Sundaresh Menon to be new Chief Justice

By THAM YUEN-C

SINGAPORE will have a new Chief Justice in November.
Justice Sundaresh Menon will be the only the fourth man to take over the reins of Singapore’s judiciary since its independence. He will succeed CJ Chan Sek Keong, 74, who is retiring after six years in the job.
Justice Menon was appointed a Supreme Court Judge just this month, on Aug 1. When this was announced, many in legal circles anticipated that he would soon head the Bench.

Yesterday, he said of his new appointment: “I am greatly honored and privileged to be entrusted with this awesome responsibility, and humbled by the calibre of those who have been so entrust before me... I pray that I will discharge this great responsibility with wisdom, courage, humility and honour.”

Like his predecessor, Justice Menon served as Singapore’s Attorney-General, a post he held for two years from 2010 until June this year. He was the only Attorney-General appointed directly from the private sector to the post. Before that, he was the head of Rajah & Tann, one of Singapore’s largest law firms, and was widely recognised as a leading lawyer in commercial disputes and arbitration.

Lawyers yesterday said his knowledge, experience and track record of accomplishments made him a fitting choice for Chief Justice.

“Justice Menon is an outstanding choice for Chief Justice, in terms of having the legal learning that is necessary to be a great lawyer, the vision for how he wants the legal sector to develop and the management skills to drive the courts forward to be a leading judiciary on the world stage,” said Senior Counsel Alvin Yeo.

So far, only three Justices - Wee Chong Jin, Yong Pung How and Chan Sek Keong - have been appointed CJ.

Paying tribute to CJ Chan yesterday, Justice Menon said: “It is daunting to be faced with the prospect of taking over from someone who has been a towering figure in the Singapore legal landscape throughout the course of my professional career.”

Lawyers said yesterday that CJ Chan’s six-year term as head of the Bench was marked by rulings that helped refine Singapore’s legal system. As a judge, he built a reputation for being fair and compassionate.

“Chief Justice Chan Sek Keong has presided over the administration of justice in Singapore with rectitude and distinction. His judgments bear testament to his deep learning in the law, and a determination that justice be done for the common man,” said Law Minister K. Shanmugam, who was in private practice when the Chief Justice was sworn in.

Yesterday, CJ Chan said his years as Chief Justice had been “a great honour and privilege given to few.”

“I have found this opportunity to serve Singapore to be immensely meaningful and satisfying,” he said of his 26 years in public service.