

## Remembering Luthra and Luthra Founder Rajiv Luthra - Legal Stalwart, Kind Hearted & Larger than Life...

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By Pavan Lall



Veteran Corporate Lawyer and Founder of law firm Luthra & Luthra, **Rajiv Luthra**, died Wednesday after a brief illness. He was 67. The jocular Luthra had advised the Government of India and Government-owned corporations, including the merger of Air India and Indian Airlines, Planning Commission of India. Additionally, he also advised corporations such as, Emaar, ExxonMobil, Goldman Sachs, Monsanto, Mylan Pharmaceuticals, Reliance, ArcelorMittal, Bank of America, Temasek, The World Bank, and the Blackstone Group among others. The major transactions he had been a part of included the US\$ 4 billion Sun Pharma Ranbaxy merger, as well as Mylan Inc's acquisition of Agila Specialties Division from Strides Arcolab.

While he was trained as an accountant and first ran a small financial services outfit which worked with the likes of Bank of America, he went on to study law and Luthra set up the law firm Luthra and Luthra in 1989.

**Supreme Court Justice (Retd.) B.N. Srikrishna** said that *"Rajiv had a lot of interaction with me during my investigation in the ICICI Bank - Chanda Kochhar matter and was a great soul. He was very kind hearted which I had personally noticed and he was always ready to help people who needed it. For some reason he had the greatest regard for me and was always available and went out of the way to help me but I noticed he was like that even to his staff. He even adopted children and gave them a home and a great life."*

Luthra also had a great sense of humour and would often visit Srikrishna and chatted with him in his office and showed great respect for the judiciary which is broadly lacking today and was a competent lawyer above all, he said. *"He had built a decent sized firm and took a personal detailed interest in his employees and was like a father to everyone at his firm. He felt the obligation to help his team at a personal level far beyond what was expected of a corporate firm in India and is exemplary in that manner,"* Srikrishna said.



His former partner and one-time ally **Mohit Saraf**, who later broke his own firm said that despite their differences, when he looked back there were learnings he had through his association with the man. *“When Rajiv and I started working he had much better ideas about business being a tax practitioner and I was still fresh out of college, so he introduced me to the dos and don’ts of the commercial world. He also taught me the value of being well turned out and dressing well. Earlier I would wear jeans and t-shirts and today I never leave home without a jacket and I fathomed the importance of being formally dressed which does make a big difference in the legal world.”*

The other thing was that he had a knack of building relationships with clients. *“I would end up being cut and dried and keep it business like about but in due course and I learned his way and today most of my clients are my friends. Never give up, never worry and don’t get intimidated by the competition was also what I gleaned from him through the years,”* Saraf said.

Almost all top lawyers and heads of big firms also remembered Luthra well.



*“He was a legal stalwart and a truly wonderful human being. He was larger than life and a pillar of our profession. He will be sorely missed”,* said **Cyril Shroff, Managing Partner at Law Firm Cyril Amarchand Mangaldas.**

Others concur.



**Zia Mody, Founder Partner at AZB & Partners** said that *“He was a big hearted man with a generous streak and would always remember his friends and always call out of the blue to stay in touch. One can’t imagine the loss his family is undergoing and wish his soul Godspeed,* she said

It wasn’t just senior executives that Luthra was held in high esteem by. *“Whenever my phone rang with an 'unknown caller,' tag to it. I knew that it would always be Luthra on the other end, perhaps calling from some foreign country. His innate ability to connect with people of all ages was amazing, and he was a loyal friend whose lofty values were reflected in his firm's culture,”* said **Urvashi Datwani**, a former employee at blue chip law firms in Mumbai. She added that *“His unique ability to combine loyalty, hard work, and prompt delivery resulted in the creation of a successful brand. It's rare to come across a human being like him who treated everyone equally and with respect.”*

**Deepak Talwar**, corporate lobbyist, who was a junior of Luthra’s in college, said that the late lawyer’s career and business took off in 2004, at the height of the Indian economy. *“I think his core strength was relationship management and he was extremely well plugged into the Delhi social scene because of his deep networks which led him to build a classic corporate law firm,”* Talwar said. *“His success will be*

*difficult to emulate."*

In retrospect and as his twitter profile picture shows him astride a Harley Davidson motorcycle, Luthra was unusual for his ability to get the job done but yet not take himself too seriously.

**Shardul Shroff of Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas & Co** said that *"Luthra was no ordinary person.*



*His extraordinary way of touching the hearts and minds of so many was truly divine. His firm Luthra and Luthra was a combined Colossus and Hercules. It was no mean feat for him to set up and establish a national full service firm in a relatively short time. His wit and repartee, his sharp mind and native intellect was admirable and the backbone of his success. No one can say when such another will come."*