

BOOK REVIEWS

REVIEW OF JUDICIAL AND LEGAL REFORMS IN SINGAPORE BETWEEN 1990 AND 1995 (BY VARIOUS AUTHORS FOR THE SINGAPORE ACADEMY OF LAW)
[Singapore: Butterworths Asia. 1996. lxxxiv + 804 pp. Hardcover: S\$303.85, including GST]

THIS very impressive and weighty book is a collection of fourteen individual studies of specific areas of Singapore's judicial and legal system. They were originally presented as papers by judges, practitioners and academics at a conference organised in November 1995 by the Singapore Academy of Law. The papers (some of which are very detailed and extensive) have now been brought together and published as a book charting Singapore's judicial and legal development in recent years.

As the Chief Justice pointed out in his keynote address to the conference (which is reproduced at the beginning of the book) the five year period with which the conference dealt was an important one for Singapore. It was a period during which many of the changes that had occurred within the Republic since its independence were confirmed and consolidated. It was also a period during which the pace of life in the legal profession continued to become ever more demanding. Where once the courts had sat only in the mornings and the Privy Council had been at the apex of the judicial system, by 1995 the courts were fully stretched and the Court of Appeal offered the final solution to all judicial questions. The increasing pressure on those responsible for making and applying law in Singapore to become less dependent on their colonial roots was reflected in many of the developments which took place during the first half of this decade, and it is with these developments that the conference was, and the book is, concerned.

The book is divided into five sections, each containing contributions which will be referred to for want of a better description as chapters (although many of them are far more substantial than such terminology might imply, and almost all are divided into many parts). The first section deals with reforms in the procedure of the courts, and contains two chapters, both contributed by members of the Faculty of Law. It begins with a very detailed analysis by Associate Professor Jeffrey Pinsler of amendments to the rules of court. This is followed by a chapter written by Michael Hor, a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty, on the legislative and judicial reforms to criminal evidence. Between them, these two chapters cover 164 pages.

The second section consists of a single chapter, contributed by Associate Professor Walter Woon. This chapter, which deals with reforms to the hierarchy of the courts and their legal implications, is, of course, extremely significant given the major changes which took place in this respect during the five years in question.

This is followed by the third section of the book, which – certainly in terms of length, covering, as it does, more than 500 pages – is the most extensive of the four sections. In it, various experts in individual fields examine trends in core areas of Singapore law. The first chapter in this section, dealing with developments

in Equity, is by practitioners Michael Hwang and Andrew Chan. There follow chapters on Contract by Associate Professor Andrew Phang, Criminal Law by Professor Koh Kheng Lian, Criminal Sentencing Policy by Justice Karthigesu, Banking and Securities by Professor Peter Ellinger, Intellectual Property Rights (a very detailed analysis covering almost 150 pages) by Associate Professor George Wei, Land Law by Associate Professor Tan Sook Yee, and Family Law by Associate Professor Leong Wai Kum.

The fourth section deals with major legislative reforms, and contains a chapter by Goh Phai Cheng and Charles Lim Aeng Cheng, both of the Attorney General's Chambers, on legislation to implement the restructuring of Singapore.

The book concludes with a section on trends in legal practice, containing two chapters, both written by practitioners – the first on trends within Singapore by Davinder Singh and the second on Singapore law firms abroad by Chang See Hiang.

As will be readily appreciated, this book is extremely wide-ranging in the topics which it covers, and it draws on the considerable talents of many eminent contributors. The only criticism which this reviewer had was with respect to the Contents pages, which do not accurately reflect the organisation of the book, and which give the inaccurate impression that it is rather unstructured. There is no indication in these pages of the various sections into which the book is divided, the chapters are not numbered, and the contributors are not named. The reader is therefore unaware of either the identities of the contributors or the cohesive nature of the book until he actually works his way through it. Only on doing so does he see that the book is indeed divided into distinct sections, with the names of the relevant contributors appearing at the beginning of each chapter.

That minor point aside, this book will be a valuable addition to the collection of all those who are interested in Singapore's legal and judicial development during the past few years. It will also be welcomed by anyone who wishes to obtain an informed overview of all aspects of Singapore law written by many of our most senior and experienced commentators.