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ASIA'S
TOP 15 TMT
PRACTITIONERS

WE HEAR
FROM VIRTUAL
FIRM LEADERS

CLIENTS PICK THE
BEST DISPUTES
LAWYERS

THE REGION'S
BEST LAW FIRMS
TO WORK FOR

EMPLOYER OF CHOICE



ALB SE ASIA IN-HOUSE LEGAL SUMMIT 2022

11-12 MAY - PAN PACIFIC HOTEL, SINGAPORE

The **ALB SE Asia In-House Legal Summit** returns to Singapore in 2022 as an in-person event. New to the event this year are the pre and post summit roundtables that take a deep dive into specific issues impacting General Counsels (GCs). Attendees engage in meaningful dialogue with speakers on key issues. The summit uncovers the evolution of the GC's role and provides the opportunity to rethink your operations to align with everchanging business requirements. This 2-day event will equip you with the necessary knowledge and strategies to prepare for the uncertain year ahead.

JOIN OUR ALB SE ASIA IN-HOUSE LEGAL SUMMIT 2022, WHERE WE'LL EXAMINE:

- How GCs are steering their increased responsibilities from legal to leadership to influence and drive the organisation forward
- The impact of technology and social change on legal and compliance work eg: online dispute resolution, the rise of ESG, changing landscape of privacy
- Proactive reputation risk management strategies during a data breach or cyber incidents
- The impact of technology on M&A and the recent rise of SPAC in Asia
- The recent developments in competition law and how they impact your business
- And more

**Agenda is subject to change*

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**Please note that complimentary registration for in-house counsels at this event is at the sole discretion of Asian Legal Business and all confirmed participants will be notified by email. Representatives from law firms and legal service providers are welcome to contact our sponsorship team, Amantha Chia (amantha.chia@thomsonreuters.com) for further information on how to participate in the event.*

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CONTENTS

36

ALB ASIA'S TOP 15
TMT LAWYERS

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COVER STORY

12

ALB Employer of Choice 2022

It's been two years since the pandemic began, and the concepts of "work" and "employment" are starting to look very different for industries globally. Law firms realise that if they want to avoid becoming victims of the Great Resignation, they need to have an honest conversation about the needs of their lawyers. The best ones are able to embrace new ways of working while building engagement in the process.

The ALB Employer of Choice 2022 celebrates the cream of the crop.

Ranking by ALB, text by Elizabeth Beattie

FEATURES

24

Virtual firms, real ambitions

Are virtual law firms the next big thing? Since the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of flexible working, discussions around what the law firm of the future looks like are intensifying, and distributed firms are being offered as a compelling model. In this roundtable, leaders of such firms

offer a compelling argument for office-less practices.

28

ALB Asia Super 50 Disputes Lawyers 2022

In its second annual list, ALB unveils outstanding disputes lawyers in the region when it comes to client service. These lawyers were selected based on client recommendations sent directly to ALB.

Plus:

- *DivinaLaw*

36

ALB Asia's Top 15 TMT Lawyers

The technology sector has become

increasingly prominent in the past few years, partly because of the pandemic, and partly due to the emergence of new areas – from AI to fintech to decentralized finance and everything in between. To succeed in this dynamic environment, the best TMT lawyers have had to keep up with rapidly changing business and regulatory trends.

Plus:

- *Drew & Napier*
- *Gorriceta Africa*
- *Cauton & Saavedra*
- *HHP Law Firm*

BRIEFS

3

The Briefing

4

Forum

7

Deals

8

Appointments

9

Q&A

10

Explainer

11

League Tables

FROM THE EDITOR

Engagement is critical, especially now.

Even before the emergence of COVID-19, which impacted legal work in the past two years, it was tough to be a junior employee in a law firm. The twin forces of technology and heightened competition have ensured that many law firms, chasing short-term profits, are less inclined to invest in their associates, for the associates themselves, getting a start at a prestigious law firm is becoming difficult, but once they're in, difficult hours, a lack of meaningful work and little to no development of skills ensures that they are looking at alternatives like in-house



roles or flexible work – that is, if they stay on in the legal profession at all. From a law firm's perspective, skimping on the development of younger lawyers is a myopic strategy. A law firm is different from a company in the sense that relationships matter that much more; if a partner exits, retires or is for some other reason unable to continue practice, the relationship with the client in many cases dies out. It is just as important to build both bench strength and prepare for succession, and developing a core of strong, committed, accomplished associates will help you do that. And this is where the key question comes in – how can you ensure that people stay? Well, the answer starts at the top. Law firm leaders need to first recognise the importance of engagement. Enthusiasm skyrockets when

they create a positive environment, promote helpfulness, value their staff and provide the resources necessary for success. But more importantly, create a culture that fosters empowerment and accountability which motivates people to find their own solutions and make a difference. This gives your lawyers a greater sense of ownership – one of the greatest professional motivators. This will ensure they stay happy and committed to your firm for many years to come.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ranajit Dam', written over a white background.

RANAJIT DAM
Managing Editor, Asian Legal Business, Thomson Reuters

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BRIEFS



THE BRIEFING: YOUR MONTHLY NEED-TO-KNOW

IN THE NEWS



Khaitan & Co recently became the first Indian law firm to reach the 200-partner milestone after announcing a raft of promotions. The firm, which currently has more than 880 lawyers, reached the 150-partner mark in July 2020.

QUOTE UNQUOTE

"I DREAM OF ONE DAY CREATING A SUCCESSFUL LAW FIRM."

Reality TV star Kim Kardashian tells *Vogue Hong Kong* that she has "never worked so hard" on anything in her life as passing the California "baby bar" exam in December 2021.

IN THE NEWS



A judge in the BVI recently refused to allow Ogier to cease acting for Russian state-owned VTB in a pending litigation, stating that the offshore firm's duties to the court "outweigh" other considerations including reputational damage.

IN-HOUSE LAWYERS PREFER WFH, BUT LET DOWN BY TECH FAILURES

Although the majority of U.S. in-house lawyers prefer not to return full-time to their offices, nearly half have done so, in part because their organizations have failed to effectively adopt new technologies that would facilitate hybrid work arrangements. This was the finding of a new survey of in-house lawyers commissioned by the contract management company ContractWorks and conducted by the UK based research company Censuswide. The survey of 250 in-house lawyers in the U.S. found that two-thirds (64 percent) of them prefer policies that would permit them to work from home, even as many companies are insisting they return to the office full-time. However, 44 percent of in-house lawyers are now back in the office full time because of deficiencies in technology.

50 PERCENT

Percentage of law department heads who named "efficient conduct of operations" as their key strategic priority for 2022, according to a Thomson Reuters survey. "Safeguarding the business" came in second.

3X

Legal services firms operating a consultancy model are growing at three times the rate of mid-market law firms as a whole, according to an analysis by small and mid-cap investment bank Arden Partners.

COVINGTON, AMAL CLOONEY TEAM UP FOR UKRAINE

The Ukrainian government recently announced the formation of a legal Task Force on Accountability for Crimes Committed in Ukraine in order to deliver justice for victims of the Russian invasion. The taskforce includes human rights lawyers Amal Clooney, Baroness Helena Kennedy QC, Richard Hermer QC, Tim Otty QC, Philippa Webb, and Lord Neuberger; a team from Covington & Burling, led by Nikhil Gore; a team from French firm Sygna Partners, led by Luke Vidal; and a team from Withers, led by Emma Lindsay. Each of the firms is already representing Ukraine at the International Court of Justice.

GUIDANCE FROM AFAR

As remote working arrangements reshape office interactions and expectations, law firm leaders are thinking up innovative ways to mentor junior lawyers, thereby ensuring engagement and retention.

HOW CAN FIRMS EFFECTIVELY MENTOR JUNIOR STAFFERS IN REMOTE WORKPLACES?



IP

VINCENT IP, Hong Kong office managing partner, Ropes & Gray

We've been working and living through an extraordinary time. The uncertainty of the pandemic and unprecedented client demand for our services, coupled with the physical distance that comes from working remotely, affects us all. With this reality as a backdrop, we're lucky that prior to the onset of COVID-19 and extended periods of working from home, a culture of mentoring has long been in place at Ropes & Gray. We are a people-oriented business, and hands-on mentorship and training is critical to nurturing junior lawyers' legal talents. We have also kept our finger on the pulse of our professionals and have adopted a more holistic approach to strengthening a greater sense of community. While working remotely, we've strived to keep everyone connected and engaged as part of a community. Given how much time is being spent at home, we've rolled out other types of virtual socials. This includes, for example, virtual wine tasting events, as well as opportunities for associates to order lunch at home, and then hop on a zoom to eat together while doing training. While these aren't mentoring experiences exactly, they are opportunities for associates to connect with their peers in relaxed settings where they can step back from the stresses of a deal. As well as ensuring junior lawyers feel supported in their career development amid a strong culture of achievement, we know that what reinforces these are bonds with colleagues, finding meaning in their work and forging personal connections at the firm.



