

From Courtroom to Cross-Border: Dato' David Gurupatham Builds a Different Kind of Malaysian Law Practice

KUALA LUMPUR, MALAYSIA, September 4, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- When Malaysia was in the grip of its deepest economic and public-health crisis in decades, [Dato' David Gurupatham](#) was not confined to a courtroom.

As co-leader of Industries Unite, a coalition that grew from 52 to 115 trade associations and represented an estimated 3.3 million businesses, Gurupatham became one of the legal voices pressing the government to reconsider aspects of its pandemic recovery strategy. In July 2021, he publicly challenged the government's National Recovery Plan, arguing that official economic data did not reflect the conditions businesses were experiencing on the ground.

At the time, the coalition reported that approximately 80% of its members were struggling to meet financial obligations, while four in 10 had already closed. Gurupatham also questioned official figures on the resumption of bank-loan repayments, citing information gathered directly from businesses represented by the coalition.

The episode captured a defining



feature of Gurupatham's three-decade legal career: he has repeatedly taken his legal expertise beyond the conventional boundaries of the courtroom.

Called to the Bar at the Honourable Society of the Middle Temple in 1992, Gurupatham co-founded David Gurupatham & Koay (DGK) with Koay Eng Hooi in 2002. What began as a new practice has since grown into a firm employing nearly 100 people across offices in Selangor, Johor and Jinan, China.

His practice encompasses complex commercial litigation, arbitration, mediation and cross-border disputes involving parties from jurisdictions including Singapore, India, the United Kingdom, Taiwan and mainland China.

A Malaysian law firm goes to mainland China

The firm's most significant international expansion came in February 2025, when DGK opened a 1,500-square-foot office on the 11th floor of the China Life Insurance Building in Jinan, Shandong Province.

The move placed a Malaysian law firm directly inside mainland China's commercial environment at a time when economic ties between the two countries were reaching record levels. China-Malaysia bilateral trade reached approximately US\$212 billion in 2024, while Chinese investment into Malaysia also recorded substantial growth.

For Gurupatham, the rationale was not simply geographic expansion. Businesses operating between Malaysia and China must navigate different legal systems, regulatory environments and dispute-resolution mechanisms. Malaysia's common-law tradition and China's civil-law system can create challenges for companies seeking predictable outcomes in cross-border transactions.

DGK's presence in Jinan is therefore positioned around a practical proposition: cross-border legal problems are easier to address when lawyers understand the commercial environment on both sides of the border.

A practice built beyond commercial interests

Gurupatham's approach to law has also extended into public-interest work.

He has undertaken pro bono matters involving indigenous communities and customary land rights, an area in which Orang Asli communities have increasingly relied on the Malaysian courts to challenge land dispossession and assert legal rights.

He has also participated in legal-aid initiatives through the Selangor Bar and contributed to law-

reform activities within the Malaysian Bar Council.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, DGK separately operated a weekly food-distribution programme for elderly care homes. In 2016, the firm hosted a free legal clinic providing members of the public with access to walk-in legal advice.

For Gurupatham, these activities reflect a broader understanding of what a legal practice can contribute to society.

A legal profession being reshaped by new rules

His cross-border practice is now developing against a rapidly changing Malaysian legal landscape.

The Arbitration (Amendment) Act 2024, which came into force on 1 January 2026, introduced a statutory framework for third-party funding in arbitration, bringing Malaysia closer to established arbitration hubs such as Singapore and Hong Kong.

In March 2026, the Malaysian judiciary launched the International Commercial and Admiralty Division (ICAD) at the Kuala Lumpur High Court, with an objective of resolving cross-border commercial disputes within nine months.

Meanwhile, the Committee for the Review and Reform of Contract Law presented its three-volume final report in June 2026, proposing wide-ranging changes to the Contracts Act 1950. Among the issues addressed are digital commerce, electronic agreements and contracts involving emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence.

These developments have direct implications for firms working with international businesses. As Malaysia seeks to strengthen its position as a regional commercial and dispute-resolution centre, the ability to bridge domestic law with international commercial realities is becoming increasingly important.

The lawyer who refuses to remain in the courtroom

Gurupatham's career offers an alternative model of legal leadership.

The conventional measure of a successful litigator is often the landmark case won or the dispute successfully resolved. Gurupatham's record includes those achievements, but his professional trajectory has been defined just as much by what happened outside the courtroom.

He helped organise a coalition representing millions of businesses during a national crisis. He expanded a Malaysian law practice into mainland China. He has represented indigenous communities in matters where legal fees were not the objective. And he has built a practice

operating across litigation, arbitration, mediation, policy advocacy and international commerce.

The result is a legal career that reflects a changing role for lawyers in a globalised economy: not simply interpreting the law after problems arise, but helping businesses, communities and institutions navigate the problems before them.

As Malaysia strengthens its legal and commercial infrastructure for the next phase of regional growth, Dato' David Gurupatham's approach suggests that the future of the profession may belong to lawyers prepared to operate well beyond the courtroom.

About Dato' David Gurupatham

Dato' David Gurupatham is a Malaysian lawyer, litigator, mediator and arbitrator, and co-founder of David Gurupatham & Koay. Called to the Bar at the Honourable Society of the Middle Temple in 1992, he has practised in Malaysia for more than three decades.

He has been involved in complex commercial disputes, international arbitration, cross-border matters and public-interest legal work. Through DGK, he has developed an international practice spanning Malaysia and mainland China, alongside the firm's wider work in litigation, arbitration and commercial law.

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