

# CJ Yong Pung How to step down on April 10

By K.C. VIJAYAN

AFTER more than 15 years at the head of the Bench, Chief Justice Yong Pung How will retire on April 10, a day ahead of his 80th birthday.

He will be replaced by Attorney-General Chan Sek Keong, 69, whose post will in turn be taken by Justice Chao Hick Tin, 64, now a judge of appeal of the Supreme Court.

A statement from the Prime Minister's Office yesterday said Mr Chan's term as CJ would run for three years from April 11 in the first instance, while that of Justice Chao will be for two years.

The Prime Minister's Office also announced yesterday the appointment of two more High Court judges — Mr Lee Seiu Kein, 52, who begins his new post on April 11, and Mr Sundarsh Menon, 44, on Monday.

Mr Lee is now the Second Solicitor-General in the Attorney-General's Office; Mr Menon, a partner in Jones Day, is widely acknowledged as one of Asia's leading lawyers in the fields of commercial litigation, arbitration and construction law. He will be appointed as a judicial commissioner for a period of one year.

CJ Yong, who was chairman and chief executive of OCBC before joining the Bench in 1989, leaves behind a remarkable legacy — a judicial system that has been ranked No. 1 in the world, according to a 1993 world competitiveness report by the World Economic Forum.

In a letter to him, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong paid tribute to his contributions, which have transformed the judiciary into one with "a world-class reputation for efficiency, integrity and competence".

He lauded CJ Yong's introduction of technology and management processes to erase a 1991 backlog of 2,000 cases, which, going by the old methods, would have taken five or six years to clear. Hearing dates today are available within three months of the parties being ready, and more than half the writs filed are concluded within six months, noted Mr Lee.

The "Chief", as he is known in legal circles, is also the most prolific judge in Singapore's legal history, having heard thousands of criminal appeals from the Subordinate Courts.

Efficiency was not his only hallmark. Mr Lee also credited him for his work in attracting, managing and developing talent in his role as President of the Legal Service Commission.

He said it had strengthened the Judiciary and legal service, and "dramatically raised the quality of work".

His contributions aside, CJ Yong was also known for not



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mincing his words in court. His acerbic remarks were mostly directed at criminals, but he did not spare lawyers.

On Aug 26 last year, he delivered a stinging rebuke to the profession after three lawyers were disciplined for lying, shoplifting and cheating, saying it was "becoming a most naughty profession in the world".

His upping of sentences for those who appealed their sentences handed out by lower courts is also legend, although figures released by the Subordinate Courts showed that, more often than not, he cut punishments on appeal.

Lawyers hailed his achievements and said his would be a hard act to follow.

Law Society president Philip Jeyaretnam said the CJ brought to his office "an unflinching eye for shortcomings, broad shoulders to take on the burden of reform and immense energy for the tasks he set himself".

"When I became Law Society president, I expected — and received — the same candid and robust assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of my cause, just as much as any advocate appearing before him," he added.

Mr Jeyaretnam said the Law Society warmly welcomed Mr Chan's appointment.

"The practising profession knows that in Mr Chan Sek Keong, they have a friend who thoroughly understands the needs and concerns of the profession," he said.

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