YAKURA

SHINSUKE YAKURA, leader of the Tokyo office, Orrick

As the leader of Orrick's Tokyo office, one of my priorities is to cultivate mentoring relationships between junior and experienced team members. Mentoring is a vital way to pass knowledge and culture from one generation to the next. It connects people in a firm, equipping more junior individuals for professional growth and increased effectiveness



SUN

while strengthening the broader organization. This was true before the pandemic and took on even greater significance in the era of increased remote work. In my opinion, creating new rituals is key to fostering mentoring relationships in the time of COVID-19. These rituals could take the form of a mentor and mentee meeting for coffee or tea when conditions allow face-to-face meetings. It could involve lingering after a virtual meeting to compare notes. Or it could take the form of periodic check-ins – whatever works for the individuals involved. The key is for both sides to make it a habit like any other, to put it on the calendar and commit to it. Doing so can develop the mentee and invigorate the mentor. It can increase engagement, impart a sense of shared purpose, and contribute to increased satisfaction and performance for the individuals involved – and the firm as a whole.

JUSTIN SUN, partner, HFW

Working remotely has had its challenges through the COVID pandemic. One of the biggest challenges of remote work is of course a reduced amount of communication and collaboration – the lack of face-to-face engagement can make things more difficult for junior employees who don't have such easy access to support and information. We have strived to put activities in place to ensure our high level of engagement across the team has continued while working remotely, so that junior staff feel comfortable to reach out for guidance and help where needed and all staff feel supported.

Some of these activities include:

1. Regular catch-up on Microsoft Teams, to ensure that everyone is connected and knows what the priorities are for the day or week;
2. Creating a virtual space for groups on Teams, so that everyone can say hello, ask any questions, and initiate meetings;
3. Continuing our normal approach of working together on a transaction. I.e. review documents as normal and provide feedback as necessary;



SUCHARITKUL



VACHANAVUTTIVONG

4. Encouraging more phone/Teams calls than emails – this is particularly important when working remotely;
5. Encouraging senior members of the team to check on junior members regularly;
6. Keeping the team spirit alive through non-work-related updates and sending care packages – for example, we recently delivered doughnuts to our teams!

While it hasn't been easy, and we of course look forward to getting back to the office soon, we have found this approach has been working quite nicely so far.

**TIZIANA SUCHARITKUL and
DARANI VACHANAVUTTIVONG,
managing partners, Tilleke & Gibbins**

One lesson that has been emphasized by remote working is that people are social beings and no matter what technology exists to support working remotely, people still crave human interaction, feeling connected and feeling supported, especially during challenging times.

We encourage regular meetings and calls between team members – preferably with video – so they don't feel isolated. We've found that this also helps maintain a level of mutual responsibility and a sense that we are all still in this together, even though we aren't in the same place. Firm leaders and managers are encouraged to "drop-in" on people by giving them a call to discuss ongoing projects and matters, and to chat socially in much the same way as they would have done in the office. In some cases, that has even allowed them to do so in ways that they wouldn't have been able to do previously. This is particularly true across our offices. While a lawyer from our Bangkok office might normally get to visit Vietnam once or twice a year, suddenly she was able to meet with her Hanoi colleagues every week and work with them on documents in real-time, in the exact same way as she would with the team in Bangkok. In that sense, it has really flattened the obstacles to cross-office and cross-practice work, and we're now seeing active mentorship relationships between seniors and juniors in different jurisdictions. Having said that, we still believe that in-person interaction offers so many benefits and fulfils so much of our social needs, and we can't wait to be fully in the office together again. At such time, given the experience gained from our remote work over the last few years, we will know how to leverage the tools and skills acquired through remote working and combine them effectively with the advantages of in-person working. 

UK JUDGES RESIGN FROM HK COURT OVER CHINA'S CRACKDOWN ON DISSENT

(Reuters) Two senior British judges, including the president of the UK Supreme Court, resigned from Hong Kong's highest court because of a sweeping national security law imposed by China cracking down on dissent in the former British colony.



REUTERS/Tyrone Siu

Robert Reed, who heads Britain's top judicial body, said that he and colleague Patrick Hodge would relinquish their roles with immediate effect as non-permanent judges on the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal (CFA).

"I have concluded, in agreement with the government, that the judges of the Supreme Court cannot continue to sit in Hong Kong without appearing to endorse an administration which has departed from values of political freedom, and freedom of expression," Reed said in a statement.

Britain, which handed Hong Kong back to China in 1997, has said the security law that punishes offences like subversion with up to life imprisonment has been used to curb dissent and freedoms. London also says the law is a breach of the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration that paved the way for the handover.

Many of the city's democratic campaigners have been arrested, detained or forced into exile, civil society groups shuttered, and liberal media outlets forced to close under a security crackdown since the law was enacted in June 2020.

Beijing says the law has brought stability to Hong Kong, rocked by months of sometimes violent anti-government street protests in 2019, and that it includes human rights safeguards.

Hong Kong leader Carrie Lam expressed "regret and disappointment" over the move.

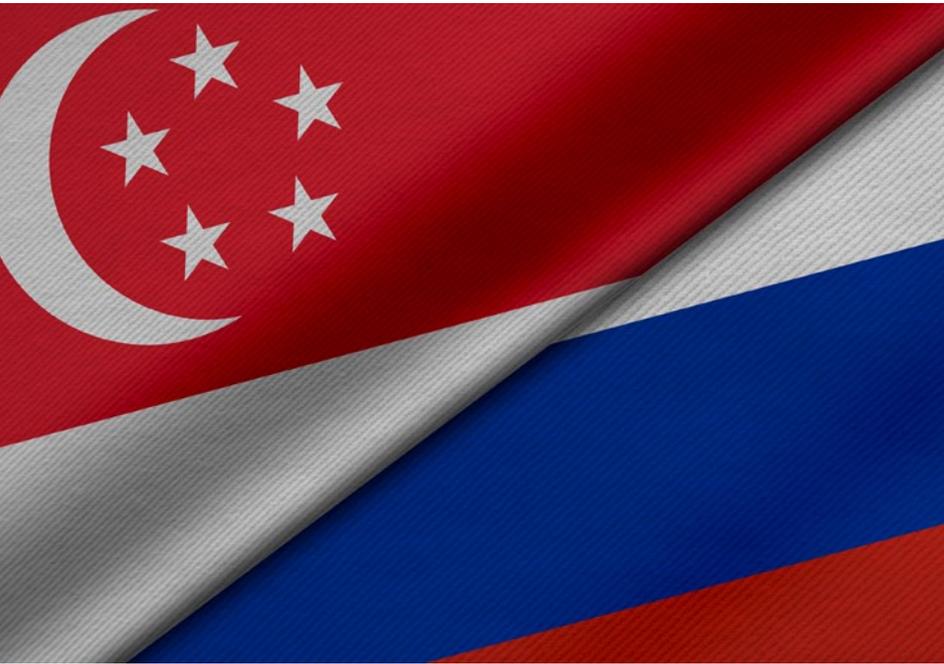
Lam said in a statement that foreign judges had made a valuable contribution to Hong Kong for 25 years but "we must vehemently refute any unfounded allegations that the judges' resignations have anything to do with...the national security law".

Hong Kong Chief Justice Andrew Cheung said in a statement that he noted with "regret" the resignations of Reed and Hodge, saying the judiciary was committed to the rule of law.

The presence of foreign judges in Hong Kong is enshrined in the Basic Law, the mini constitution that guarantees the global financial hub's freedoms and extensive autonomy under Chinese rule, including the continuation of Hong Kong's common law traditions forged during the colonial era.

Reed has previously said he would not serve on the HKCFA in the event the judiciary in the city was undermined.

Local lawyers said the resignations would likely put pressure on the 10 other foreign Court of Final Appeal judges to quit. Six of these are British. Those judges, also from Canada and Australia, are mostly retired senior jurists in their home countries. 



SG RUSSIA SANCTIONS UNLIKELY TO HIT LOCAL BUSINESSES HARD

With Russia's invasion of Ukraine growing increasingly bloody and allegations of war crimes mounting, Singapore has taken a stronger stance than other Southeast Asian countries. In March, the city-state's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) announced sanctions that extend to banks, and export bans on computers, electronics and military items.

An MFA spokesperson said the invasion had set "a dangerous precedent," prompting the government to act.

In light of the restrictions, Singapore's financial institutions are barred from entering into transactions with Bank Rossiya, Promsvyazbank Public Joint Stock Company, Foreign Economic Affairs Vnesheconombank and the Corporation Bank for Development. The ban also extends to cryptocurrencies and takes aim at fundraising activities that would benefit Russia's government.

It was not lost on observers that Singapore had acted independently

in its move to sanction Russia and in the absence of binding United Nations Security Council resolutions.

Chia Voon Jiet, a dispute resolution director and co-head of the investigations practice at Drew & Napier, says Singapore "rarely imposes sanctions on other countries" without such resolutions, and this in fact is "only the second time that Singapore has imposed unilateral sanctions."

However, Chia says, "as the Singapore government considers the Russian invasion a 'dangerous precedent' and an 'existential issue' for a small sovereign state like Singapore, it made the decision to impose targeted sanctions and restrictions against Russia to uphold principles that are fundamental to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of smaller nations."

With regard to the sanctions themselves, he says the measures which target Russian banks, entities and

activities in Russia, as well as fundraising activities benefiting the Russian government, apply to all financial institutions in Singapore.

As a result, "this will likely lead to an increase in compliance costs as financial institutions take appropriate measures to ensure they do not fall foul of these sanctions."

"That said, most, if not all, financial institutions should already have well-established internal policies and protocols in place for conducting due diligence and sanctions screening on their counterparties and transactions. Many financial institutions will also have to ensure that they comply with the sanctions imposed by the US and the EU against Russia, on top of the Singapore sanctions," Chia notes.

