

**ADDRESS BY**  
**THE HONOURABLE THE CHIEF JUSTICE**  
**NATIONAL DAY OBSERVANCE CEREMONY**  
**OF THE SUPREME COURT BENCH AND**  
**THE SINGAPORE LEGAL SERVICE**  
**11 AUGUST 2001**

The Honourable the Attorney-General, Judges of Appeal, Judges and Judicial Commissioners of the Supreme Court, and officers of the Singapore Legal Service, good morning.

2. This year, Singapore celebrates its 36th birthday, and the first in the new millennium. In the last few years leading to the turn of the century, our nation has seen tremendous sea-change in the public and private sectors, with the liberalisation of the telecommunications market, the consolidation and strengthening of the banking and financial industry, the greater proliferation of the IT-related sector, and the expansion of the service industry as a whole, to name a few. All these changes have been driven by the reality of globalisation and changing trends, increased public expectation and heightened competition among countries to provide the best in order to attract investments and growth. That Singapore has consistently been rated highly year after year for its excellent reputation as a place to do business, and a place where the rule of law is highly regarded, upheld and maintained, is a testament to the hard work and success, both by the government and the people.

3. The celebration of National Day is not just to commemorate our nation's day of independence. It is also a time to remember and pay tribute to those who have laid the foundations through hardwork and sacrifice, to build and establish the nation as it is today, and to remind us that we are indeed privileged and proud to be Singaporeans. However, the continued success and prosperity of our country cannot be taken for granted, nor can we afford to rest on our laurels. Indeed, as Singapore is experiencing and facing difficult and challenging times ahead with an economic slowdown, this serves as a stark reminder of the fragility of our economy, dependant on those of our neighbours and the world at large.

4. Amidst good and bad times, prosperity and adversity, one of the key organs of State which play a crucial and continual role in nation building, is the Judiciary. Our nation is built on the foundations of justice and equality. The Supreme Court Bench and the Singapore Legal Service are key public institutions, by which we uphold the Rule of Law and administer justice, to promote and protect the interests of our people. However, although the pillars of our foundation remain unchanging, this cannot be said of prevailing trends and needs, which will constantly evolve.

5. As such, we are ever mindful of new and different needs and circumstances which will arise with the ever-changing times, and we must be prepared to deal with them in order to meet the expectations of the public. For us to preserve our high standards of

justice and the administration of it, and lift it to even greater heights, we must continually improve the standards of the Legal Service and equip our officers with the best, so that they in turn, can serve the public more effectively and with pride. In this regard, the Legal Service has undergone tremendous change. The aim is primarily two-fold – to attract and retain good officers by providing job satisfaction and career development, which will in turn and ultimately enhance the administration of justice and elevate the standards of public service.

### **The Singapore Legal Service – Building A Strong Institution**

6. In the first, we recognise that in order to attract the best and brightest to join the Singapore Legal Service, and maintain our position as a premier service, we must keep in tune with expectations. This is particularly crucial when the Legal Service is competing against the private sector, offshore firms and multinationals, for law graduates and those with legal experience, from the same and limited source of talent pool.

7. We have made the Singapore Legal Service a more attractive place to work, with the revamp of the scheme of service, and, in particular with competitive salaries to keep up with market rates; and we had our inaugural dinner last year to promote and foster greater interaction and bonding amongst Legal Service officers from the Judicial and Legal Branches.

8. Moreover, the Legal Service continually provides opportunities for professional development and personal growth. Each year, it sponsors its officers for postgraduate degree courses and executive development programmes both locally and overseas, such as to NUS, top Ivy-League universities and Oxbridge. In order to meet the expectations and aspirations of its officers, the Legal Service will continue to fine-tune its posting system and chart the career paths of officers in the short and long term, in order to enhance career development and provide job satisfaction. In particular, the Legal Service is currently exploring the feasibility of mapping an individual's interest and forte in a specific area of work with the corresponding branch or department within the Service, in which the officer's request and preference will be taken into account. Secondments to other organisations may also be offered from time to time.

9. The Singapore Legal Service offers meaningful and challenging work, that is unique and distinct, and which is found only in the public sector and no where else. For where can one have the opportunity to become a magistrate or a judge, setting the standards of human morality and maintaining the law? Where else can one be involved in drafting legislation and law reform, thus shaping the course of the laws and policies of our nation; in representing the public who can ill-afford legal representation; and in prosecuting and bringing offenders to bear for their crimes, to name but a few?

