

## 'Graduates of new Indian law schools ready for global competition'

Indian Law Minister Hans Raj Bhardwaj has said there is no reason for lawyers to fear the liberalisation of India's legal services sector, saying lawyers graduating from newly-set up national law schools are now "ready to compete' with those from other nations.

"The 24 national law schools are producing young lawyers in large numbers and they are ready to compete with lawyers of any other country. This wealth that we possess will provide another opportunity to introduce reforms in the legal and judicial system," Bhardwaj said at the launch of the Indo-European Business Forum here Friday.

With legal sector reforms high on the list of demands made by the British government, the visiting minister's remarks were warmly welcomed by former British attorney general Lord Goldsmith.

"The debate that has been taking place about access to the Indian legal profession has been going on for a very long time. My first visit to India was in 1995 when it involved discussions about the ability of non-Indian lawyers to have some sort of practice. That debate continues," Goldsmith said.

"I welcome the minister's warm remarks about the Indian legal profession not needing to fear competition and I wish him well in what I know is still a continuing debate that he has back home to make that a reality,' he added.

Goldsmith said his contacts in the Indian business world wanted to see foreign competition in the legal system, particularly in order to speed up the settlement and resolution of business disputes.

"The rest of the world has globalised - accountancy, banking, finance, business. The law remains very national. The globalisation of law needs to happen," he added.

Earlier, Bhardwaj - one of India's longest-serving public figures who first became law minister in 1982 - said successive Indian governments had shown a "consistency of policy" as far as economic reforms were concerned.

He said the current government was trying to speed up the process of dispute resolution.

"This government, headed by Manmohan Singh, has given a mandate to all of us, all ministers, that 'don't go into litigation. As far as possible, settle your dispute amicably by conciliation, mediation or arbitration'," he said.

"This is an important area, and an important decision taken by this government," Bhardwaj added.

The British government has been pushing India hard to open up its legal services sector, and the demand reportedly also figures on the agenda of the European Union in ongoing negotiations on an India-EU free trade agreement.

The absence of legal sector reforms - and specialised services - meant that globalising India was having to pay more to obtain such advice in London, Dubai or Singapore, according to Alison Hook, head of international department at the Law Society of England and Wales.

"It matters to the Indian government because major international projects which may include multinational consortia and international institutional financing, which will require lawyers with previous experience in those types of matters are involved in those kinds of projects going forward. And those lawyers are currently only available in a pool which is based outside of India," she said.

She said Indian lawyers are missing out on an "incredible revolution that is taking place in the global legal services market'.

*Dipankar De Sarkar ( © IANS / India eNews)*