"The general consensus at the moment is that the sanctions are unlikely to have significant impact on most businesses in Singapore, although the fact remains that Russia is a sizeable economy. Singapore companies that have dealings with Russian entities or have some exposure to Russia will be most immediately affected. In particular, the flow of funds between Singapore and Russia may be disrupted. Singapore's financial measures may also lead to supply chain disruption and higher costs, especially for companies in the technology, and oil and gas sectors," he adds.

Additionally, the sanctions could lead to some parties having to rely on force majeure or sanctions clauses in their contracts to avoid or delay fulfilling their contractual obligations, Chia notes, adding that this could potentially give rise to disputes.

"Should these sanctions remain in place for the longer term, it is quite possible that lawsuits will arise as parties seek to rely on such clauses to delay or avoid their contractual obligations," Chia says.

At present, businesses and the legal community are still assessing how sanctions and restrictions against Russia could affect their operations and their contractual obligations, as well as the long-term effects of these sanctions, he notes. 

DEALS

\$3.34 BLN**Biocon Biologics' acquisition of the biosimilars business of Viatrix****Deal Type:** M&A**Firms:** Cravath, Swaine & Moore; Goodwin Procter; Saraf and Partners; Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas & Co**Jurisdictions:** India, U.S.**\$1.25** BLN**Coincheck's SPAC merger with Thunder Bridge Capital Partners****Deal Type:** M&A**Firms:** Allen & Overy; Anderson Mori & Tomotsune; De Brauw Blackstone Westbroek; Littler Mendelson; Mori Hamada & Matsumoto; Nelson Mullins Riley & Scarborough; Simpson Thacher & Bartlett**Jurisdictions:** Japan, Netherlands, U.S.**\$768** MLN**Nikkiso's sale of LEWA and Geveke to Atlas Copco****Deal Type:** M&A**Firm:** Baker McKenzie
Jurisdictions: Germany, Japan, Netherlands, Sweden**\$732** MLN**Zinus' sale of stake to Hyundai Department Store****Deal Type:** M&A**Firm:** White & Case
Jurisdiction: Korea**\$700** MLN**ShareChat's acquisition of MX TakaTak from MX Media****Deal Type:** M&A**Firms:** Gunderson Dettmer; IndusLaw; Latham & Watkins; Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas & Co; Touchstone Partners
Jurisdiction: India**\$639** MLN**Mitsui & Co's acquisition of stake in Mainstream Renewable Power****Deal Type:** M&A**Firms:** Arntzen de Besche; BAHR; Barros & Errázuriz; Herbert Smith Freehills; PJS Law; VILAF
Jurisdictions: Chile, Japan, Norway, Philippines, Vietnam**\$239** MLN**Farm Fresh Berhad's IPO on Bursa Malaysia****Deal Type:** IPO**Firms:** Adnan Sundra & Low; Clifford Chance
Jurisdiction: Malaysia**N/A****Marubeni's JV with BP to develop offshore wind opportunities in Japan****Deal Type:** JV**Firms:** Ashurst; Herbert Smith Freehills
Jurisdictions: Japan, UK

INDIA'S INDUSLAW MERGES WITH SOUTHERN REAL ESTATE BOUTIQUE

Indian firm IndusLaw has merged with real estate-focused outfit ASLF, which has offices in the southern cities of Bengaluru and Chennai.

The merger will give IndusLaw a presence in Chennai, with the firm currently having offices in Bengaluru, Delhi, Hyderabad and Mumbai. It will additionally give it a foothold in the premium real estate space in South India.

ASLF was founded in 1993 by partner Anup S Shah. Specialising in property-related transactions – including due

diligence of immovable property, structuring, foreign investment, civil litigation, alternate dispute resolution and arbitration, strategic planning of real estate and commercial transactions – the firm currently has 64 lawyers.

The merger with ASLF continues IndusLaw's steady expansion in the past few months, which has included the hiring of partners Soura Subha Ghosh, Faraz Khan, Ravi Kumar, and Avikshit Moral in Mumbai; Rohit Ambast in Delhi; and Apurbalal Malik in Hyderabad. ^{ALB}



RAJAH & TANN JOINS MENTAL HEALTH COLLECTIVE

■ Singapore Big Four firm Rajah & Tann has joined local mental health non-profit WorkWell Leaders as a founding member.

WorkWell Leaders aims to build “mentally healthy” workplaces in Singapore through a CEO network focused on supporting and prioritising employee mental wellbeing. The law firm joins 18 other MNCs and local companies as founding members of the collective.

In a release, Rajah & Tann said it was there was a shift in the industry as firms “started to prioritise initiatives that address stress, loss of motivation and burnout.” It added that its own measures included introducing flexible working arrangements for staff who need time off to take care of their young children, equipping employees with iPads with remote access to all documents, and publishing regular newsletters and running internal campaigns to promote work-life harmony.

Since the global COVID-19 pandemic, discussions around employee wellbeing in law firms have escalated.

Firms have implemented a variety of work-life balance measures, including permanent flexible working policies. California-headquartered Latham & Watkins brought in mental health counsellors for its UK staff amid concerns of burnout. ^{ALB}

APPOINTMENTS



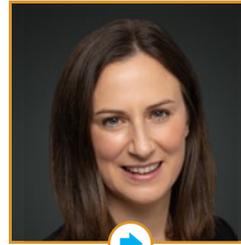
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Kirkland & Ellis

JOINING
Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer

PRACTICE
Capital Markets

LOCATION
Hong Kong



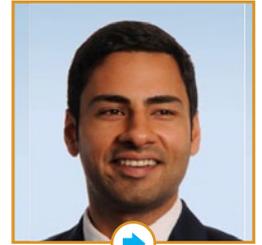
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PRACTICE
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LOCATION
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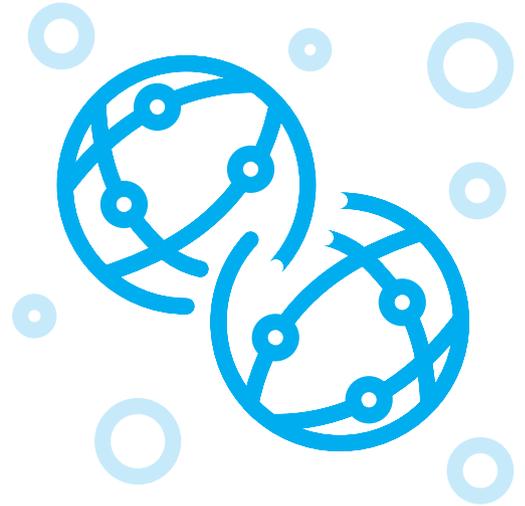
PRACTICE
Private Equity, M&A

LOCATION
Hong Kong

Q & A

LAWYERS AND THE METAVERSE

In February this year, ArentFox Schiff announced that it had become the first major U.S. law firm to “join the Metaverse” by acquiring a land site in Decentraland, a fact that underscored how seriously lawyers are taking one of the latest technology trends. Technologist and futurist **Joseph Raczynski** of Thomson Reuters Legal talks about how the Metaverse will impact the legal space, and what lawyers should do to prepare.



ALB: You’ve written previously about the Metaverse and the preparedness of lawyers. How widespread do you think the use of this will be in the near future, and how can lawyers make sure they are sufficiently prepared?

JOSEPH RACZYNSKI: If by the near future we are saying three to five years, I would say 100 percent that the Metaverse will be used in various forms by the majority of the population in the industrialized world. It has already started. There are two forces at play that are enabling the Metaverse: One, blockchain, which is a unique way to store information in a provable, unalterable way. Second, the emerging hardware is key. When Apple releases its Virtual Reality or Mixed Reality headset in the coming year or so, it will force all of us to head into the Metaverse. Just for perspective, VR is fully immersive, while MR allows you to see the physical world and places digital imagery on top of that.

I have likely spoken to thousands of lawyers over the last several years. They are extraordinarily bright, but with one limiting factor - their dedication to their craft. This means that they do not have the time to lift their heads to see what is coming. All these emerging technologies will impact their practices in some way, as well as the business of law. At a minimum, lawyers need the opportunity to focus on the big four: AI, blockchain, workflow, and the grab bag of general emerging technology. There are a multitude of places to learn about

these things, but I would include some of the classics such as Google Alerts, Twitter threads on these topics, and magazines like Wired, which should be a staple for everyone.

ALB: What kind of opportunities could the Metaverse bring to lawyers?

RACZYNSKI: Imagine a world, much like what we have now, but only digital. It is nearly as immersive and interactive. Then, extrapolate all the problems, issues, benefits, and challenges we have currently in real life, and think about where lawyers play a role. It will be similar. In the beginning, much of the involvement of lawyers will be around IP issues and copyright. Soon thereafter, insurance and contractual disagreements will ensue, but these contract issues could be interesting because of the nature of the platform a Metaverse will be built upon. Since it should rely on blockchain and smart contracts, these disputes could likely be easier to solve at a lower tier, leaving lawyers to resolve more complex issues.

ALB: How does our engagement with digital worlds and environments shape the way we work and the kind of work we carry out?

