

# 2008:

## the year ahead

Where are the key markets? The key sectors? What can law firms expect from 2008? Let *ALB* be your guide. Our panel of legal industry pundits predicts new year trends, providing a map of the opportunities and challenges

Lawyers often shy away from crystal ball gazing, especially in emerging Asia, where a rapidly changing environment makes accurate predictions all the more difficult. However, after strong encouragement from *ALB*, a panel of industry leaders has come together from jurisdictions across Asia to do just that. They were invited to give us their take on what we could expect.

The result is an engaging – and opinionated – outlook on one of the world's most exciting and fastest emerging legal markets. From further legal market liberalisation in markets such as India and Malaysia, to legal profit squeezes as a result of associate salary hikes, you can expect it all in 2008. Above all, our lawyers cannot hide a feeling of optimism and anticipation, as Asia's rise to prominence continues.

It may be that time proves some of their thoughts wrong, but we have no doubt most of them will be right. One thing that is certain is that the following pages will provoke healthy discussion among their peers, both private practice and in-house. *ALB* wishes all the law firms and in-house teams across Asia success in the coming year.



### SINGAPORE

Loo Choon Chiaw, managing partner,  
Loo & Partners

- Increase in billing rates
- Capitalising on marketing liberalisation

**As Singapore becomes a more service-oriented,** knowledge-based economy, employment growth in the services sectors is likely to continue, including inevitably the legal sector. As part of Singapore's continuing trend towards business market globalisation, we expect legal practitioners specialising in areas such as general corporate, corporate finance, corporate compliance, and dispute resolution practices to be in great demand as we march into 2008.

In view of the stress brought about by the faster pace of legal practice, younger practitioners are increasingly seeing in-house positions in MNCs as a good alternative. Also, foreign law firms have reduced their local presence in Singapore over the past few years. This trend may be reversed, barring the further escalation of the sub-prime crisis, in view of generally favourable sentiments about the region's economy. In the light of the recent surge in property (both residential and commercial) prices and rental in the last 12 months, the costs of doing business in Singapore has increased substantially. We expect the billing rates of both local and foreign law firms to be increased correspondingly.

While the large local law firms are getting bigger in size, there will always be room for smaller practices, especially the boutique firms providing specialised services in practice areas, such as general corporate or intellectual property work.

The liberalisation of marketing rules in 1998 has not been fully capitalised upon by local law firms. Most local firms, with a few notable exceptions, still maintain a traditional publicity shy approach. This approach may change, however, with younger practitioners taking over the helm in law firms in Singapore.