



SPH Valedictorian Award winner and law and business graduand Russell Low with his mother, Mrs Ivy Low, and father, Mr Richard Low. The self-confessed former truant made the most of his time at SMU, pioneering a bone marrow drive for minority races, among other things. PHOTO: LIANHE ZAOBAO

# Asia's rise 'a win-win for lawyers'

Its combined economies will eclipse today's major economies, says Chief Justice

By JOANNA SEOW

THE rise of Asia represents a win-win situation for lawyers.

New lawyers are entering a profession that will provide services to a vibrant Asia whose "combined economies will, in the next 20 years, eclipse the major economies of today's world", said Chief Justice Chan Sek Keong.

He was addressing the pioneer batch of law graduates - 106 received their degrees, while a further 18 completed the country's first Juris Doctor programme - from the Singapore Management University (SMU) yesterday.

"Public expectations of your future role in the legal profession are high. You cannot ask for a better and warmer reception into a new and exciting phase of your life," he said.

The entire graduating cohort managed to secure practice training contracts three months before graduation, except for four who opted for different careers.

This is in contrast to the 1960s when there was concern that there would be too many lawyers, said Chief Justice Chan.

For example, when he graduated in 1961 from the pioneer batch of law students at the University of Malaya - the predecessor of the National University of Singapore - he had to go to Kuala Lumpur to do his pupillage.

While the future looks good, he also challenged them to examine their motives for being in the profession and reminded them of their role in society.

"There will always be injustices to right and rights to defend and protect," Chief Justice Chan said. "Lawyers serve society best as hounds of justice and shields against injustices, as promoters and defenders of the rule of law."

In the light of the demands and long hours of legal practice, he encouraged the graduating class to "at all times strive for meaning in your legal career, in service to the community and in your life".

One of those who have gotten a lift in a legal career is this year's valedictorian, Mr Russell Low, 26, who graduated with top honours in law and business management.

"It's my dream job," he said of his appointment as a justices' law clerk at the Supreme Court.

"Being in this job allows me to help ensure the law develops along the right path and to ensure that justice is served, so it's very meaningful."

Mr Low won the top student award for the past four years - a far cry from his schooldays when he often played truant.

"The only times my parents were invited to school was when I had gotten into trouble or had failed my exams."

During his five years at SMU, he pioneered a bone marrow drive for minority races, and co-founded a community service club to help foreign students bond with local ones.

Yesterday's event was also attended by Education Minister Heng Swee Keat and Minister for Environment and Water Resources Vivian Balakrishnan, whose daughter Natalie graduated with a Bachelor of Laws.

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