RACZYNSKI: If we presume we are moving increasingly into a digital world, then every nuance surrounding that space will become increasingly important. Start with AI. Algorithms will increasingly be able to make decisions for us. Yes, this includes much of the legal work out there. These algos start off simply, but will become far more complex, freeing us from some decisions or work. Stack on top of that blockchain, which is trustless (as in,

you don’t have to trust a third-party) database, meaning both AI and blockchain can work in tandem to begin doing some pretty impressive workflows that are automated. When we move into the Metaverse for both fun and business, everything can be quantified, e.g. a house, shoes, art, tickets to a concert, via an NFT (non-fungible token) which uses a

blockchain. Processes will increasingly be leveraging data and AI to make decisions which will rely less on human intervention. I know this can sound frightening, and it could be, which is why as this progresses, we need the best legal minds to understand the implications, yet keep a progressive mindset to guide the path forward. We do not merely wish to replicate everything we have in the real world, but try to evolve it to the best we humanly can. **ALB**



**JOSEPH
RACZYNSKI**

EXPLAINER

THE AMAZON-RELIANCE BATTLE ESCALATES

U.S. giant Amazon's face-off against India's Reliance over Future Retail has grabbed attention in India and beyond. Amazon, eager to make a dent in India — one of the world's fastest-growing retail markets, is now locked in a protracted, complex legal battle of more than a year with Future, stalling its \$3.4 billion sale to Reliance, owned by India's richest man Mukesh Ambani. After colourful courtroom exchanges, in early March both companies agreed to hold discussions to resolve their dispute, but these too appear to have failed. All the while, lawyers are eagerly watching the developments unfold.

▶ **AMAZON HAS ACCUSED RELIANCE OF "PLAYING A FRAUD" IN THE DEAL IT ANNOUNCED WITH FUTURE GROUP. WHAT PROMPTED THIS ACCUSATION?**

In 2019, Amazon India invested \$200 million in Future Coupons — a promoter entity under the Future umbrella. According to Amazon, this arrangement included non-compete clauses that prohibited Future from selling assets to rivals including Reliance, and included a disputes clause that specified arbitration at the Singapore International Arbitration Centre.

The following year, struggling under the COVID-19 pandemic, Future decided to sell assets to Reliance. Amazon stopped the sale, approaching Singapore arbitrators, but that was only the start of the friction. Both parties have waged lawsuits against each other in Indian courts.

More recently, in February this year, Reliance suddenly took control of hundreds of Future stores, citing non-payment of rent it was due. Following that, Amazon took out attack ads in Indian newspa-

pers accusing Reliance of "playing a fraud."

R. Sudhinder, senior partner at Argus Partners says the retail assets of Future Retail "were allegedly transferred to Reliance contrary to the orders of the tribunal," sparking Amazon's accusations.

"It was claimed by Future Retail Limited (FRL) that the owners of its retail stores had terminated the lease arrangements and Reliance,



in order to provide continuity of business, took over the lease of the properties. Amazon alleges that this is a dishonest method of transfer of the retail assets," Sudhinder explains.

▶ **WHAT STRATEGIES HAVE LAWYERS OF THE VARIOUS PARTIES USED DURING THE FIGHT?**

Top Indian firms and lawyers have

supported the different parties throughout the battle. Two lawyers formally occupying the position of Solicitor-General of India have argued for Amazon and Future, according to Reuters.

Sudhinder says that Amazon has consistently claimed that Future Retail "could not have agreed to transfer its business to Reliance contrary to the undertakings in the agreements between Amazon, Future Retail, Future Coupons, and promoters."

Meanwhile, Reliance and Future Retail have contended that "Amazon cannot stop Future Retail from transferring its business and that the shareholders agreement is between Amazon and Future Coupons. Amazon is trying to control the business/ownership of FRL indirectly," Sudhinder says.

The latest development, Sudhinder says, is that the country's competition regulator has suspended its approval to the Amazon-Future Coupons combination. He notes that it "has created further impediments for Amazon," and that will be a "tough road ahead for" the American company.

▶ **WHAT COMES NEXT?**

The legal battle is far from over — Reuters has reported that Amazon plans to file a criminal case against Future in a New Delhi court as the situation escalates.

Another big question, given the volatile fallout is whether the dispute will set a precedent for legal battles between corporates going forward.

The short answer is "Yes," Sudhinder says, noting that "corporates will have to be far more diligent before inking any such deal." 

NORTH ASIA AND SOUTHEAST ASIA/SOUTH ASIA LEAGUE TABLES

North Asia Announced M&A Legal Rankings

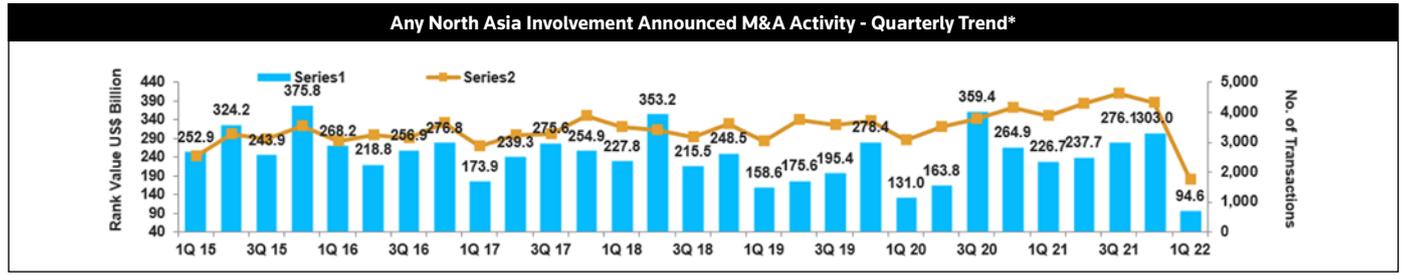
Rank	Legal Advisor	Value (\$MLN)	Deals	Market Share
1	Kirkland & Ellis	13,181.9	11	8.5
2	Simpson Thacher & Bartlett	12,024.0	6	7.7
3	Paul, Weiss	10,337.6	4	6.6
4	Sidley Austin LLP	8,782.6	5	5.6
5	AZB & Partners	8,085.8	4	5.2
6*	Mannheimer Swartling Advokatbyra	7,477.6	1	4.8
6*	Advokatfirman Vinge	7,477.6	1	4.8
8	Nishimura & Asahi	6,901.0	37	4.4
9	Mori Hamada & Matsumoto	6,125.7	17	3.9
10	Anderson Mori & Tomotsune	5,698.9	23	3.7

(*tie) Based on Rank Value including Net Debt of announced M&A deals (excluding withdrawn M&A)

North Asia Announced M&A Financial Rankings

Rank	Legal Advisor	Value (\$MLN)	Deals	Market Share
1	Morgan Stanley	21,782.3	20	14.0
2	Goldman Sachs & Co	18,974.1	16	12.2
3	JP Morgan	10,352.6	3	6.6
4	Mizuho Financial Group	9,105.5	31	5.8
5	China International Capital Co	7,655.5	21	4.9
6	Nomura	7,072.0	26	4.5
7	Sumitomo Mitsui Finl Grp Inc	5,759.4	31	3.7
8	UBS	5,361.9	7	3.4
9	Moelis & Co	5,160.0	5	3.3
10	Barclays	4,444.2	5	2.9

(*tie) Based on Rank Value including Net Debt of announced M&A deals (excluding withdrawn M&A)



Southeast Asia / South Asia Announced M&A Legal Rankings

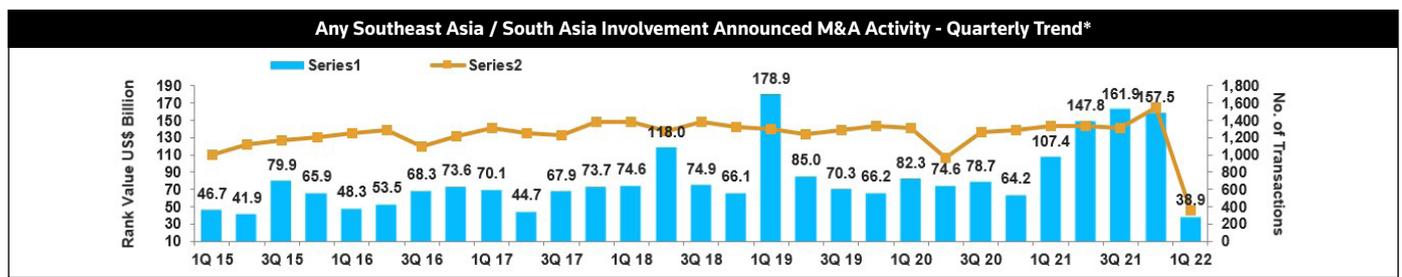
Rank	Legal Advisor	Value (\$MLN)	Deals	Market Share
1	AZB & Partners	8,395.0	45	11.8
2	Sullivan & Cromwell	5,942.1	4	8.3
3	Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer	5,571.4	3	7.8
4*	Bredin Prat	5,543.4	1	7.8
4*	De Brauw Blackstone Westbroek	5,543.4	1	7.8
4*	Gide Loyrette Nouel	5,543.4	1	7.8
7	Khaitan & Co	4,837.6	23	6.8
8	Allen & Overy	3,995.3	6	5.6
9	K Law Solicitors	3,711.4	10	5.2
10	Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas & Co	3,678.9	5	5.2

(*tie) Based on Rank Value including Net Debt of announced M&A deals (excluding withdrawn M&A)

Southeast Asia / South Asia Announced M&A Financial Rankings

Rank	Legal Advisor	Value (\$MLN)	Deals	Market Share
1	Citi	12,584.8	6	17.7
2	Goldman Sachs & Co	8,451.5	5	11.9
3	JP Morgan	7,730.6	5	10.8
4	Rothschild & Co	7,494.3	8	10.5
5	Credit Suisse	7,129.8	5	10.0
6	Morgan Stanley	6,336.5	11	8.9
7	UBS	6,085.0	3	8.5
8	PJT Partners Inc	3,835.0	2	5.4
9*	Advisory Grp Eq Svcs Ltd	3,652.7	1	5.1
9*	Capital Markets Corporation	3,652.7	1	5.1

(*tie) Based on Rank Value including Net Debt of announced M&A deals (excluding withdrawn M&A)



*League tables, quarterly trends, and deal lists are based on the nation of either the target, acquirer, target ultimate parent, or acquirer ultimate parent at the time of the transaction. Announced M&A transactions excludes withdrawn deals. Deals with undisclosed dollar values are rank eligible but with no corresponding Rank Value. Non-US dollar denominated transactions are converted to the US dollar equivalent at the time of announcement of terms. NORTH ASIA: China, Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan; SOUTHEAST ASIA: Singapore, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Timor-Leste; SOUTH ASIA: India, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka. Data accurate as of 6 April 2022.

