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Vasanti Selvaratnam KC

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CHAMBERS & PARTNERS SHIPPING AND COMMODITIES SILK OF THE YEAR 2025

Vasanti is recognised as a star individual in the 2026 Chambers and Partners UK Bar Guide for Shipping & Commodities and has been recognised as a leading individual in shipping, commodities and arbitration in the leading directories for more than 25 years. She was one of the youngest females to take Silk and one of the first Silks to be appointed from an Asian background.

“She is always exceptional as arbitrator whether working jointly as a co-arbitrator or leading the case as presiding arbitrator”.

Legal 500, 2026

Areas of expertise

International Arbitration

Shipping & Commodities

Commercial Litigation



Vasanti Selvaratnam KC



Vasanti's Counsel practice embraces all aspects of international commercial litigation and arbitration, including shipping (wet, dry and shipbuilding), commodities, energy, banking and finance, guarantee disputes, infrastructure projects, shareholder disputes, sanctions, conflict of law and jurisdiction disputes, all forms of interim urgent relief, including freezing orders and anti-suit injunctions, civil fraud, pharma and agency disputes. She is particularly noted for her user-friendly hands-on approach to cases and for her ability quickly to get to grips with disputes raising complex factual and technical issues which require a sound grasp of expert evidence and mastery of detail.

Vasanti is regularly appointed as Chair, Sole or Co - Arbitrator in confidential high value international commercial arbitrations across a wide range of industry sectors and foreign seats, including those involving the application of foreign substantive laws including the laws of India, Singapore, UAE, Iraq, South Africa, the EU and Russia.

As Counsel:

Clients include the major P&I clubs, shipowners, charterers and salvors as well as large commercial organisations involved in high value commercial court litigation or international commercial arbitration in non-shipping matters.

As Arbitrator:

She has significant experience of dispute resolution in both a judicial and quasi-judicial capacity. She sat as a Recorder of the Crown Court (2000-2018), is an accredited mediator, and receives regular appointments to act as an arbitrator across a wide range of industry sectors, including but not limited to shipping, international trade and infrastructure projects. She accepts appointments under LMAA and LOF Rules as well as under all the major institutional Rules, including LCIA, ICC, UNCITRAL, SCMA, SIAC, DIAC, HKIAC, APIAC and BICAM. She has particular expertise in cases raising complex technical issues as well as novel or difficult points on assessment of damages.

She regularly handles disputes governed by foreign laws.

Notable reported Court cases

As Counsel

Supreme Court **RTI Ltd v MUR Shipping BV**, [2024] UKSC 18, an important case on the meaning of reasonable endeavours in a force majeure clause in the context of sanctions against Russia and currency of payment.

Supreme Court **ALEXANDRA 1 c/w EVER SMART** (2021), leading case on the scope of the Crossing Rule in the International Collision Regulations.

Rubicon Vantage v KrisEnergy [2019] EWHC 2012 (Comm), the first reported case to consider a hybrid guarantee which is part "on demand" and part "see to it" and the role of the Marubeni principle in relation to construction of the scope of the "on demand" portion of the guarantee.

ETA v PMEPL (2015): first case to determine that a requirement for “friendly discussions” contained in a multi-tiered dispute resolution clause constituted a condition precedent to commencement of arbitration.

Regularly appointed as Counsel in confidential high value international commercial arbitrations across a wide range of industry sectors, including where the governing law is not that of England and Wales.

As Arbitrator

Regularly acting as sole arbitrator in LOF disputes, including one of the largest disputes since records began.

Frequent appointments under LMAA rules in a wide range of shipping and commodities disputes, including shipbuilding and ship sale and purchase.

Frequent appointments under SIAC Rules, including under SIAC’s Expedited Procedures requiring issuance of an Award within 6 months of appointment of the Tribunal.

Often selected as Chair by LCIA in commodities and heavy weight contractual disputes.

Chaired an ICC Panel relating to disputes governed by Iraq law concerning removal of unexploded materials at Basrah port.

Testimonials

I find her very user-friendly, she is excellent to work with and I enjoy the cooperation.

Chambers UK, 2026

Ms. Selvaratnam served in the role of strategist and counselor under challenging circumstances, exercised judgement and rendered strategic advice that was thoughtful and wise.

Chambers UK, 2026

Vasanti is absolutely at the top of her game and would be a go-to silk for complex multi-jurisdictional disputes for me.

Chambers UK, 2026

Vasanti is brilliant at everything she does and is lovely to work with.

Chambers UK, 2026

A pragmatic and seasoned strategist.

Chambers UK, 2026

Vasanti is a class apart - an extremely skilled advocate. Hardworking and ingenious with her thoughts and ideas.

Legal 500, 2026

She is always exceptional as arbitrator whether working jointly as a co-arbitrator or leading the case as presiding arbitrator.

Legal 500, 2026

Very experienced silk, with strong oral and written advocacy. Tenacious in fighting a client's case.

Legal 500, 2026

Her legal acumen is undeniable, she is meticulous in her preparation, and her courtroom presence is confident and effective.

Legal 500, 2025

Strong specialist knowledge of maritime law and practice. Good advocacy skills and determination. Good to work with as a co-arbitrator.

Legal 500, 2025

Vasanti is a fluent and unflappable advocate who puts her case clearly and is never unsettled by points or questions which the court or tribunal throw her. She is determined in pursuit of her clients' case, but with a pleasant personal style which appeals to judges and arbitrators.

