

Lawyers must never lose sight of ethics, says CJ

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As competition heats up and lawyers face rising pressures, Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon has urged the profession not to lose sight of what once made the job “very much a calling”.

He recalled how 30 years ago, people talked about the gains from a law practice in “metaphysical rather than in monetary terms”.

He stressed that ethical and moral standards to which lawyers are

held must never be compromised in the current environment marked by rising corporatisation, competition and internationalisation.

“None of these is inherently evil and, in fact, some of these are necessary features when Singapore positions herself as a major regional hub for legal services,” wrote CJ Menon in a foreword to a new book on the profession. “However, there can be a tendency in such an environment to lose sight of the core values in which our profession is rooted.”

The 722-page book, *Legal Profes-*

sion (Professional Conduct) Rules 2015. A Commentary, is a reference for lawyers, judges and the public. It explains every rule of ethics and covers all the relevant case law and disciplinary decisions which concern ethical accountability. It also addresses related legislation, the governing practice directions, rulings, guidance notes and circulars which affect a lawyer’s practice, as well as judgments from other jurisdictions.

Published by Academy Publishing of the Singapore Academy of Law, the book is written by National University of Singapore law profes-

sor and Senior Counsel Jeffrey Pinsler, and is a comprehensive annotative commentary on the rules of ethics in Singapore.

“Ultimately, ethical practice is about character and character is rooted in man’s innermost sense of rectitude (his principles) unobscured, unaffected and uncompromised by any personal interest,” said Professor Pinsler in the book.

CJ Menon made it clear that while a brilliant and technically competent lawyer may endear himself to those he represents, he will not command the respect of judges he must appear before or his peers or the public “if he does not scrupulously observe the ethical standards expected of him”.

In lauding Prof Pinsler, he said the book ensures that no lawyer “should

even be uninformed of what is expected of him in this regard”.

Lawyers said the book is a timely reference in the wake of the professional conduct rules which took effect in November 2015 to suit the modern legal environment.

“We must constantly check the moral and ethical compass even as we press on with our clients’ cases. Without the ballast of professional conduct rules, how would the profession be any different from street urchins slugging it out in the arena of conflict,” said lawyer Amolat Singh.

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