

CJ calls on law schools to reinvent themselves

Rethink curricula, admissions procedure amid changing legal practice and tech disruption, says Chief Justice

Seow Bei Yi

With the legal profession no longer jurisdiction-bound, and technology disrupting lawyers' jobs, law schools should consider reinventing themselves, said Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon yesterday.

This could be done by rethinking curricula, assessing applicants based on more than grades, or expanding graduate programmes for those who wish to make a mid-career switch to law, he added.

Speaking at the 60th anniversary gala of the National University of Singapore's (NUS) law faculty held

In view of the challenges ahead, he added that it may be time to rethink the admissions process, such as by considering a record of voluntary work, or diversity of life experiences. The graduate programme could also be expanded for those who have a degree but wish to make a mid-career switch to law, he said.

at Shangri-La Hotel, he said the legal practice is no longer jurisdiction-bound.

The Supreme Court has seen more lawyers mounting arguments based on foreign and international law. Many major commercial transactions allow dispute resolution with the use of domestic, foreign, or international law as well.

Second, with automation and artificial intelligence diminishing some work traditionally done by lawyers, he said there is a need to think "radically" the way future lawyers are taught.

The Chief Justice said he also hopes to identify more chances for students to take part in pro bono activities, and that NUS Law could consider other ways to entrench a focus on service.

In view of the challenges ahead, he added that it may be time to rethink the admissions process, such as by considering a record of voluntary work, or diversity of life experiences. The graduate programme could also be expanded for those who have a degree but wish to make a mid-career switch to law, he said.

"There is security in attracting the best of each high school cohort, but they may not necessarily prove



to be the best material for the profession decades down the line."

He cited his conversation with his Bhutan counterpart at a conference last month.

Chief Justice Dasho Tshering Wangchuk had explained how the country's metric of Gross National Happiness, with its emphasis on sustainable and equitable develop-

ment, environmental conservation and sound governance, has infused every aspect of Bhutan's society.

Chief Justice Menon said: "I mention this as an example of having the courage to chart a radically different course."

Among those present at the dinner were Attorney-General Lucien Wong, Law Society president Gre-

gory Vijayendran, former law dean Thio Su-Mien, former deputy prime minister and law minister S. Jayakumar, and former chief justice Chan Sek Keong. The event also saw the launch of a book, written by legal historian Kevin Tan, charting NUS Law School's 60 years of development.

byseow@sph.com.sg

Legal historian Kevin Tan presenting a copy of his new book, *The Lamp Of The Law: 60 Years Of Legal Education At NUS Law*, to Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon, with NUS law dean Simon Chesterman looking on. They were at the 60th anniversary gala of the National University of Singapore's law faculty held at Shangri-La Hotel yesterday.

ST PHOTO:
JONATHAN CHOO