Legal 500, 2025

Her individual strengths are great clarity in her written work and brilliance in her advocacy. She is very well respected by everyone at the shipping Bar and is seen as an overall star.

Legal 500, 2025

A very experienced silk who is able to distil complex technical issues and provide strong written advocacy.

Chambers UK, 2025

She is easygoing and friendly, and incredibly bright.

Chambers UK, 2025

Her clients love her.

Chambers UK, 2025

Vasanti is brilliant.

Chambers UK, 2025

She wins massive cases and is a fantastic KC.

Chambers UK, 2025

Vasanti is incredible.

Chambers UK, 2025

Vasanti is a very capable and experienced KC.

Chambers UK, 2025

Vasanti is a fantastic KC.

Chambers UK, 2025

She is very concise and an excellent arbitrator.

Chambers UK, 2025

Vasanti is one of the best silks in the space.

Chambers UK, 2025

A very experienced silk who is able to distil complex technical issues and provide strong written advocacy.

Chambers UK, 2024

Vasanti is one of the best silks in the space. She is very concise and an excellent arbitrator.

Chambers UK, 2024

Vasanti is clever and methodical and could be one of the greats.

Legal 500, 2024

International Arbitration

Vasanti's International Commercial Arbitration practice covers a wide range of industry sectors and institutional rules. She is currently involved either as Counsel or Arbitrator in live arbitrations governed by ICC, LCIA, UNCITRAL, SIAC, LMAA and LOF Rules. She has a particular interest in Middle East, India and Asia related disputes and has a wide client base in those jurisdictions.

Recent cases include:

- a Dubai seated arbitration relating to 'margin calls' and regarding the duty of care owed by the bank in respect of the mitigation of losses due to hedging with implications regarding duty of care across the banking sector;
- Representing the claimant buyers in a dispute relating to the default of the sellers in delivering steel strips from Mexico to China;
- LOF claim making waves arising out of a ship sinking off Sri Lanka alleged to have caused extensive environmental damage.

International Trade, Commodities and Trade Finance

An adept silk, recognised as one of the Top 24 Women in the world for shipping and commodities (allaboutshipping), former Joint Head of Chambers, Vasanti Selvaratnam KC's commodities practice spans the globe and continues to strengthen.

Recent cases include:

Multiple disputes regarding the current Russian sanctions and their implications on the commodities and shipping industries.

RTI Ltd v Cargill Ocean Transportation Singapore Pte Ltd and Cargill International SA - Issues as to applicability of sanctions used as defence to performance of contract of carriage

RTI v MUR (Supreme Court) - Multimillion dollar contract of affreightment arbitration concerning shipments of bauxite.

Shipping, Wet & Dry

Vasanti's shipping practice embraces all aspects of Maritime Law (both wet and dry). She is consistently rated for her advocacy skills and grasp of detail, particularly in technically complex cases, as well as for her user-friendly manner. In addition to her busy Counsel practice she also sits as an arbitrator under the rules of all the major arbitral institutions.

Recent cases include:

Supreme Court RTI Ltd v MUR Shipping, an important case on the meaning of reasonable endeavours in a force majeure clause in the context of sanctions against Russia and currency of payment.

The Alexandra 1 (2021), the leading case in the Supreme Court on the scope of the Crossing Rule in the International Collision Regulations

FMG Sydney (2023): appeal to the Court of Appeal in a leading case on the Head-On Rule (settled before hearing)

Rubicon Vantage v KrisEnergy [2019] EWHC 2012 (Comm), the first reported case to consider a hybrid guarantee which is part "on demand" and part "see to it" and the role of the Marubeni principle in relation to construction of the scope of the "on-demand" portion of the guarantee

Energy & Natural Resources

Vasanti Selvaratnam KC's energy practice is buoyant. She is involved in a number of energy and natural resources matters as either counsel or arbitrator in the UK, Middle East and Singapore. She is active in a large number of sanctions related energy matters due to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

Recent cases include:

Dubai seated dispute relating to 'margin calls' and regarding the duty of care owed by the bank in respect of the mitigation of losses due to hedging. Whether trades for oil & gas futures should have been stopped by the bank and whether bank should have hedged its expose in relation to commodities.

Representing the claimant buyers in a dispute relating to the default of the sellers in delivering steel strips from Mexico to China.

Multimillion dollar contract of affreightment arbitration concerning shipments of bauxite.

Further information

Publications

(Un)reasonable endeavours: force majeure clauses and offers of non-contractual performance

Funding International Arbitration: Legal Barriers to Funding (chapter in Petit and Vakil eds.). Funding International Arbitration <2024>. co-authored with Vasanti Selvaratnam KC}

An assessment of the reliability requirement in the Electronic Trade Documents Act

Good Faith: Is English Law Swimming Against The International Tide?: 2019 Donald O'May lecture, since published in the LMCLQ 2020

Education History

King's College, London (1982 LLB; 1984 LLM Hons 1st).

Wider Engagement

Appointments & Memberships

ICC Member

COMBAR

Chancery Bar Association

LCLB

A

BMLA

LMAA supporting member

LCIA

APIAC Panel arbitrator

SIAC Panel arbitrator

SCMA Panel arbitrator

HKIAC Panel arbitrator

BICAM Panel arbitrator

London Shipping Law Centre (Head of education sub-committee) European Circuit

Bar European Group

Law Society European Group

Institute of Advanced legal

Studies ICC's Banking and

Finance committee ICCA

Languages

Working knowledge French