

Singapore faces internal challenges, Law Minister tells SMU law graduates

Be prepared to adapt to economic, legal changes

AMELIA TENG, THE STRAITS TIMES

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 mean 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 law graduates and 36 Juris Doctor gradu-

ates 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 who can be paid as low as US\$25 (S\$34.60) an 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."

The minister added: "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 urged the law graduates to develop a deeper understanding of laws and legal systems of countries in our region.

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.

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.

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— Law Minister K. Shanmugam

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