

Arbitration academy to be set up here

It will offer a one-stop experience to train regional lawyers: Shanmugam

By K. C. VIJAYAN
LAW CORRESPONDENT

THE next step in Singapore's moves to be a leading international arbitration player will include the setting up of a world-class arbitration academy.

To be steered by the Centre for International Law at the National University of Singapore (NUS) and/or the law faculty, it will be a "one-stop experience" where lawyers from the region can be trained in arbitration, right where top arbitrators practise and supported by cutting-edge facilities.

Law minister K. Shanmugam, announcing the move, was speaking to an audience of the world's arbitration experts at the 21st Con-

gress of the International Council for Commercial Arbitration.

The academy is being planned for at a time when regional demand for arbitration will go up. Cross-border arbitration cases heard here, along with revenue from them, are expected to hit a record high.

In his speech, Mr Shanmugam also gave a broad-brush perspective of Singapore's track record in the field. It has put the country alongside London, Paris and New York as a preferred venue to settle commercial disputes.

Explaining the potential for arbitration here, he noted that Singapore is in the 10-nation Asean, with a combined population of 608 million and an econo-



Law minister K. Shanmugam at Sunday's session of the International Council for Commercial Arbitration Congress. He said that Singapore intended to position itself as a centre for common-law and civil-law countries. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

my of \$1.8 trillion – making it Asia's third-largest economy.

The region which has registered 6 per cent to 6.5 per cent growth despite the severe global economic crisis, will present opportunities for arbitration as the way for parties to settle their disputes, "given the complexities and different legal systems and practices in this region", he said.

Mr Shanmugam further noted that the Government here has the will to provide the legislative framework, and consults the industry for a finger on its pulse.

And the world-class facilities in Maxwell Chambers, which enable lawyers from anywhere in the world to practise arbitration here, are already in place, he said.

He made it clear that Singapore intended to position itself, not only as an arbitration centre for common-law countries like India, Malaysia and Brunei, but also a centre for civil-law countries like Indonesia, Thailand and China.

The wheels have already been set in motion for the Singapore International Arbitration Academy.

Associate Professor Michael Ewing-Chow, who heads trade and investment law at NUS' Centre for International Law, said the academy will have 54 faculty members, of whom about half will be from overseas. The programme there will run for three weeks every November and December.

A masters programme in arbitration is in the works.

Prof Chow said the course will "uniquely weave practice skills with substantive issues".

Industry players said that the academy will stamp Singapore's status as a long-term player and provide high-value training for the next generation of arbitrators.

Participants at yesterday's congress said they agreed with the thrust of the minister's speech.

London-based delegate Amarjit Singh said of the dynamism in Asia: "There's a lot of growth here and it's not just in the legal sector, but also in finance, commerce and other areas.

"Singapore is well-positioned as an arbitration seat to draw in the surge in demand."

✉ vijayah@sph.com.sg