Jaya credits CJ Yong for model judiciary

Law Minister also pays tribute to incoming CJ Chin Sek Kheong

BY ARTI MULCHAND

FROM a legal system that had a backlog of some 2,000 cases to process in 1960, Singapore's courts have become a model for other countries reforming and reviewing their own systems. Judges and court officials, even from England, have come here on study visits.

And that, said Law Minister S. Jayakumar yesterday, is testimony to the "impressive and outstanding contribution" of Chief Justice Yong Pung How.

Mr Yong, 62, retires next Monday after nearly 35 years as a judge, "and we are here to celebrate him," said Professor Jayakumar.

He outlined some of the key changes CJ Yong made to the legal system, including restructuring courts and boosting efficiency with the extensive use of technology.

"CJ Yong created the Night Courts so people could attend court without having to take a day off, specialised courts were set up to deal with specific areas such as garbage and white-collar crime," he said.

The Singapore Law Reform and Revision Division was set up to revise legal procedures, the legal aid service, and the Courts of Appeal and High Court were expanded.

"And as president of the Legal Services Board, he regulated the profession and aggressively pursued efforts to attract overseas talent," said Mr Jayakumar.

"Chief Justice Yong recognises that we cannot have a lacuna in the provision of legal services to people on the High Court bench and in the legal service," said Mr Jayakumar.

CJ Yong started the Judicial Committee of the GCC, he added, and "now the house has grown in size and personality and there is a sense of pride in being a part of Singapore's judiciary".

"And we have moved from the best to the top," he said.

NEW JUDICIAL COMMISSIONER SWORN IN

President S R Nathan officiated at the swearing-in ceremony of Mr Sundaresh Menon as the Judicial Commissioner of the High Court.

Mr Nathan, 74, is seen as one of Asia's leading lawyers in the fields of commercial litigation, arbitration and construction law.

Chief Justice Yong Pung How (front centre) was also in attendance.

Changes in legal service needed to draw in new talent

CHANGES are in order if Singapore's legal service is to remain robust and responsive, and continue to draw in talent, said Law Minister S. Jayakumar.

The present personnel management framework of the Legal Service Commission (LSC), inherited from the British, has stayed largely the same since Independence. Despite radical changes in the demands on legal services, he said.

Changes are needed to bring in people with a wider range of experience, and better personnel and talent management systems.

So a review panel will be set up to look into possible changes over the next few months. This was a unanimous decision based on consultations between the Government with the outgoing and incoming Chief Justice and the incoming Attorney-General, he added.

Among the changes needed: a more broad-based LSC, which would include representatives of the Singapore Bar, the Law School, the National University of Singapore, and the private sector.

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