10. The aim of the reorganisation and transformation of the Singapore Legal Service is to build a strong institution - one which our officers would be proud to be associated with – where our trademark is synonymous with respectability, reputation, dynamism, and integrity. The establishment of an attractive Legal Service will in turn, naturally and

automatically draw to the organisation individuals who are driven, talented and who wish to excel.

### **The Profession of Public Service**

11. However, while the Legal Service aims to attract top talent and improve the quality of our officers, this is ultimately aimed at enhancing the quality of the judicial and legal system. We must not forget or ignore our integral and fundamental role – that the Judiciary and the Legal Service (as part of the Public Service), have a duty to serve. To serve and protect the interests of the public and the nation. To serve the effective and efficient administration of justice. To serve to uphold and enhance the Rule of Law. This is what sets us apart from the private sector and this is what we should be proud to do.

12. As judicial and legal officers, be it of the Supreme Court, the Subordinate Courts, the Attorney-General's Chambers, or in any other branch of the Legal Service, we should not view our existence as merely fulfilling an occupation, a function or a job. It is more than that. We are in the profession of public service. I believe that those of us who choose the Legal Service as a career do so because we have a calling - a higher calling, of which every officer should take pride in. The Judiciary and the Singapore Legal Service should be impartial in and dedicated to the pursuit of public service, because we help to administer justice and preserve public and international confidence in our judicial and legal system. This in turn enhances the image of our nation as a safe, corrupt-free and dynamic country for business and living.

13. Our officers should be imbued with the qualities of dedication, commitment and unity of vision in administering justice and serving the good of the public. In this regard, the Judiciary and the Singapore Legal Service have, over the years, set the course of justice and blazed the trail for the legal profession in Singapore. It has taken many leads in the legal profession, liberalized and changed its landscape with the increased participation of offshore and foreign firms in the local market and the corporatisation of law firms, to name a few.

### **The New Generation**

14. With a new generation of Singaporeans emerging, influenced more and more by international and foreign trends as a result of globalisation, the level, as well as the type of service, that will be expected by the public, both local and international, will similarly rise. As much is now measured by Internet time, the public will demand wider and easier access to service, which is faster and more efficient, yet with uncompromised quality, in addition to different and novel ways to resolve and meet their needs.

15. Hence, we must continue to be innovative and bold as we press forward, in order to enhance the administration of justice and serve the interests of the public and the state, and for us to remain relevant and at the forefront of change in the 21st century. Our officers must continue to equip themselves with the necessary and relevant knowledge and skills to face the challenges ahead. This would include skills that would, a long time

ago, be thought of as unnecessary or irrelevant to the Legal Service, such as IT and management skills; gaining knowledge in a wide variety of laws and legal subjects, including emerging areas as in bio-technology and Internet law; and acquiring the flexibility to be multi-disciplinary, ready to move among the various departments and branches of the Legal Service as and when the call of duty beckons.

16. At the same time, in order to tackle new and emerging issues, trends and offences, such as in cyberspace laws, bio-technology and e-commerce, we must look beyond the confines of the Judiciary and the Legal Service. We must understand the work of other governmental bodies to adopt consistent policies in dealing with new and complex types of disputes, offences and regulatory breaches.

17. However, at the core, the Rule of Law remains fundamental and will be protected. The enhanced level of public service which the Judiciary and the Legal Service can provide, built on a strong and unshakeable foundation of the Rule of Law, will always ensure public confidence, maintain social harmony and attract foreign investments and talent to Singapore. This is necessary and crucial to our continual survival and prosperity as a nation.

## **Conclusion**

18. While we can never fully match the private sector in terms of remuneration and salaries, in particular if comparison is made to the offshore firms and multi-nationals, the one thing we offer which the private sector cannot, is the privilege and honour to be able to serve the public and the nation. At the end of the day, it is hoped that, as public servants, we will not choose to work for the Singapore Legal Service, because we are motivated by pay, prestige or public recognition, but by the satisfaction of knowing that we are working to improve our nation, and create a positive influence that will benefit our people for generations to come. We are, in effect, the public's voice and advocate for, and the gatekeeper of, justice, law and order.

19. In this regard, I would like to take the opportunity to thank all the members of the Judiciary and the Singapore Legal Service, who are dedicated to the pursuit of this cause, and exhort you to continue to serve with pride and dedication, our country and nation.

Thank you.