ASIAN LEGAL BUSINESS

EMPLOYER OF CHOICE

It's been two years since the pandemic began, and the concepts of "work" and "employment" are starting to look very different for industries globally.

Law firms realise that if they want to avoid becoming victims of the Great Resignation, they need to have honest conversations about the needs of their lawyers. The best ones are able to embrace the new ways of working, while building engagement in the process. This year's ALB Employer of Choice celebrates the cream of the crop. **BY ELIZABETH BEATTIE**

■ In 2021, the Great Resignation cast a shadow over much of the employment market, including the legal community, prompting internal strategising and offers for higher salaries.

However, even with the money being thrown around, law firm leaders in many markets have witnessed a shift in expectations, prompting conversations about flexible working environments and internal culture.

Raymond Mah, managing partner of Malaysia's MahWengKwai & Associates (MWKA), says the pandemic has brought about increased reflection and self-awareness.

"Many are striving to better manage stress and burnout to achieve better work-life integration. Hence, organisations with toxic workplace cultures, poor communication or unrealistic workloads may find it difficult to retain talent. Some teammates realised that legal practice was not for them, and we supported them in their transition into other opportunities including going in-house and other creative pursuits – such as starting a media company," Mah says.

For some, he says, the thought of resignation "was really a call for help."

"Honest conversations, changes in portfolios to cater for new interests and coaching on self-leadership competencies have helped us help our teammates shape their career paths," he adds.

Other workers have also prioritised personal "bucket list" items and pursuits in addition to their career such as becoming an author, speaker, learning to code, or being more present in their home life, Mah notes, thus requiring a change in work hours, or needing greater flexibility.

"Scheduled unpaid leave and career breaks have allowed our employees to pursue their masters overseas, and deal with familial issues, personal commitments or interests. Part-time and job-sharing arrangements have helped us welcome back moms into the workplace," he tells ALB.

For the firm, in order to support shifting working arrangements, and

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Oldham, Li & Nie
Paul Hastings
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L&L Partners Law Offices
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S&A Law Offices (Formerly
Singh & Associates)
Trilegal

INDONESIA

ABNR
Dentons HPRP
Hiswara Bunjamin & Tandjung

KOREA

Bae, Kim & Lee
Kim & Chang
Peter & Kim
Shin & Kim
Yulchon

MALAYSIA

MahWengKwai & Associates
LAW Partnership
Zul Rafique & Partners

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Quisumbing Torres
Romulo
Villaraza & Angangco

SINGAPORE

Drew & Napier
Harry Elias Partnership
Helmsman
Stephenson Harwood

THAILAND

Chandler MHM
Kudun & Partners
Tilleke & Gibbins
Weerawong, Chinnavat and Partners

VIETNAM

LNT & Partners
Rajah & Tann LCT Lawyers
Tilleke & Gibbins

ensure client needs are met, the firm implemented technological change to support this.

Mei Lum, chief technology officer at MWKA, describes the shift: "In change management, the lack of clear policies and guidelines creates friction. Talk about changing culture and improving client experience is meaningless without implementing time management and project management systems to help our people communicate better with each other, helping them achieve clear handovers, asynchronous communication and better manage work expectations and familial obligations," she says.

"As a firm, we realise that flexibility and autonomy should not be temporary measures. We have focused on supporting mental health, improving legal project management, fine-tuning communication policies, setting up healthy boundaries, and reinforcing respect for each other's working hours and personal time. For example, we work collaboratively with our clients on their documents to avoid unnecessary back and forth and intentionally manage clients' expectations on timelines," Lum says, noting, in a post-pandemic world, "we see a Great Digital Skills Divide and are purposefully increasing the digital competence of our people. We've developed advanced digital skill sets, knowledge management and new ways of work to help our people better navigate the future."

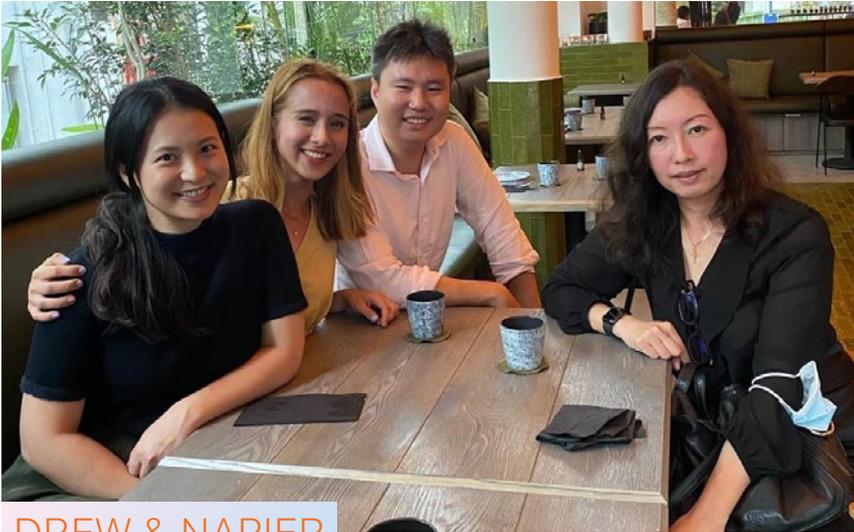
CHANGING ATTITUDES

While LNT & Partners in Vietnam haven't been directly affected by the Great Resignation, the firm has observed a change in attitudes from legal talent.

"Workers have had more time to assess their priorities in life during the COVID-19 pandemic," they say.

When Vietnam locked down in 2021, the firm implemented a work from home policy during the initial days of the pandemic to ensure workers' health wasn't risked and subsequently carried out training, inviting collaboration and feedback from the team.

Chisako Takaya, co-managing partner of Thailand's Chandler MHM,



DREW & NAPIER

also notes that the Great Resignation trend isn't as visible in the Southeast Asian country as it is elsewhere.

"This is not something we have seen occur in Thailand, as has been the case in other markets. Because of

the pandemic, there has been a reduction in recruitment over the past two years, but that is now bouncing back," Takaya says.

The firm maintained "steady recruitment" over the past two years during the

COVID-19 pandemic as it "takes a long-term view of the market," she says.

"We also supported our employees when they had to work remotely, to ensure that they still felt very much part of the team. In the longer term we are addressing the changing expectations around the quality of working life and flexible working arrangements," Takaya adds.

STRONG INTERNAL CULTURE

Strong internal culture is often cited as the reason law firms are successful in holding on to good talent. Maintaining this during these challenging times is not easy, and requires ongoing effort.

Tiziana Sucharitkul and Darani Vachanavuttivong, managing partners of the Thailand-headquartered Tilleke & Gibbins, say the firm has a reputation as a welcoming, inclusive place to work.

"It's almost become a cliché to say that any workplace is 'like a family,' but

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it really is the phrase that comes up the most when people talk about working here," they say.

"There are a lot of factors that go into maintaining that, but it essentially comes down to putting fairness and equity at the heart of everything we do and ensuring that everyone feels that the workplace is inclusive. We work hard to maintain that and we're very proud of the results – in addition to having exceptionally high retention rates and a very diverse workforce, many of those that do leave the firm come back to us within a few years because they miss the working environment," Tiziana and Darani add.

Mah says MWKA's culture is founded on respect and open communication. "We trust our team and we learn, constantly," he says, noting that investment in technology and innovation has "empowered our people to work remotely and flexibly, more efficiently and collaboratively."



LNT & PARTNERS

Additionally, the firm elicits advice on how they can do better. "We have the courage to ask for feedback and the commitment to implement suggestions for improvement from our people, clients, vendors and community

partners to better our product offerings and service delivery regularly," Mah says.

At Chandler MHM, Takaya says the firm benefits from a multicultural culture, with lawyers from diverse

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backgrounds, “which means that we benefit from the unique experiences and cultural perspectives that each has.”

“This also means that it is important that our firm has an environment

in which mutual respect, regardless of our differences, is the norm. We ensure that our employees can work with each other to the best of their ability and be their authentic selves. Our aim is also to provide a

supportive learning environment for younger lawyers to grow as professionals as they develop their careers with us. In addition to providing skills training our management team leads by example, acting as role models for more junior team members,” Takaya says.

For LNT & Partners, the firm’s core values are “teamwork, professional and learning and development.”

