Would a law deterring libel tourism have an effect on defamation suits by Singapore politicians against US-based foreign media?

The impact is minimal if the suit is won here and the defendants have assets here to be seized or frozen, said National University of Singapore Adjunct Professor Kevin Tan.

Currently, courts usually help other courts of good repute enforce overseas judgements, he said. But once the new law is enforced, US courts will be prevented from enforcing a foreign judgement.

Nonetheless Mr Andy Lem, a partner at Harry Elias Partnership, notes the “primary motivation” for a defamation suit is to vindicate one’s reputation, and Government leaders will continue to assert and protect their rights and reputation.

Assistant Professor Jack Lee agreed: “The moral victory of having succeeded in the defamation claim before the Singapore courts is sufficient.”

Last year, Review Publishing Company, publisher of the now-defunct Hong Kong-based *Far Eastern Economic Review*, and its editor Hugo Restall were ordered to pay a total of $405,000 in damages and legal costs to Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong and Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew after losing a defamation suit. The magazine is owned by American company Dow Jones and Co.

In March, the *International Herald Tribune*’s publisher, The New York Times Co, the editor of *IHT* global editions, and the article’s writer Philip Bowring paid damages and apologised to PM Lee, MM Lee and Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong. The matter did not go to court. ALICIA WONG