PwC India boss pleads case for seat at firm's global top table

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PwC's India boss is lobbying for a seat on the Big Four firm's global executive committee alongside his counterpart in China, arguing that the fast growth of its business and the rising importance of the Indian economy merit a position at the $53bn network's top table.

Sanjeev Krishan, chair of PwC India, in recent months petitioned senior figures for him to be added to the firm's influential network leadership team, people familiar with the matter told the Financial Times.

The move has caused ructions within the accounting and consulting firm, with one senior figure familiar with the discussions saying that while the issue has not yet risen to the level of "tensions", it is regarded by some within the network as a "problem".

One partner said Krishan had been "pushing very hard" for a seat while another, who has held global and national leadership roles at the firm, said it was "highly unlikely" that the Indian business would be given a place on the committee.

Like the rest of the Big Four firms — Deloitte, EY and KPMG — PwC is run as a worldwide network of partnerships linked through a global entity. The firm's network leadership team sets overall strategy and standards for its 151-country network.

The network leadership team currently consists of the firm's global chair, the leaders of its US, UK, and Asia-Pacific/China businesses, as well as its Europe boss, who holds a seat that can be rotated at the behest of PwC's global board.

"The size and composition of PwC's network leadership team is determined by the regulations that govern the network and by PwC's global governance board," said a PwC International spokesperson. "There are no current plans to add any additional members to the network leadership team."

The Indian firm's lobbying underlines the sometimes contentious political manoeuvring that occurs within the Big Four's sprawling global networks and marks an early test for Mohamed Kande, the firm's incoming global chair.

It also comes as PwC's China business faces a crisis over its audits of collapsed property developer Evergrande. One of the senior partners said: "India is very punchy at the moment because of what's going on with China."

Demand for professional services in India has increased rapidly in recent years on the back of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's economic drive and the professionalisation of the country's economy.

The Indian firm was the fastest-growing of PwC's 21 largest businesses in the network last year, with revenues jumping by nearly a quarter. That performance propped up PwC's overall Asia-Pacific revenue growth, which at 7 per cent was slower than the other major regions, dragged down by China. The Indian firm expects to surpass $1bn in sales for the first time this financial year.

One person familiar with the Indian firm said it was well positioned to continue to grow at a fast pace because of the country's expanding economy and its young, growing population. PwC's China boss was added to the firm's network leadership team in 2008 because it was then seen as the region with the greatest growth potential, according to one senior partner.

However, the Indian business remains small compared with some of those in other regions.

"If you look at their numbers, the domestic [Indian business] is growing great, but from a very low base," said the partner who has held global and national leadership roles. "To put them on the

network leadership team, you would also have to put Canada, France and the Middle East. Suddenly the network leadership team has 10 countries. That would not be workable."

PwC's network leadership team, which met 25 times last year, is already set to be overhauled at the start of next month, when Kande, Marco Amitrano and Daniel Li take up their positions as respective heads of PwC global, UK and Asia-Pacific. Paul Griggs, the firm's new US boss, joined the committee at the beginning of June.