known lawyer with degree from Tata Institute of Social Sciences leads our social sector practice with special focus on impact investing industry and on blended finance, sustainability and CSR.

Desai: Distributed leadership model means 'no void when exits happen'

Desai said that NDA had a "distributed leadership model", which meant that formally, since 2017, the firm did not have any "formal titles or traditional hierarchy".

"It's only organic," he said. "People respect experience and expertise and remain accountable to each other."

A side-effect of this was also that departures of individual senior lawyers did not leave 'voids', due to management responsibilities for practice areas being shared.

"We have distributed leadership model. Leadership is about responsibility and accountability and is not a title. It's about competency and inspiration. It's not a command and control power center," he said. "Both practice and administrative responsibilities are distributed amongst different members and people are empowered and trusted. We have many micro and super specialities. Relevant leaders have responsibilities to develop them. If the practice is large, there are a number of leaders. We simply have 'coordination and strategy execution group' which acts as servant leader and helps leaders grow. With this distributed leadership, the burden doesn't come on one person. It gets distributed."

The ranks for these groups were constantly increased from the ranks, Desai said. "Every leader is encouraged to create at least two other leaders every year who can independently handle complex projects and inspire others. Each of these leaders have to develop at least two other leaders," he explained.

Leaders, according to Desai, are "trained both on technical legal skills in the context of specific industries and are also trained on management skills". "They have to learn project management, Human Resource management, change management, client development, process management and process re-engineering in a hands-on manner," he said. "And most important, humility and empathy. This allows members to often perform at a much higher level than people normally expect them

to.”

“This system is designed to ensure that in the event of exits, there is no void,” He concluded. “Also we don’t have water tight compartments for practices. Anyone can work in any practice and on any matter while not losing focus on their own area.”

Ratnadeep Roychowdhury

Work history

From: Aug 2017: legal counsel, **Industry** (Mumbai)

Oct 2017 - Aug 2020: Legal Counsel, **Industry** (Mumbai Area)

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Education

2002 - 2007: **West Bengal National University of Juridical Sciences**, B. A. / L.L.B, Law