

Boost level of expertise in arbitration: A-G

By ian poh

THE level of arbitration expertise in the region must be raised to keep pace with increasing demand for arbitration services, said Attorney-General Steven Chong yesterday.

The increasing demand for arbitration services is a trend to be expected as governments in the Asia-Pacific region "embrace" investment treaties, and investor-state claims become "more prominent".

"Despite the best intentions of investors and host states, disputes will inevitably arise," said Mr Chong. He said it was "incumbent" upon government officials and private practitioners alike to learn best practices in arbitration, and understand new legal trends.

He was speaking at the welcome ceremony for a new three-week course, at the National University of Singapore's (NUS) Bukit Timah campus.

Called the Singapore International Arbitration Academy, the intensive course was conceived by Mr Chong's predecessor, Mr Sundaresh Menon, who was sworn in as Chief Justice on Nov 7.

It yesterday began its first run, which will end on Dec 14. Its 44 participants are a mix of government officials and legal practitioners from 14 countries - most of them Asian states like the Philippines, India, Myanmar and Vietnam.

The course, which will be conducted every year at this time by the Centre of International Law (CIL) at NUS and the university's law faculty, is the latest in recent efforts made here to enhance the country's status as an arbitration hub.

For example, dispute resolution centre Maxwell Chambers was set up in 2009 to provide facilities and services for the conduct of arbitration hearings, said Mr Chong.

It houses international arbitral institutions like the American Arbitration Association and the World Intellectual Property Organisation's Arbitration and Mediation Centre, alongside local institutions like the Singapore International Arbitration Centre.

And Singapore's International Arbitration Act was amended this year to stay aligned with "international best practices", with arbitration awards made here enforceable in more than 140 countries.

The programme itself includes expert lectures and practice sessions involving case preparations and oral arguments.

Participants will represent various parties in an imagined dispute over a mining concession, between a fictitious American corporation and an Asian state.

Said one participant, Mr Kabir Singh, 35, a lawyer at international law firm Clifford Chance: "The fact that this course is being conducted in Singapore by the CIL is another feather in Singapore's cap and will further strengthen our position as a global hub for international arbitration. It has been an interactive and eventful first day."

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