“Teamwork, we respect and support each other, synergy and use in bringing good life for all participants. Professional, we recruit the best, honing professional skills, meeting deadlines, dedication and bringing values to the brand LNT & Partners in the market. Learning and development, we learn by doing, change constantly, modernize the system, provide quality work with innovative and practical solutions to our clients and enrich ourselves as professionals,” says the firm.

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A GOOD FIT

With well-established internal cultures, ensuring a good fit is a critical consideration when it comes to hiring and retaining good staff. But each firm takes an active approach when it comes to their retention strategies.

“Our strategy focuses on aligning interest with growth and leadership opportunities,” says Mah of MWKA. “Regular check-ins and open communication allow us to identify and pursue opportunities productively and resolve issues proactively. We provide one-on-one coaching to align personal and professional goals.”

Lum adds that the firm also celebrates together. “To keep our teammates engaged and connected we hold monthly birthday celebrations and morning coffee meetups (online and in-person). We provide opportunities for networking both locally and internationally. Our partners will be meeting our fellow Asian and European members



of the League of Lawyers in Switzerland later this year,” she says noting the firm’s Toastmasters club helps members improve their public speaking skills.

At Singapore’s Drew & Napier, director Blossom Hing says the firm’s

philosophy has always been “to treat talent as our top priority and we will continue to do so.”

“Young lawyers join a team led by a senior lawyer and are mentored by lawyers within the team who

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CHANDLER MHM

have varying years of experience. An open-door and team-based system allow more experienced lawyers to constantly communicate with and guide the younger lawyers in a safe space, thereby ensuring that each lawyer is encouraged to constantly grow and develop into the next stage of his or her career with confidence," she says.

"Our senior lawyers, having benefited themselves from the mentorship and training they received are committed to invest time and effort to understand the hopes, expectations and concerns of each member of their team. The close relationship among the lawyers within a team enables more senior lawyers to help make sense of the myriad of challenges faced by young lawyers and has been key to ensuring that we have done well on talent retention despite the challenges of the pandemic," Hing notes.

For LNT & Partners, retention stems from a commitment to provide lawyers with a variety of growth and development opportunities, "from organising internal training sessions on legal expertise as well as soft skills,

to informing them of external courses and events which they might find useful, encouraging them to attend and supporting them financially if they do," they say, noting they build talent from fresh graduates and aim to promote internally while providing all members "equal opportunities to become partners."

"We have two partners who started as junior associates at the firm around ten years ago. The spirit of teamwork has always been encouraged within LNT," it says.

MEANINGFUL WORK

Retention strategies are one side of the coin, but meaningful work is something often spoken about as an antidote to the great resignation and a way to ensure employee engagement.

Tiziana and Darani of Tilleke & Gibbins say they don't think law firm leaders should define 'meaningful work' unilaterally.

"Only the employees themselves can do that, and it means something different to each person. We're careful to make sure that we're asking them that question regularly and allocating

appropriate work to meet their definition wherever possible. We're fortunate to be large enough to be able to build roles around each employee's skillset and professional goals, without being so large that people feel anonymous and stuck inside a rigid framework," they say.

For LNT & Partners, it's important that employees can "feel joyful in their daily work and see their path to moving forward."

"On the employer side, we have always been of the view that every member of the firm has the right to voice their opinion about their workplace and the firm's leadership, and that the leadership has a responsibility to take into account these opinions," it says.

Mah of MWKA says for the firm, meaningful work is viewed as "the result of aligning passion with the delivery of effective solutions."

"A lot of professional and personal satisfaction comes from seeing how our work impacts individuals and the communities around us. As an organisation, we have identified five of the Sustainable Development Goals

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promoted by the United Nations. Our founder leads by example with his contribution as a Human Rights Commissioner. Our family law team has been at the forefront of strategic litigation concerning Malaysian citizenship for abandoned and adopted children, resulting in us winning the ALB Family Law Firm of the Year Award in 2021," Mah says.

"We also encourage our lawyers to participate in pro bono and community projects, which have included coaching underprivileged school children on digital enablement and legal awareness. Our work is not always confined to legal issues. Our lawyers collaborate with our talent in finance, human resources and technology (MWKA Technologies Pte Ltd) to solve complex problems and provide client value. For example, litigation support, financial analysis, data security and regulatory compliance automation," he adds.

Takaya says the firm is supportive of their employees as people, and forge long term relationships with them.

"We focus on professional development and providing career progression to maintain a high retention rate.

It is understandable however that from time to time for personal or professional reasons employees may choose other paths in life. In those situations, we remain supportive and have on many occasions welcomed back alumni to their previous or new roles within the firm," she says.

"There has been a lot of attention in the media on low employee engagement at work globally. As a firm we are mindful of ensuring that employees are in roles that are appropriate for them and routinely monitor workloads to ensure that these are appropriately distributed. Particularly during the COVID pandemic, we have focused on ensuring the health and safety of our employees," Takaya adds.

Tiziana and Darani say the firm's approach to development and retention "mixes quantitative data analysis and a fixed development framework with qualitative individual appraisal and ongoing continuous improvement."

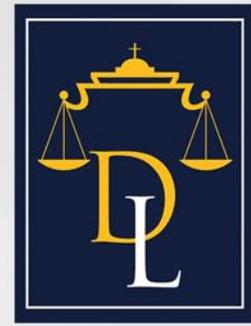
"That continuous improvement is fairly unique in that it isn't just about improving employees — it's about the firm itself and the approach we take to supervision, development, and

appraisal. If employees have ideas about how to improve the development system for their benefit and that of others, they are encouraged to share them and we take that feedback very seriously," they say, noting that at the moment they're in the process of developing a revamped mentorship system thanks to one suggestion from an employee.

"We'll soon be rolling out channels for feedback on working practices—above and beyond our annual employee experience survey—at the suggestion of another. This kind of engagement ensures that the development of our associates and staff isn't just something dictated from the top—it's a collaborative effort that everyone has a hand in, and people really appreciate that as they feel that they play a significant role in their development and career progression," they add.

CULTURE OF COLLABORATION

Veeranuch Thammavaranucept, senior partner of Thailand's Weerawong, Chinnavat & Partners, says that people are a priority for the firm — "our philosophy is that the firm is a platform to



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support all lawyers' advancement in the profession," Veeranuch says, noting the firm "emphasizes a culture of collaboration."

For lawyers, ensuring this sense of investment in the firm brand, and engagement throughout each step of their career requires a long-term view and close relationships with staff.

Takaya of CMHM says junior lawyers are given opportunities to work in different areas of practice so that they can decide which areas they would like to develop further in.

"More senior lawyers are encouraged to develop areas of expertise and practice that they have a particular interest in. As one of the larger law firms in Thailand with a broad range of practice areas we are able to offer our lawyers the opportunity to develop in the areas they are most passionate about," she adds.

For MWKA, ensuring staff longevity stems back to how talent is hired in the first place.

"Half the challenge is won when we find people who share our core values and our passion for client service," says Mah. "Next, we focus on

"Our philosophy is that the firm is a platform to support all lawyers' advancement in the profession."

— Veeranuch Thammavaranucept,
Weerawong, Chinnavat & Partners

providing well-rounded opportunities for personal and professional growth, including access to a breadth of practice areas. Our professional development plan sees our pupils develop into partners and industry thought leaders."

Lum adds that the right support makes work fun. "We effectively address stress creators with structured work planning, team collaboration

for clarity and regular check-ins. Collaborative brainstorming (remote and in-person) between cross-functional teams has also worked wonders for our team engagement," she says.

At its crux, the firm says its internal culture is about building a likeminded team of diverse talent, and that creates an environment where people thrive.

"We put our words into action by supporting not just our lawyers but all our teammates equally. With our support and encouragement, our clerk with just a high school certificate has gone on to complete her law degree and is now our legal practice manager," Mah says.

"One of our pupils after several years of practice took a career break to pursue his Master's in International Economic Law in China and is now a partner with the firm. We have mothers who have previously left the workforce return to work with us on flexible arrangements giving us the benefit of their vast working experience. When our people get better, we're able to perform better as a team, which ultimately benefits our clients too," he adds. 

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VIRTUAL FIRMS, REAL AMBITION

Are virtual law firms the next big thing? Since the COVID-19 pandemic and rise of flexible working, discussions around what the law firm of the future looks like are intensifying, and distributed firms are being offered as a compelling model. In this roundtable, leaders of such firms offer a compelling argument for office-less practices. **BY ELIZABETH BEATTIE**

ALB: How does the running of a virtual law firm differ from that of a traditional law firm? As managing partner, what does the average day look like for you?

MICHAEL PIERSON, managing partner, global corporate, FisherBroyles: From a client's perspective, our law firm operates quite similarly to other peer firms of our size: We are built to enable our partners to focus only on delivering superior legal services. During the COVID-19 pandemic, all law firms were forced to

adopt a remote model, which our firm pioneered 20 years ago. I suspect that the biggest difference is in our constitution. We were specifically purpose-built as a decentralised, semi-autonomous technology-enabled firm that enables us to manage a distributed partnership from anywhere. Our formula-based compensation model allows us to manage a large, Am Law 200 firm more efficiently and effectively than others. With very lean management

and a focus on applying bright-line rules, the lack of discretion in our compensation model means that our firm seeks to treat our lawyers fairly and without bias. Like most senior leaders of large organisations, my day can be spent setting strategy and communicating messaging, reviewing financials, executing growth initiatives, interacting with the executive committee, and speaking with my practice group leaders. However, it can also involve meeting new partner candidates,

speaking with fellow partners, running firmwide partnership meetings, and practicing securities law for our many clients. Most of all, my role involves making decisions that further the growth of the partnership, challenging and empowering our people to make great decisions, and problem-solving by allocating and deploying our talent. Above all, I strive to lead by example and to strike a positive tone.

