

Our reforms aim to create a transparent, efficient, and world-class arbitration ecosystem: Union Minister of Law and Justice Shri Arjun Ram Meghwal

India and Singapore Strengthen Arbitration Ties through High-Level Dialogue Organised by India International Arbitration Centre

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The India International Arbitration Centre (IIAC) organised a special session on the theme ‘Selection of Arbitrators in an India-Related Dispute’ on August 28, 2025, during Singapore Convention Week 2025. The dialogue brought together senior officials from India and Singapore to discuss the pivotal role of both the countries in shaping the future of global dispute resolution.

Delivering the keynote address, Shri Arjun Ram Meghwal, Union Minister of Law & Justice (Independent Charge) traced arbitration’s deep historical roots in India—from traditional community mediation practices to the Arbitration Act of 1940 and the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996. Reaffirming India’s ambition to become a global arbitration hub, he also drew from Indian tradition by referencing Krishna as the first mediator and arbitrator. “Our reforms aim to create a transparent, efficient, and world-class arbitration ecosystem. Singapore is a valued partner in this journey,” Shri Meghwal said.

In his welcome address, Mr. Jimmy Yim, Chairman of Drew & Napier LLC, highlighted India’s historic and continuing influence across Asia and beyond. He noted Singapore’s growing economic and legal ties with India, and emphasised that between 2020–2024, the Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC) emerged as Asia’s leading arbitration hub and second globally, with Indian law frequently chosen as the governing law in disputes. Mr. Yim stressed that arbitrator appointments are central to this growing cooperation and welcomed the dialogue as a platform to deepen India–Singapore collaboration in arbitration.

Placing the discussions in a broader context of bilateral relations, Dr. Shilpak Ambule, High Commissioner of India to Singapore, spoke of robust trade, investment, and state-level partnerships. “Singaporean companies are expanding rapidly in India, while Indian firms are deepening their presence in Singapore. Cooperation in arbitration adds an important layer to this strategic partnership,” he remarked.

Dr. Anju Rathi Rana, Law Secretary, Government of India, underlined the importance of strengthening institutional frameworks and investing in capacity-building for arbitration. “Institutions thrive when stakeholders believe in them. Through conferences, capacity-building programmes, and outreach, institutions like the IIAC are training practitioners, raising awareness, and nurturing an arbitration-friendly culture across sectors,” she said, emphasising that transparent and diverse panels are vital to building trust in cross-border dispute resolution.

The session featured an in-depth panel discussion on “Selection of Arbitrators in India-Related Disputes”, moderated by Mr. Abhinav Bhushan, Director (Foreign Law), Drew & Napier LLC, which focused on the need to diversify arbitrator appointments and move beyond the traditional reliance on retired judges.

Mr. Nitesh Jain, Partner, Trilegal, emphasised the importance of building a more diverse pool of arbitrators, including trained lawyers and professionals with international exposure.

Justice (Retd.) Hemant Gupta, Chairperson, India International Arbitration Centre, and former Judge of the Supreme Court of India, observed that while retired judges are often readily available, arbitration requires a fundamentally different approach: “To be a good arbitrator, a judge has to unlearn certain judicial habits.” He pointed out that arbitral institutions already have a strong representation of advocates on their panels, with nearly 70 percent of arbitrators being practising lawyers, a fact that helps challenge the myth that arbitration is the preserve of retired judges.

Dr. Sanjeev Gemawat, Managing Director & Group General Counsel, Essar Group, identified India’s reliance on ad hoc arbitration as a structural challenge that has reinforced the culture of appointing retired judges. He called for greater emphasis on arbitrators with commercial and contractual expertise, adding that many industries today prefer professionals trained in English law. Echoing these concerns.

Dr. Pinky Anand, Senior Advocate and former Additional Solicitor-General of India, stressed that appointments must be made on the basis of merit and diversity. She observed that arbitration should evolve into a full-time professional practice rather than a “part-time business,” and encouraged greater participation from young lawyers to build the next generation of arbitration professionals.

The panel also explored international perceptions of India-related arbitrations.

Mr. Jain highlighted India’s potential to support multiple arbitral institutions, noting the gradual but significant shift from ad hoc to institutional arbitration. Justice Gupta added that institutions must earn user confidence through consistent performance. “Our performance will bring reputation,” he said, pointing to the benefits of a pan-India institutional presence.

Mr. Mahesh Rai noted that while arbitration in India was long seen as a domestic affair, challenges emerge when disputes move to the international stage. He observed that parties often avoid Indian seats for cross-border disputes, preferring Singapore and other recognised centers for their professionalised arbitration systems. Rai highlighted the perception issue surrounding appointments, where international practice emphasises professional arbitrators rather than exclusively retired judges. He stressed that India must address these concerns to build confidence in Indian arbitrators on the global stage.

The session concluded with the consensus that India is at a critical juncture in arbitration reform—supported by government commitment, institutional growth, and a strong pool of professionals. With these drivers, India is well-positioned to emerge as a leading global arbitration hub.

The event closed with a vote of thanks delivered by Mr. Ganesh Chandru, Member, India International Arbitration Centre.

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