

Boost expertise in Asian legal systems: Shanmugam

Economic growth predicted in region, giving S'pore area of opportunity, he says

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Legal academics here need to deepen their expertise in areas such as the laws of other Asian countries, in order for Singapore to become an important legal centre in the region, said Minister for Law and Home Affairs K. Shanmugam yesterday.

This is an area of opportunity for Singapore, in the light of the regional economic development forecast to grow in the next few decades, he added.

He was delivering the keynote address at the launch of the 16th Asian Law Institute (Asli) Conference in the Bukit Timah campus of the National University of Singapore (NUS).

Hosted by the NUS Faculty of Law, the two-day conference will see legal academics and scholars from Asli member institutions and around the world discuss contemporary legal issues relevant to Asian countries, such as environmental law, human rights and information technology law.

Mr Shanmugam said analysts predict a growth in economic activity in this region, with an Asian Development Bank report forecasting Asia's share of global gross domestic product to be 40 per cent by 2030 and 50 per cent by 2050.

Such developments will raise a demand for professional services, such as law firms with project financing and infrastructure dispute resolution expertise.

"The economic growth is linked inextricably with the framework of law," the minister said.

He said the Singapore Govern-



Minister for Home Affairs and Law K. Shanmugam, with dean of NUS Law Simon Chesterman (left) and director of the Asian Law Institute Gary F. Bell, arriving for the opening of the 16th Asian Law Institute Conference in NUS' Bukit Timah campus yesterday. Mr Shanmugam says economic growth is linked inextricably with the framework of law. ST PHOTO: KEVIN LIM

ment is deeply committed to developing Singapore into the most important legal centre in the region, and has allocated financial resources for it.

He added that the hope is this "will help establish centres of excellence in Singapore, and they will, in turn, contribute to developing high-quality academic leadership on the legal regimes around the region".

Mr Shanmugam said the Ministry of Law (MinLaw) supported the launch of the Asean Law Academy in NUS last year.

He added that for six years, MinLaw has contributed "a very significant amount of funding" to the running of the NUS law school – beyond that provided by the Ministry of Education – to support the study

and development of thought leadership in Asian legal studies".

"The purpose of the funding was to build up a pool of local law academics with specialist law knowledge, to deepen the expertise and strengthen leadership in identified areas," he said.

The areas included common law, civil law systems and in the specific laws of countries around the Asian region, and particularly in South-east Asia.

Mr Shanmugam added that for Singapore to be an international legal services hub, it has to further strengthen its position as a dispute resolution centre by creating new areas of legal services out of Singapore and promoting the use of Singapore law.

There is also a need to under-

stand the Asian legal systems that address the needs of businesses operating in this region.

"There are varying degrees of confidence in various legal systems," he said, adding that the gap is where academics can play a significant role.

Professor Simon Chesterman, dean of NUS Law, said: "The theme of this year's conference, *The Rule of Law and the Role of Law in Asia*, reflects the diversity of legal research and legal experiences across the continent.

"Every country in Asia embraces the rule of law in theory, for example, but differences routinely arise as to what this means in practice."

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