

India Law Journal's Vikrant Pachnanda and Pratik Purswani spoke with Mr. Navneet S. Chugh about the Indian Lawyers Association and their upcoming Annual Conference on the 22nd of December 2018

Ques: Can you tell us about the Indian Lawyers Association (ILA) that was started by you?

Ans: I have been in California for the last 37 years. After law school, I practiced in the US and I am actively associated with Bar Associations in the United States. There are almost 6000 Bar Associations in the United States and around 1.3 million lawyers, which is almost the same number as in India. It is rather surprising that there is no nation wide organisation in India of this sort. The American Bar Association started in 1878, almost 140 years ago with 75 lawyers and it today has approximately 4,10,000 members. So in 1993, I started an Indian Lawyers Association in Los Angeles with 50 lawyers. I felt that with 1.3 million lawyers in the country, even if 10% have the mindset and show willingness to participate, that's a 1,30,000 lawyers. We started ILA on January 1st, 2018 with the initial idea of starting in one city. But then on realising the potential and acknowledging that there are thousand of lawyers in other cities in India, we decided to start with 100 cities on January 18th, 2018. We had picked up 40 presidents by January 18 and the remaining 60 by May 31st, 2018. It is a voluntary, professional organisation for the legal professional of India. Membership is open to lawyers, judges, professors, law students, and others interested in law and legal profession. ILA has been formed to shape the future of legal profession throughout India.

Ques: What prompted you to start this in India since you were based in the US?

Ans: In my opinion, it is a flat world and I am reminded of this anecdote that once, someone visited the space and when he returned, he was asked about how does the earth look different from the space and he replied that there are no country borders visible from the space. Thanks to internet, telecommunication and increasing literacy, these country borders have continued to diminish. Thus, it does not matter whether somebody is in US or in India. What bothered me was that there was no industry body for the profession of law and that there was no voice in India for the 1.3 million lawyers. There is a need to remove the restrictions on law and lawyers need to be free. There will be a day when foreign lawyers will enter India and before they come in, I think we should free the Indian lawyers and remove the restrictions. The Indian Constitution talks about freedom from restraint on trade, but if we look at the profession of law, it has many restrictions on lawyers, like one cannot advertise, or do 'success fee' lawyering, or cannot have another business. In addition, the legal system is not very efficient and there are 30 million cases pending in India. As a combination of all of this, lawyers in India are not as wealthy as they should be.

Ques: The ILA is hosting its 1st National Annual Conference in December 2018. What does this Conference endeavour to achieve?

Ans: We now have 104 chapters and we plan to start another 196 chapters. We will end expansion when we are in 300 cities on completion of phase II. Any city where there are more than 10 Indian lawyers, we want an ILA Chapter. One may ask as to why does a city with 10 Indian lawyers need an ILA chapter, to which I say that these cities need a Chapter more than a city like Delhi, which has a 1,00,000 lawyers. Another reason why ILA is important is because the current Bar Associations in India are exclusive clubs of sorts. We want to flatten the world with ILA and it is an organization that is open and welcomes all lawyers. We already have 104 chapters and we plan to have 300 in all, the feeling that we all belong to a national organization and this will happen only if we do a national conference. Till then it is just a nice story that exist on paper. But when 104 chapter presidents get together, it will be realised that there is a hub-and-spoke

approach to ILA and that there exists a larger organisation. With our 1st Annual Conference, we are going to have about a 100 speakers in about 20 panel discussions, some key notes and around 1200 lawyers. To that extent, I am convinced, without a thread of doubt that in 5 years from now, our annual legal conference will have 10,000 lawyers.

Ques:How do you plan to take ILA forward post this conference?

Ans: Post this conference, we plan to begin working on Phase II. By then, we need to have Board Members filled for all 104 existing chapters, wherein each chapter will have 15 board members, making it a strong leadership group of around 1500 people. Each chapter will have 20 committees which will be dedicated to different substantive areas of law. These ILA chapters will operate as mini ILA chapters within ILA chapters wherein they can have their own conferences on that dedicated area of law. Starting from next year, we also intend to have regional conferences in all four regions of the country. Thereafter, we aim to incorporate a set of model professional rules of conduct. Towards the last phase, our endeavour will be to work towards finding solutions to fix the legal system of India. We have around 30 million pending cases in the country and this high pendency is leading to delayed justice. In fact, the focus of the 1st Published paper of ILA deals with the issue of pending cases in the country.

Ques: What do you think could be the incentives that this Association offers in order for lawyers to be a part of it?

Ans:

1. Creation of wealth: Baring the top few, we believe that legal professionals are not making as much money as they potentially can and we want to work towards establishing a system where they can generate the deserved wealth. To achieve this, they need to be free and have no restraint on trade. ILA aims to be a platform to get together and learn, where lawyers can network and get support to manage and market their practice. ILA wishes to be a catalyst for lawyers in creation of wealth.
2. Social: In addition to being a platform to network, this association also becomes a club of sorts, where people come together and celebrate various occasions. We already have 27 chapters of ILA in USA, wherein every city with more than 10 Indian lawyers has a chapter.
3. Provide a leadership forum for judges: Through ILA, we want to encourage our members to become judges and also be a platform for judges to interact with each other.
4. Socio - economic - political benefits.

Our vision and endeavour is to increase the respect of the profession of law. The founder believes that we need to go back a 100 years in time when the most respected people in India like Jawaharlal Nehru, Jinnah, Rajendra Prasad, Mahatma Gandhi, etc were lawyers. They are the ones who got us freedom. The mutiny started in 1857 and it took 90 years thereafter for us to get political freedom. In 1991, we got economic freedom and now the next revolution in India should come from lawyers. 1.3 million lawyers of the country need to help the 1.3 billion people to get their full rights. For that, lawyers need to free themselves first and then ensure that every single person's rights are duly enforced and they get justice. For a democracy like India, rule of law needs to be adhered to and 1.3 billion people have the power to make it work. The only way to enforce this power is for lawyers and the legal system to work efficiently and ILA can be an important part in making this happen. At the end of the day, after all, it is law that creates a society and for a diverse culture like ours, with 1.3 billion people, who follow different religions, languages, customs and practices, it is important to follow the rule of law.

To register for the event, please access: www.ilacon2018.com