

Chief Justice says law schools should reinvent themselves

# Time for radical thinking in training future lawyers: CJ

✓ SEOW BEI YI, THE STRAITS TIMES

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 re-thinking 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 National University of Singapore's (NUS) law faculty 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.

CJ Menon said he also hopes to identify more chances for students to take part in pro bono activities, and that NUS Law

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— Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon

could consider other ways to entrench a focus on service.

In view of challenges ahead, he added it may be time to re-think 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 already have a degree but wish to make a mid-career

switch to law, he said.

"There is security in attracting the best of each cohort of high school graduates but they may not necessarily prove to be the best material for the profession decades down the line," said CJ Menon.

He cited his conversation at a conference last month with the Chief Justice of Bhutan.

CJ Dasho Tshering Wangchuk had explained how the country's metric of Gross National Happiness with its emphasis on sustainable and equitable development, environmental conservation and sound governance has infused every aspect of Bhutan's society.

"I mention this as an example of having the courage to chart a radically different course," added CJ Menon.

Among those present at the dinner yesterday were Attorney-General Lucien Wong, Law Society president Gregory Vijayendran, former law dean Dr 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 an anniversary book, written by legal historian Dr Kevin Tan, charting NUS Law School's 60 years of development.

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