DAVID REIDY, managing partner, Scale: We think of ourselves as a modern firm operating on a distributed platform. Because of the flexibility of our model, we can compete for the best talent in the country—and that’s the managing partner’s first job, to find the best people.

GRANT WALSH, co-founder and co-managing partner, Culhane Meadows: Running a remote-office law firm has many of the same duties and responsibilities as a traditional law firm—we’re managing both our own practices, making sure that the firm is functioning well and that our partners are being supported, and that our clients are happy.

The difference comes in how you build and maintain the culture within a distributed environment and, for us, the culture itself which is deliberately distinct from that of a traditional firm. A big part of that is bringing in attorneys who want to do things in a new and more efficient way, as well as having the technology in place to allow partners to work seamlessly with colleagues and clients from anywhere.

As for my day-to-day work, we divide up much of the operational and management duties between the five members of our leadership team. My work focuses on marketing, relationships, and recruitment, which means that I’m meeting with partners and prospective partners on a regular basis—and supporting my colleagues in their client development initiatives, too.

That means that I do a lot of traveling, but because I work from my home office most of the time, I also get to be a big part of my kids’ lives on a regular basis. So, I may be across the country meeting a prospect early in the week, but be home to take my youngest to school

and attend a soccer game with one of my older kids later in week. Having a work-life balance is really all about being able to take care of the most important thing at that moment, whether it’s spending extra time with one of my kids after they had a rough day at school, or saying good night early so that I can go tackle some urgent work e-mails once the kids are in bed. I’ve found that having the ability to integrate my work and home life gives me the ability to be better at both.



“We are often asked whether we are several hundred mini practices under one common umbrella. Nothing could be further from reality. Our lawyers often practice in teams, and our guidance is consensus-driven by current law and up-to-date market norms. I often say that under the hood, we look and feel a lot like the large, global law firms where many of us practiced previously.”

— Michael Pierson, FisherBroyles

ALB: In what ways do your priorities differ from leaders of traditional law firms?

REIDY: We do not struggle with the high turnover and retention issues facing traditional firms. This allows us to focus on strategic growth, and on building teams to strengthen client relationships.

WALSH: Our entire leadership team is much more focused on the needs of our clients and our partners. We don’t have the overhead of a traditional firm

and that financial freedom means that we’re not pressuring our partners to bill a ton of hours to meet quotas, or raising our client rates every year. In fact, we operate more like a modern business, with a technology-forward approach and an emphasis on efficiency and value.

Another key difference is that we prioritise collaboration not competition. Many traditional firms have a culture that pits attorneys against each other for client origination or to increase profits for the firm. We think that working together is a superior way to serve our clients, and it’s a much nicer atmosphere to work in.

PIERSON: Our firm does not have billable quotas, so we are free to focus on excellence and client service, responding to partner feedback, improving our firm experience, and continuing to build the next-generation law firm.

ALB: What are some common misconceptions about virtual law firms among clients as well as lawyers in private practice?

REIDY: The secret’s out about distributed firms. In the past, some clients may have wondered if the bench strength was there, in terms of staffing deals and litigation, but clients have embraced our model because of the quality of our team and the value that we bring as former GCs and business owners ourselves. On the talent side, lawyers who are accustomed to handing over 60 to 70 percent of their value to a traditional law firm have realised they can build a more rewarding practice, with better economics, at Scale.

PIERSON: We are often asked whether we are several hundred mini practices under one common umbrella. Nothing could be further from reality. Our lawyers often practice in teams, and our guidance is consensus-driven by current law and up-to-date market norms. I often say that under the hood, we look and feel a lot like the large, global law firms where many of us practiced previously.

WALSH: The word “virtual” implies something that’s not real, but Culhane Meadows is a very real national law firm with about 70 real lawyers who serve over 700 real clients. That’s why we prefer

more accurate terminology like remote, cloud-based, distributed, alternative model, or non-traditional to describe our firm. At the very beginning of work-from-home in spring 2020, there were a lot of articles about people working in their pajamas, suggesting a less-than-professional standard. However, Culhane Meadows was formed and launched from Day One to be a distributed law firm that reduces overhead, provides clients with an exceptional value proposition, and affords greater work-life balance for our attorneys. Since then, we've found that our clients are similarly way ahead of traditional law firms in recognising the benefits of leveraging remote-work technology. Many of our clients have also adopted a digital workplace—even before COVID—and prefer the efficiency and flexibility that it offers. So, in our experience, there hasn't been a lot of resistance to the concept of remote work from clients.

Not having an office to go to can be a harder concept for attorneys to grasp, especially if they've not been working with the technological tools that we've embraced.

We do a lot of one-on-one work with our new partners during onboarding to help them quickly feel comfortable working remotely from their home office. Those tools also allow them to collaborate with other partners as easily (or more!) than if they were working down the hall from each other in a traditional brick-and-mortar firm. Partners also see very early on that the "water-cooler" aspects of working in an office don't disappear in a remote workplace. We have brown-bag lunches over video conference, movie nights and our partners form great relationships even though they might work across the country from their colleagues. Plus, we hold monthly in-person meetings, lunches and happy hours with our partners in each of our 11 business markets, and a four-day partner retreat in a fun destination once per year.

ALB: How is the experience different from a client's perspective, and what kind of feedback do you receive from clients?

PIERSON: Since we have eliminated a number of overhead expenses — including real estate — our clients like that our work is partner-led at rates that are often two-thirds of our competitors. Many clients do not realise that we maintain zero physical offices.

WALSH: For most of our clients, the experience isn't any different as we work with clients in almost all of the same ways that traditional firms do. For example, if the clients want to meet,



"The difference comes in how you build and maintain the culture within a distributed environment and, for us, the culture itself which is deliberately distinct from that of a traditional firm. A big part of that is bringing in attorneys who want to do things in a new and more efficient way, as well as having the technology in place to allow partners to work seamlessly from anywhere."

— Grant Walsh, Culhane Meadows

instead of hosting them we might travel to their offices, or rent out a conference room for the day. As you can imagine, during the pandemic these small differences have been pretty insignificant.

Clients are really focused on outcomes, and we've learned that as long as we're getting the work done, they don't care about how or when that work happens. And they appreciate the efficiency and value that our non-traditional firm delivers.

REIDY: Clients are rooting for us. The BigLaw salary wars provide a headline, but the real story there is turnover. The Georgetown/Reuters 2022 Report on the State of the Legal Market found that higher salaries are not increasing retention, with some firms losing a quarter of their associates just last year. Clients understand that this does not serve their interests. They see the lack of training and experience that results from the churn, and they see the rates firms have to charge to play the game. Our clients are glad Scale and other distributed firms can offer an alternative, and they know that most of our attorneys have worked in-house or served in a GC role. They know we get it.

ALB: Who is a good fit for a virtual law firm, and what kind of attributes or experience should they possess?

REIDY: We look for character, quality and experience. We receive hundreds of applications every month, and so we focus on entrepreneurial and collaborative people who are ready to reimagine the practice of law and understand that clients deserve better. Our top-tier brand allows us to focus on attorneys with the best training and credentials. And finally, we look for experience that's relevant to our clients — whether at a prior firm, as a tech company GC, former prosecutor, or startup founder. It's a big tent, but the common thread is experience that helps us relate to the challenges and opportunities facing our clients.

WALSH: Our partners are experienced attorneys with at least eight years of practice in-house at a large corporation or at a BigLaw firm. They know their clients, their practice area and the market they work within, and have established a book of business.

Beyond that, what we look for is someone who is a good fit with our collegial culture and is looking for a change in how, when and where they work. We encourage collaboration and want partners who are eager to work with their colleagues and enjoy the benefits of a supportive and diverse environment.

PIERSON: Not all firms with our model are the same so I can only speak to our standards. We have very specific hiring

criteria, and all our partners are extraordinarily well-trained. Most join us with more than 10 years of experience gained in an Am Law 100 firm, large corporate department, or government agency. Most of our partners have a healthy dose of entrepreneurial spirit, and all are driven to practice at the highest level of the profession. Elite lawyers with books of business perform exceptionally well at our firm.

ALB: In terms of hiring, what do you do to attract the talent you want? Do you face challenges in terms of the novel nature of your operations?

REIDY: We attract talent by treating our lawyers as clients. We have built a firm that allows each attorney to pursue high-quality work with great clients, on a flexible and tech-enabled platform. As a result, we are inundated with interest in the firm, and we can recruit in a way that serves our strategic plan, tech brand, and market position.

WALSH: It was harder before COVID. The pandemic has shown attorneys that they can still work at the top level without having to be in the office, and many people found that they could also have a better work/life balance working remotely. So, attorneys reluctant to move to a distributed firm previously now have proof of concept that it will work for them.

Attracting talent for us is really about getting the word out about who we are and how we operate. Many of our attorneys come to us because they've worked with one of our partners and have seen the benefits of our business model first-hand.

We also work with recruiters, especially in an effort to reach women and other minority attorneys. Although recruitment at traditional firms is improving for diverse attorneys at the beginning of their careers, those numbers decrease steadily as attorneys progress. That means that there are fewer women and minority attorneys who have the experience we look for. Working with recruiters and being active members of organisations like the National Association of Minority and Women-owned Law Firms (NAMWOLF) and Women-Owned Law (WOL) help us

to connect with a more diverse pool of experienced attorneys who might appreciate the unique appeal of Culhane Meadows, where every attorney is treated on a completely level playing field, regardless of race, gender, orientation, or background.

