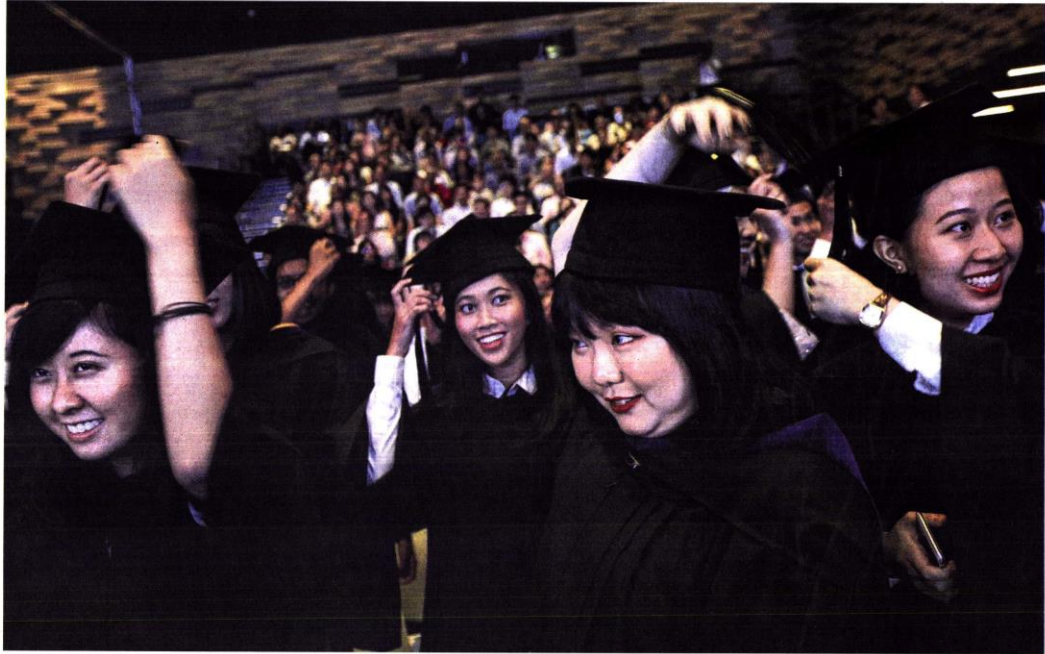


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Headline: Be ready to adapt to changes, Shanmugam tells law grads



SMU law graduates at the commencement ceremony yesterday at the new School of Law building. Mr Shanmugam reminded the new graduates that the legal industry faces pressures from low-cost jurisdictions and technological changes.  
PHOTO: DON WONG FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

# Be ready to adapt to changes, Shanmugam tells law grads

## \$35

The lowest rate per hour that lawyers in Bangalore are paid.

Develop a deeper understanding of legal systems in region, look for new areas, he says

**Amelia Teng**

Be aware of the changes in the world, and be prepared to adapt, Law Minister K. Shanmugam told

Singapore Management University (SMU) law graduates yesterday.

Singapore's economy and legal services industry have done well, but the Republic faces internal challenges in its ageing demographic,

size, and limited land resources, he said.

Competition from around the region across fields such as aviation and shipping also means that there is more work ahead, he added.

"Law doesn't stand alone. It's an ancillary service. You only get legal work if the underlying economy is doing well," Mr Shanmugam told 143 Bachelor of Laws graduates and 36 Juris Doctor graduates from SMU at its first commencement ceremony this year.

The legal industry faces pressures from low-cost jurisdictions and technological changes, he said.

There is the pressure to outsource legal work to lawyers in Bangalore, India, who can be paid as low as US\$25 (S\$34.60) per hour, he said.

"Banks are piloting schemes where cashier's orders and documents don't even need to be exchanged physically," he added.

"All of this really calls for us to be on our toes, for the Government and industry to work together, to identify and grab opportunities.

"Others can catch up, overtake, but we will do well if we continue to outperform... Whether we can do so depends on the very same factors that made us successful in

the first place," he said.

He urged the law graduates to develop a deeper understanding of the laws and legal systems of countries in the region.

"Those who look for new areas will survive," he added.

At the ceremony, SMU chairman Ho Kwon Ping also told the graduates that they are starting careers at a time of "great change in the work landscape" with technological disruptions.

"Just as fintech is starting to affect the work of thousands of financial analysts, legal research will be conducted by sophisticated search engines and artificial intelligence algorithms," he said.

This leaves "the most creative, adaptive and forward-thinking legal minds with some borrowed time, to create an irreplaceable uniqueness about their own abilities," he said.

SMU's commencement ceremony was held on its own campus for the first time, at its new School of Law building which opened earlier this year.

The university's class of 2017 is its 14th and largest batch of graduates.

More than 2,700 of them are being conferred their degrees from Tuesday through Friday.

Ms Beatrice Wee, 23, who graduated magna cum laude with a Bachelor of Laws from SMU and secured a training contract with Drew & Napier, said: "I knew that Singapore's growth is slowing down but I wasn't so much aware of the growth in the region.

"I now understand why law firms are going beyond Singapore into the region for business."

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