

Kluwer Arbitration Blog

SIAC Symposium 2024 Part 1: An Age of Disruption

Lau Chee Chong (Omni Bridgeway) · Tuesday, October 8th, 2024 · YSIAC

The 2024 Singapore Convention Week kicked off with a bang on 26 August 2024 with the Singapore International Arbitration Centre (“SIAC”) hosting its flagship [SIAC Symposium](#) at the Shangri-La Hotel, Singapore. The SIAC Symposium 2024 featured a welcome address by [Mr Davinder Singh SC](#) (Chairman, SIAC; Executive Chairman, Davinder Singh Chambers LLC), a keynote address and fireside conversation with [Minister Indranee Rajah SC](#) (Minister in the Prime Minister’s Office, Second Minister for Finance and National Development), and four plenary sessions moderated by [Ms Lucy Reed](#) (President, SIAC Court of Arbitration; Independent Arbitrator, Arbitration Chambers), [Mr Kevin Nash](#) (Registrar, SIAC), [Mr Daryl Chew](#) (Partner, Three Crowns LLP) and [Mr Toby Landau KC](#) (Vice President, SIAC Court of Arbitration; Barrister, Advocate & Arbitrator, Duxton Hill Chambers (Singapore Group Practice)). The event was then capped with a reception celebrating the launch of the [SIAC Gateway](#) platform.

This Part reports on the morning events, while [Part 2](#) pertains to the afternoon sessions.

Opening Remarks and Welcome Address

Opening the symposium, [Ms Gloria Lim](#) (Chief Executive Officer, SIAC) noted the truly international nature of the gathering, and reiterated SIAC’s commitment to enhancing SIAC’s services and strengthening the institution’s connections with the global arbitration community. Ms Lim also shared that the SIAC Symposium 2024 marked the official launch of the SIAC Gateway platform, a streamlined, cloud-based platform that simplifies case management for SIAC users, powered by Opus 2.

This was followed by a welcome address from Mr Davinder Singh SC. In his speech, Mr Singh highlighted the importance of integrity, ethics and the rule of law, which were foundational to how SIAC and Singapore had built a trusted system, and underlined SIAC’s continued commitment to upholding these fundamental values.

Keynote Address and Fireside Chat: The Challenges of AI, Climate Change, and Trade Disruption

Minister Rajah began her keynote address by touching on the topical issues of artificial intelligence

“AI”), geopolitics and climate change, and the global challenges that had arisen, which demand global solutions. She also highlighted the need to find pathways that can be win-win, rather than win-lose, and Singapore’s efforts in this regard. She highlighted how Singapore’s approach had allowed Singapore to build trust, which in turn made it a jurisdiction of choice for many activities, including arbitration.

Minister Rajah noted that the advent of AI was one of the most transformative developments of recent times, and has the possibility of revolutionising legal practice as we now understand it. In this regard, Minister Rajah highlighted that the Singapore government provides productivity solution grants to Singapore law firms to adopt AI solutions (in, for instance, eDiscovery or legal research). Minister Rajah nonetheless flagged that it was important for legal practitioners to be careful to guard against bias and to ensure ethical and transparent use of AI.

Minister Rajah’s keynote address was followed by a fireside chat moderated by [Professor Stavros Brekoulakis](#) (Michael and Laura Hwang Chair in International Arbitration, Faculty of Law, National University of Singapore). The importance of trust and integrity of legal systems continued to be emphasised during the dialogue, in which the Minister emphasised that the legal framework must inspire trust, and there needs to be clear laws and rules that are transparent, with rational and objective criteria. Responding to the moderator’s question on Singapore’s position as a leading dispute resolution hub, Minister Rajah explained that being a small country with not a lot of resources, Singapore has relied on the key ingredients of trust, integrity, and the ability to deliver. Having created a good environment for resolving disputes, Singapore would be more than happy to share its experiences with the world, if its model and approach can be useful for others. To the extent that Singapore can be a place for parties to resolve their disputes, safe in the knowledge that their disputes would be handled well and that they can trust the system, Singapore is happy to contribute and make a difference on the global stage. Minister Rajah concluded by emphasising that Singapore is happy to help and enable dispute resolution, and make the world a less acrimonious and happier place.

Plenary Panel I: International Arbitration in the Age of Trade Disruption and Energy Transition

The first panel of the day followed up on the topics of trade disruption and energy transition by addressing energy disputes and the impact of supply chain disruptions, sanctions, and structural and policy changes.

This was especially topical, given that more than 80% of the participants responding to an audience poll at the SIAC Symposium agreed that trade and energy disputes are increasing, and according to the [SIAC 2023 Annual Report](#), 47% of disputes administered by the SIAC in 2023 were trade-related disputes.

[Justice Andre Maniam](#) (Judge of the High Court, Supreme Court of Singapore) kicked off the discussion by addressing the increasing “complexification” of disputes in the trade and energy space, with increasingly complex issues (particularly of a technical nature) being arbitrated or litigated. Speaking from the perspective of an expert, [Mr Ajey Chandra](#) (Chief Executive Officer, Baker & O’Brien) concurred that in the context of trade and energy disputes, expert reports have grown in length and now address more complex issues. From a legal practitioner’s perspective, [Ms](#)

Jessica Fei (Member, SIAC Court of Arbitration; International Partner, King & Wood Mallesons) and Mr Gavin Margetson (Partner, Mishcon de Reya LLP) highlighted the need for concise drafting as the tendency of any reader would be to gloss over details the longer an expert report is. The panellists also discussed how joint expert reports might help in addressing the “complexification” of issues.

Mr Gabriel Yuen (Legal Counsel, Aramco Trading Dubai Company Limited) also added that from a practical perspective, clients (who are the end-users of arbitration) are often keen to avoid having to litigate or arbitrate similar issues across various jurisdictions. Other members of the panel therefore flagged the importance of having similar dispute resolution clauses in “back-to-back” contracts between different parties in a chain of contracts to ease the consolidation/joiner process and avoid protracted disputes over jurisdiction.

Conclusion

The morning sessions of the SIAC Symposium 2024 discussed the challenges faced by arbitration practitioners in an age of disruption. It provided a unique opportunity for users of SIAC’s services and other relevant stakeholders to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on how to best manage these challenges, using international arbitration as a tool. The sessions also highlighted that trust in the dispute resolution system is paramount and that the ethics and values of both the users and institutions must be impeccable. These themes set the stage for the remainder of the plenary panel sessions in the afternoon.

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