

Dispute Resolution Hotline

March 26, 2010

ANOTHER WRIT PETITION FILED AGAINST FOREIGN LAW FIRMS AND LPO

Keeping in tune with the weather, the heat on practice of law by foreign advocates in India has just been turned up. Petitioner A.K. Balaji, a practicing advocate of Tamil Nadu ("**Petitioner**"), has filed a writ petition in High Court of Madras ("**High Court**") alleging non-action on part of various government bodies. The Petitioner has claimed that numerous foreign law firms are allegedly violating provisions of Indian Advocates Act, 1961 ("**Advocates Act**") by providing legal services in India.

Late last year, the Bombay High Court in its judgment in the case of Lawyers' Collective has held that the practice of law in India, as governed by Advocates Act, included both litigious and non-litigious practice. Our hotline in this matter was circulated to the international business community on December 24, 2009¹.

FACTS OF THE CASE

The Petitioner has filed a writ petition against Bar Council of India, Government of India, a business-process outsourcing firm and several well-known foreign law firms² ("**Respondents**") alleging violation of Advocates Act, Immigration laws and the Income Tax Act, 1961.

The Petitioner has claimed that the interpretation of the Advocates Act is to allow only an 'Advocate' registered under the Advocates Act to practice law anywhere in India. As such Advocates Act allows a foreign citizen to practice law in India only if the person possesses necessary educational qualification and the country of citizenship allows Indian citizens to practice law in their country on a reciprocal basis. In absence of a reciprocal arrangement, Indians are not allowed to practice law in most jurisdictions without taking further set of educational courses and other tests, such as QLTT in case of UK or the state bar examination in case of the US. No such requirement of taking a qualifying examination or program, apart from a qualifying legal education, is necessary for enrolling as an 'Advocate' under Advocates Act.

It is therefore prayed that in lack of a clear and fair reciprocal arrangement between India and a foreign country, no foreign law firm or advocate should be allowed to practice law in India.

The Petitioner has further claimed that the Respondents (lawyers) enter India in the guise of visitor's visas, however, with the intention to do indirect marketing and holding seminars. Petitioner has also alleged that foreign lawyers are earning in India by conducting arbitration proceedings in hotels, for which fees are directly paid into their foreign bank accounts.

The Petitioner has made various government bodies such as income tax department, ministries of finance and law, and other immigration offices responsible for not taking cognizance of the alleged violation of various laws by the Respondents. The Petitioner claims to have made a representation in the past to these agencies, and due to lack of responsiveness, has filed a writ petition with the High Court under Article 226 of the Constitution of India against the government and its agencies to take further action in this respect.

OUR VIEW

We believe that the Bombay High Court judgment in the case of Lawyers Collective has clearly set out the distinction of what tantamounts to practice of law and what doesn't. Our commentary in form of our hotline circulated on December 24, 2009 also sets out that sporadic visits by foreign lawyers to India would not tantamount to practice of law.

It remains to be seen how the High Court will look at this matter. It is early to comment at this stage, however, we will keep the international business community informed of all critical developments in this matter.

- **Kabeer Shrivastava & Vivek Kathpalia**

1 Copy available at <https://nishithdesai.com/SectionCategory/33/Dispute-Resolution-Hotline/12/57/DisputeResolutionHotline/5508/6.html>

2 Rouse, Ashurst LLP, Kelley Drye & Warren LLP C/O Wakhariya & Wakhariya, Kennedys C/o Tuli & Co., DeHeng Law Office, White & Case LLP, Linklaters LLP, Freshfields Brackhaus Deringer, Allen & Overy, Clifford Chance, Wilmer Hale, Shearman & Sterling LLP, Herbert Smith LLP, Slaughter and May, Hogan and Hartson, Davis Polk & Wardwell, Eversheds, Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP, Paul, Weiss, Rifkin, Wharton & Garrison, Norton Rose LLP, Pillsbury Winthrop Shaw Pittman, Wilson Sonsini Goodrich Rosati, Arnold & Porter LLP, Covington & Burling LLP, Perkins Coie, Loyens & Loeff, Freehills, Clayton Utz, Mayer Brown LLP, Clyde & Co, Bird and Bird LLP (As listed in the writ petition)

Research Papers

M&A In The Indian Technology Sector

February 19, 2025

Unlocking Capital

February 11, 2025

Fintech

January 28, 2025

Research Articles

Re-Evaluating Press Note 3 Of 2020: Should India's Land Borders Still Define Foreign Investment Boundaries?

February 04, 2025

INDIA 2025: The Emerging Powerhouse for Private Equity and M&A Deals

January 15, 2025

Key changes to Model Concession Agreements in the Road Sector

January 03, 2025

Audio

Securities Market Regulator's Continued Quest Against "Unfiltered" Financial Advice

December 18, 2024

Digital Lending - Part 1 - What's New with NBFC P2Ps

November 19, 2024

Renewable Roadmap: Budget 2024 and Beyond - Part I

August 26, 2024

NDA Connect

Connect with us at events, conferences and seminars.

NDA Hotline

Click here to view Hotline archives.

Video

Arbitration Amendment Bill 2024: A Few Suggestions | Legally Speaking With Tarun Nangia | NewsX

February 12, 2025

DISCLAIMER

The contents of this hotline should not be construed as legal opinion. View detailed disclaimer.

This Hotline provides general information existing at the time of preparation. The Hotline is intended as a news update and Nishith Desai Associates neither assumes nor accepts any responsibility for any loss arising to any person acting or refraining from acting as a result of any material contained in this Hotline. It is recommended that professional advice be taken based on the specific facts and circumstances. This Hotline does not substitute the need to refer to the original pronouncements.

This is not a Spam mail. You have received this mail because you have either requested for it or someone must have suggested your name. Since India has no anti-spamming law, we refer to the US directive, which states that a mail cannot be considered Spam if it contains the sender's contact information, which this mail does. In case this mail doesn't concern you, please unsubscribe from mailing list.

What India’s Transition to New Data
Protection Law Means for Global
Businesses

January 23, 2025

India 2025: The Emerging
Powerhouse for Private Equity and
M&A Deals

January 16, 2025