

REPORT ON OUR PARTICIPATION IN THE IISL MOOT COURT COMPETITION

MANFRED LACHS SPACE LAW MOOT COURT COMPETITION, 2018

- Team from Symbiosis Law School, Pune

Seldom are law students given a chance of participating in an experience that has the effect of transforming the way you look at life. The Manfred Lachs Space Law Moot Court Competition 2018 was one such experience, and we are glad that we were a part of it. It has been about a year since we were paired together as a team to participate in the moot, and today, we can say it with pride that it has been a character-building and self-changing experience.

A series of vibrant memories play on a reel in our minds when we talk about our participation in the moot. The initial phase of preparation was tough for us. It was a real challenge as it was a new area of public international law that we were not exposed to before. As is normal practice, most law universities around the world conduct lectures of air and space law as part of their public international law courses, and hence, the subject was completely unexplored and new for us. Since resource material on space law is not readily available on the public domain, our biggest challenge was to streamline a source through which we could understand the complex field of space law. Thankfully, the IISL provided us access to published colloquium papers of past years, which we heavily relied upon in our research. Despite the countless hours of research, the sleepless nights, the difficulties in getting study resources, we had one thing that kept us going: the thirst for getting to know more about this uncharted area of law. The gains of our preparation were immense. We can proudly say that the knowledge we have gained in these past ten months is more than we learnt in five years of law school.

After four months of intense and constructive preparation came the Asia-Pacific Regional Finals which were held in Adelaide, Australia in April 2018. They were organized by the University of Adelaide. Our experience “down-under” was incomparable. The multiple rounds of pleadings before space law experts, the interaction with students from other universities in Asia and the Pacific region, and the thrill and anxiousness of everyone present in Adelaide are all memories that we will cherish for a lifetime. In the Final rounds at Adelaide, we had the opportunity to plead

before a bench comprising of a sitting Judge of the South Australian Supreme Court and an ex-Judge of the International Tribunal for Law of the Sea.

Winning the Asia-Pacific Regional Finals was a well-deserved reward for our months of preparations. But winning was not our biggest take-away from Adelaide: it was the knowledge that we gained in the one week we were there. We can undoubtedly say that participation in the Regional Rounds matured us substantially in the little span of time. We were made aware of our mistakes, and were given an opportunity to correct them before the World Finals. The other participating teams taught us just as much as our research did.

As Asia-Pacific Champions, our next journey was to represent the region in the World Finals which were held in Bremen, Germany in October 2018. The Japanese Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) was kind enough to sponsor our air tickets as well as our accommodation in Bremen. We cannot thank JAXA enough for giving us this opportunity and words alone cannot be enough to express our gratitude to them. The World Finals were held as part of the International Astronautical Congress. The Congress was also a “once-in-a-lifetime” experience for us. Never before had we attended an event of such a scale and magnitude and witnessed experts from all over the world flock to one destination to participate in it. We met a lot a space-enthusiasts from different nationalities and fields who had come to take part in the Congress.

As for the moot, during the Semi-Finals, we pleaded before a bench of space law experts (including one of the drafters of the problem) who grilled us with questions relating to space law and facts like never before. Despite the fact that we emerged as Runners-up in the World Finals, we were honoured to be one of the two teams that pleaded before the sitting Judges of the International Court of Justice. Their Excellencies grilled us significantly on complex questions of public international law and space law and it was a unique experience to witness their Excellencies in action.

The Competition dinner post the Final Rounds was also an amazing opportunity to meet and interact with the closely-knit space law community. We had the opportunity of interacting personally with not just the Judges of the International Court of Justice, but also various eminent

space law experts, the works of some of which we had cited in our written submissions for the moot.

Even though we are back from the competition and our journey is finally over, we still have memories that we will keep with us for a lifetime. The Manfred Lachs Space Law Moot Court Competition has completely changed our perspectives in life and is a valuable stepping stone for our personal and professional development and growth. We are now more determined than ever to pursue a career in space law and help the community develop further and we hope that students, for generations to come, will keep contributing to the development of space law.