

THE HONOURABLE THE CHIEF JUSTICE'S SPEECH AT I. INVESTING IN PEOPLE IN THE NEW LEGAL SERVICE,

30 JUNE 2000, City Hall Chambers

Role of the Legal Service

The Legal Service has played a critical role in constitutional and social changes in Singapore after independence. It not only continues to be significant today for our nation's security and welfare, but is now crucial for Singapore's economic growth and competitiveness. We are the primary public institution that secures the continued Rule of Law. Our mission is clear and definite. Legal Officers in the Attorney General's Chambers are entrusted "to enhance the Rule of Law and constitutional government in Singapore by providing sound legal advice and assistance in developing a fair and responsive legal system, furthering good public administration and protecting the interests of the state and of the people." The singular mission of Judicial Officers is "to administer justice".

Collectively, our mission is an even larger imperative in our modern, international context. International ranking agencies' evaluation of the economic competitiveness of countries invariably include the effectiveness of the legal system and the administration of justice as key criteria. The June 7, 2000 PERC (Political and Economic Risks Consultancy) report on the "Quality of Asian Legal Systems" again ranked us top among 13 countries including Australia and the USA. Six international bodies in different parts of the world gave us pole positions. The Washington-based Cato Institute and Canada Fraser's Institute's "Economic Freedom of the World: 2000 Annual Report", considered to be the most objective and accurate measure of economic freedom published, gave our legal and judicial structure a perfect 10 in a survey of 123 countries. Local independent surveys show a remarkably high degree and trust for the justice system. As I mentioned at this year's Opening of the Legal Year, the Subordinate Courts have been used as a model by the World Bank for developing and developed countries.

The need for talent in the globalised economy

These accolades were achieved through deliberate and careful programmes coupled with the talent, commitment, and sheer hard work of our officers over the last 9-10 years. Over the next decade, even more demands will be thrust upon us by the challenges of globalisation and the infocoms revolution. We want to make sure that our terms of service will attract our fair share of talent in an intensely competitive and mobile economy. Although our officers' primary motivation must still remain that of service to the nation, we need to ensure that they are rewarded comparably with their counterparts in private practice.

The new scheme of service

To this end, we have reviewed the remuneration of judicial and legal officers against that received within the private sector. In effecting the changes that the Secretariat will be briefing you on shortly, we have determined that we wish to pay competitively: for experience, for expertise, and for performance. On average, legal officers will enjoy a 14% increase in monthly salaries and a 40% increase in annual remuneration. A higher quanta of performance bonuses commensurate with the performance of individual officers will be expected. The previous benchmark at the 90th percentile of lawyers aged 34 has now been improved to the 95th percentile at age 35. The age of 35 years was chosen as it was found that successful lawyers in the private sector were usually made equity partners at age 35. This will match the salaries of public legal service jobs to those of top private law firms. In addition to these increases in monthly and annual salary packages mentioned, Legal Service Officers will enjoy the following under the new scheme of service:

- (i) an additional Market Adjustment Component (MAC) which will enable the Legal Service to follow changes in market conditions more quickly;
- (ii) additional functional allowances for advocacy and night court duties;
- (iii) additional 'loyalty bonuses' over and above regular performance bonuses;
- (iv) the benefit of faster salary progression as the current salary within the scales and salary points will be replaced by salary ranges; and
high calibre Legal Service Officers, in particular, those with First-Class
- (v) Honours, who have performed well will be given incentives to stay in the Service after the expiry of their contracts.

Remuneration is only the first step. The process and criteria for recruitment and selection will be revised to attract the right talent into the Service. We will introduce individual career and training development roadmaps to ensure that every officer will be properly tracked and developed to his highest potential. Amongst other initiatives, a varied and challenging career will be maintained by the rotation of officers through a cluster of services within the Legal Service and short stints to relevant government and overseas agencies. At the same time, the current performance management and assessment framework will be refined. We want to ensure that at each step, all officers will be assessed, and moved ahead on the basis of their performance and potential. Appraisal will be enhanced by the use of key performance indicators and key job competencies. All these new plans which we will complete in the 4th Quarter this year, will come under the responsibility of a new human resource unit, to be headed by a Chief of Staff.

The way ahead

So, there lie exciting times ahead for the Legal Service. Our new personnel framework is to ensure that we recruit and retain the talent that the Service requires in the new economy. Already, our officers not only experience a rich and fulfilling life-long career, but also the satisfaction that comes with public service and contributing to the common good. With these new plans, our officers will look forward to remuneration and terms of service in keeping with our status as a world-class institution.