

Indonesian maid Parti Liyani with her lawyer Anil Balchandani outside the State Courts on Tuesday after the last charge against her was dropped. ST PHOTO: WONG KWAI CHOW



A Gerald Genta watch (top) with a broken strap – initially valued at \$25,000 and later at \$10,000 – and a black dress (above) were allegedly stolen by Ms Parti Liyani from her employer's son Karl Liew. PHOTOS: HUMANITARIAN ORGANISATION FOR MIGRATION ECONOMICS

Committed lawyer leaves no stone unturned and shuns the limelight

Selina Lum
Law Correspondent

The sheer amount of work that Mr Anil Balchandani put into defending a maid left such an impression that High Court judge Justice Chan Seng Onn, in lauding him for his pro bono work, took special note of the number of pages of his written submissions.

For the record, he turned in 279 pages after a 22-day district court trial, while his submissions for the High Court appeal numbered 221 pages – excluding attachments.

Mr Balchandani has garnered widespread praise for securing the

acquittal of Indonesian Parti Liyani, yet the engineer-turned-lawyer has been quick to deflect the plaudits and shuns the limelight.

A statement on the website of his firm, Red Lion Circle, instead highlighted groups such as Humanitarian Organisation for Migration Economics, or Home, for doing the bulk of the work. The statement mentioned that “counsel for Parti Liyani only played a very small part in her acquittal”.

But those who know him say the accolades are well-deserved, pointing to his tenacity, humility and passion for his work.

The Parti Liyani case was not the first time that Mr Balchandani has

represented a migrant worker under the Criminal Legal Aid Scheme and secured an acquittal.

In 2017, after a 26-day trial, he got former SMRT bus driver Zhang Kun acquitted of causing the death of a passenger and injuring another by a rash act for an accident in 2013.

His listing on online portal Singapore Legal Advice stated that the trial was “notable for its length, and complexity which involved mechanical engineering, law of physics, mechanics, and expertise in the area of engine runoff”.

Mr Balchandani received his electrical and computer engineering degree from Carnegie Mellon University in 1994 and worked as a profes-

sional engineer in the United States for about eight years. He then received his diploma in intellectual property law from the National University of Singapore and his Juris Doctor degree from the Singapore Management University in 2012.

He was called to the Bar in May 2013 and practised at several small and medium-sized firms before venturing out on his own as a sole proprietor in February last year.

Mr Balchandani is also a volunteer under the Criminal Legal Aid Scheme (Clas), which is run by the Law Society.

It was through Clas that Mr Balchandani came to represent Ms Parti, said senior lawyer Suresh Damodara, a member of the steering committee that oversees the workings of the scheme.

Mr Damodara was among several lawyers that Mr Balchandani – in an interview with Home conducted before the acquittal – thanked for giving him advice on the case.

In the interview, Mr Balchandani

talked about how the trial was “very difficult and long-drawn” because 144 items were allegedly stolen and he was going up against “a very tenacious set of prosecutors”.

Mr Balchandani also had a police report filed against him for harassment, after he and his team tried to get in touch with people who were not officially listed as witnesses for the trial. “It took a whole year of that hanging over our heads before the police decided that there was no offence,” he said.

Mr Damodara said Mr Balchandani, who declined requests to be interviewed by The Sunday Times, was a committed and competent defence counsel who made a difference in the case.

He added: “Hopefully the example set by Anil and other Clas lawyers will inspire more lawyers to do pro bono criminal legal work.”

selinal@sph.com.sg

SEE INSIGHT B2