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BY NG HUIWEN



SINGAPORE - Law students at the Singapore Management University (SMU) will now have a building in the heart of the Civic District to call their own, complete with a dedicated moot court and a 500-seater law library.

On Wednesday (March 15), Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong officially opened the 23,000 sq m School of Law building, located at the junction of Armenian Street and Stamford Road.

Since the start of the year, its doors have been open to the 730 law students and 46 faculty members, who previously shared facilities with SMU's accountancy and business schools, which are now across the road from the new School of Law building.

The new building, which cost \$165 million to build, was completed in December last year after 2½ years of construction.

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Among the building's features are a pearl-shaped dome, which houses the Kwa Geok Choo Law Library, named in memory of the late Mrs Lee Kuan Yew, who is Mr Lee's mother.



In his opening speech, Mr Lee shared with the 800-strong audience present that his mother, who was a conveyancing lawyer for over 30 years, kept a small personal library of law books in her office.

"Her constant companion was a dog-eared green hard cover book brought back from her student days in Cambridge. It was Law Of Property In Land, by Henry Gibson Rivington, which was then the leading authority in land law," he said. "My mother would have been proud to have a law library named after her."

Besides nurturing young lawyers, Mr Lee also added that his mother had paid special attention to the female lawyers in her firm and she was even a pioneer of work-life balance in the 1980s.

"When a five-and-a-half day week was the norm, she declared a five-day week for all married female lawyers in her firm," he said, adding that she did so to enable them to take Saturdays off to spend time with their families.

Mr Lee later toured the 2,200 sq m, three-storey library, which will focus on developing special collections in commercial law, dispute resolution and Asean law, among other areas.

He also visited the new David Marshall Moot Court, which is named after the country's first chief minister and one of its top criminal lawyers. Mr Marshall died in 1995 at the age of 87.

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A bust of Mr Marshall, donated to SMU by his family in 2011, is now being displayed in the court.

Besides taking advantage of its state-of-the-art technology, students can also benefit from having a dedicated facility that simulates a real court, to better prepare for law competitions.

Said third-year law student Shriram Jayakumar, 24: "The moot culture may be young in SMU, as we only started in 2010, but we've since managed to win 18 championships in global competitions. Now with the proper infrastructure in place, more students will be motivated to go further, knowing that the school is behind us."

In addition, a new pro-bono centre in the law school will allow legal clinics conducted by volunteer lawyers and assisted by SMU law undergraduates to be held weekly.

Previously, due to space constraints, the legal clinics were held fortnightly and housed in the school's administration building.

In his speech, SMU president Arnoud De Meyer called the building "a real engineering achievement".

He commended the building's designer MKPL Architects and its builders Kajima Overseas Asia for their "sensitivity, skills and care", as the project is "constructed on the slopes of the historic Fort

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Canning Hill, on a site encompassing heritage trees" with several conservation buildings and the Fort Canning Tunnel close by.

SMU's law school dean, Professor Yeo Tiong Min, said: "It is without a doubt that the new School of Law building will be a venue where legal minds will be able to meet, interact, network and collaborate."