

# Moving into an international arena

Mr Jonathan Tan Jin Quan learns to embrace challenges and uncertainties while working at the Singapore Embassy in Moscow

ESTHER TEO

MR JONATHAN Tan Jin Quan was all set to become a banker upon graduation from Singapore Management University (SMU). But after spending a semester on an exchange programme in Canada, he changed his mind.

He recalls: "There, I met many individuals who pursued interesting careers in areas such as forestry, geology and anthropology. I also read a book by a Christian writer titled *Courage And Calling*, which challenged my perspective about work.

"I decided that a foreign service career would be a good fit for me as it would give me the opportunity to live abroad, leverage the skill sets I obtained in business school and 'give back' to society in a tangible way."

Mr Tan joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) after he graduated magna cum laude with a Bachelor of Business Management from SMU in 2012.

After completing his year-long Russian language immersion programme in 2015, he was posted to the Singapore Embassy in Moscow, Russia, where he is now based.

As first secretary (Admin and Consular), the 30-year-old leads a team of 10 locally recruited staff responsible for the embassy's administration and operations, and reports directly to the ambassador.

The areas under his purview include finance, consular, protocol, security, human resource, properties management, logistics, visas and procurement.

## Rising to the challenge

Mr Tan has learnt to embrace the challenges and uncertainties that come with his wide job scope in his overseas posting.

Running the embassy and implementing Singaporean civil service processes and guidelines in a foreign environment such as Russia is especially challenging.

"No two days are the same;



Mr Tan and his family, including his wife and two young sons, found camaraderie in the small but tight-knit community of Singaporeans residing in Moscow, Russia. PHOTO: MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

my focus shifts from one area to another as needs arise," he says.

He organised Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's visit to Russia in May last year — less than two months after he started work at the embassy.

In recent months, his work included sourcing for and appointing new maintenance, info-communications and security service

providers for the embassy, and preparing for renovation works at the embassy.

Some aspects of his work are also seasonal.

Summer means a stronger focus on property maintenance, which is not feasible during the long Russian winters.

He also tends to get more consular cases from Singaporeans

travelling in the country during the June school holidays.

He says: "Singaporeans in distress require quite a bit of intervention from the embassy due to the language barrier and unfamiliarity with Russia's immigration laws.

"It is always satisfying to assist a fellow citizen in need."

## Growing with the job

In his nearly six years on the job, Mr Tan has had ample opportunities to maximise his potential. He relishes the opportunities offered at MFA.

His first stint there was at the human resource directorate, where he made use of the skill sets he acquired in business school to review the ministry's compensation and benefits package.

Mr Tan also went on work trips to interesting destinations such as Mexico, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Myanmar that broadened his world views.

"The month I spent in Cairo during my first year in the foreign service was particularly challenging as it was soon after the Arab Spring, and things on the ground were still quite fluid," he recalls.

Despite being far from home, his family, including his wife and

two young sons, found camaraderie in the small but tight-knit community of Singaporeans residing in Moscow.

They have gatherings to celebrate events such as their children's birthdays and festivals such as Chinese New Year.

Mr Tan feels that a career in the foreign service is not for everyone as overseas postings may be disruptive to loved ones when it comes to spouses' careers and children's education.

He adds: "The ministry holds its officers to high standards and the nature of our work also means that officers can be recalled at short notice."

"But those prepared to embrace such a lifestyle should take the plunge."

And it would mark the start of a meaningful and satisfying career.

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