PIERSON: Unbound by geography, we seek to attract the brightest legal minds wherever they happen to live. Due to our unparalleled compensation model, we are able to recruit partners



“The BigLaw salary was provide a headline, but the real story there is turnover... Clients understand that this does not serve their interests. They see the lack of training and experience that results from the churn, and they definitely see the rates firms have to charge to play the game. Our clients are glad Scale and other distributed firms can offer an alternative.”

— David Reidy, Scale

with significant books of business who often earn much more at our firm. In addition to rainmakers, we are especially attractive for working parents, lawyers of diverse backgrounds, and anyone interested in working at a true meritocratic organisation.

ALB: Looking ahead to the future, how do you see the legal industry evolving, and what role will virtual firms play in that?

WALSH: In the U.S. we're experiencing "The Great Resignation" as the tumult of the pandemic and other world events have changed how people feel about work. For attorneys, the pandemic has shown that they can practice sophisticated law without spending 70 hours a week at the office. I don't think that attorneys are willing to go back to what life was like pre-pandemic, and this is born out, especially in how the younger generations are approaching their legal careers. We're seeing many firms offer more flexibility or a hybrid model of work to keep and attract attorneys. Of course, Culhane Meadows has offered that kind of flexibility ever since we began operations almost a decade ago. Hopefully, these changes in how they work will inspire change in the culture of the legal workplace, too. Research shows that a healthier, more diverse workplace leads to better outcomes for clients, attorneys and the firm. Yet too few traditional firms have been willing to make the systemic changes needed—like offering permanent remote work options—to create real change. It can be done, and cloud-based firms like Culhane Meadows will continue to show the way.

PIERSON: I believe the term "virtual" will no longer be necessary (indeed, we refer to our firm as a distributed law firm). Lawyers should be free to serve clients from anywhere, utilise technology to interact with their colleagues and clients, and choose in-person meetings when they deem it essential. This is the beginning of a golden era for law firms able to effectively manage a distributed workforce using technology, and I believe our firm is leading the way.

REIDY: We believe there will be an entire sector of distributed firms that offer better economics and flexibility for attorneys, and a better value proposition for clients. Big firms are not going away, but there are thousands of lawyers - and countless clients - excited to see the legal profession finally accept modernisation. We are proud to be at the forefront of that change. There's no question in my mind that Scale will be a powerhouse firm. 

ASIAN LEGAL BUSINESS

ASIA SUPER 50 DISPUTES LAWYERS

In its second annual list, ALB unveils outstanding disputes lawyers in the region when it comes to client service. These lawyers were selected based on client recommendations sent directly to ALB. The list is in alphabetical order, and some lawyers have been profiled.

LIST BY ASIAN LEGAL BUSINESS, TEXT BY WANG BINGQING



CHARLES ALLEN

partner, RPC



Charles Allen is a solicitor advocate and dispute resolution lawyer with over 25 years of experience in Hong Kong. He joined RPC in June 2019 with a strong profile and reputation in the local market for supporting clients in domestic and cross-border litigation and in international arbitrations.

Allen advises on a wide range of high-value commercial disputes, representing clients in matters before courts and tribunals in Hong Kong and other jurisdictions around the region.

Among recent significant work, Allen has acted for a technology company in contested cross-border enforcement of a substantial European arbitral award, including seeking security for the sum due pending the outcome of a set-aside application in the seat. He is also acting for clients in several pandemic-related matters, including banking and sale of goods disputes.

Allen also sits as an arbitrator and mediator in commercial matters including under the ICC and HKIAC rules.

A client praises him as “a first-rate lawyer, who despite having a very busy diary, keeps his eye on the ball and finds creative solutions for the issues at hand.” ^{ALB}

JOHN P BANG

senior partner, Peter & Kim



John P Bang has been at the centre of some of the most prominent and complex international disputes in Korea and the world for most of his career.

He is widely regarded as a super advocate and has led counsel teams in landmark cases in front of courts as well as arbitral tribunals. In the last two

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ASIA SUPER 50 DISPUTES LAWYERS

CHARLES ALLEN

RPC, Hong Kong

LE TUAN ANH

Vision & Associates, Vietnam

BRANDON BANG

Bae, Kim & Lee, Korea

JOHN BANG

Peter & Kim, Korea

TONY BUDIDJAJA

Budidjaja International Lawyers, Indonesia

ANNA CHAN WAN KEI

Oldham Li & Nie, Hong Kong

CHAN LENG SUN SC

Duxton Hill Chambers (Singapore Group Practice), Singapore

JOSEPHINE CHEE

Rajah & Tann Singapore, Singapore

KAREN CHEUNG

HFW, Hong Kong

HUAI YUAN CHIA

Dentons Rodyk & Davidson, Singapore

years, he has successfully represented Mirae Asset Global Investments to a full victory in a multi-billion-dollar case in the Delaware Courts. He is currently representing the Republic of Korea in two major ISDS cases, as well as representing POSCO in an arbitration relating to the development of the \$35 billion New Songdo International Business District.

Bang has been at the forefront of the development of the international arbitration and litigation practice in Korea over the last two decades and has represented parties in over 250 proceedings under the rules of all major institutions and/or ad hoc arbitrations including the ICC, SIAC, HKIAC, ICSID, UNCITRAL, CIETA etc. He also acts as an arbitrator and is regularly appointed as co-arbitrator or presiding arbitrator by institutions and users.

Talking about his approach to client service, Bang says he believes “excellent client service entails responding to all the client’s needs to the best of my abilities by being proactive and offering solutions, instead of just telling them what the law is.”

A client says: “John has excellent knowledge of the law, he knows/thinks what the next moves of the opponents will be, thus he can guide us properly and bring successful results to our clients.” ^{ALB}

KAREN CHEUNG

partner, HFW



Karen Cheung’s practice covers a broad spectrum of matters, ranging from complex cross-border corporate and commercial litigation, white-collar crime, regulatory matters, shareholders disputes, shipping law, employment law, and land disputes to judicial review. Cheung also advises high net worth individuals and families in Hong Kong and China on a wide range of disputes, including contentious probate litigation and matrimonial proceedings.

ASIA SUPER 50 DISPUTES LAWYERS 2022

Among her most noteworthy cases, Cheung has handled the landmark cases on cyber-bullying and obtained the first-ever judgment by the Court of Appeal in Hong Kong to condemn the practice of doxxing which infringes one's privacy and endangers one's life.

Cheung often advises and acts for financial institutions in enforcing the relevant facility agreements and guarantees against the borrowers and guarantors which involve parallel court proceedings on appellate level in multiple jurisdictions, and the reciprocal recognition and enforcement of judgment between Hong Kong and the Mainland.

Cheung describes her approach to clients as pursuing "a promise of service excellence" and says she "always maintains close relationships with each of her clients to truly understand their business, strategies and market risk."

Cheung is actively involved in community engagement as well. She is the founding member and vice chairman of the Greater Bay Area Union and serves as the Chair of the Youth Committee of the Hong Kong and Mainland Legal Professional Association. Cheung was also short-listed as a finalist for Litigator of the Year (North Asia) in ALB Women in Law Awards 2021.

Cheung is "professional, efficient and she gives me the confidence that I'm being represented in the best possible manner," says a client. 

CHIA HUI YUAN

partner (Singapore),
business development lead for
Vietnam & Thailand,
Dentons Rodyk & Davidson



Chia has extensive experience in a wide range of contentious and non-contentious civil and commercial matters, including international and domestic commercial disputes, fraud, debt recovery, breaches of directors' duties, claims for breach of trust, insolvency, insurance

ASIAN LEGAL BUSINESS

ASIA SUPER 50 DISPUTES LAWYERS

ALLEN CHOONG

Rahmat Lim & Partners,
Malaysia

EMMANUEL CHUA

Baker McKenzie, Singapore

NILO DIVINA

DivinaLaw, Philippines

YUET MIN FOO

Drew & Napier, Singapore

BHAVIN GADA

Stratage Law Partners,
India

HISAYA KIMURA

Nagashima Ohno & Tsunematsu,
Japan

CHRIS HOWSE

Howse Williams, Hong Kong

JAMES HSIAO

White & Case, Hong Kong

KOICHIRO IIDA

Mori Hamada & Matsumoto,
Japan

FARID KARACHIWALA

J Sagar Associates, India

claims, employment and labour disputes, non-compete disputes, misuse of confidential information, professional negligence, medical negligence, white-collar crimes and investigations.

In recent years, Chia has successfully represented clients in several matters as lead counsel, including a matter where he successfully argued and obtained summary judgment in a complex claim in a fraud and conspiracy case, securing a significant cost order against the adverse party. He also successfully resisted an appeal brought against the adverse party over the summary judgment and obtained a significant cost order.

Chia, who graduated from the National University of Singapore's Law Faculty with First Class Honours, once served as Deputy Public Prosecutor and State Counsel with the Attorney-General's Chambers and Justices' Law Clerk to the Chief Justice of Singapore and other justices of Singapore's Supreme Court. In 2018, he was appointed to the Supreme Court's panel of lawyers tasked with assisting it on important questions of law.

On his approach to client service, Chia says he aims to "distill complex ideas simply so that clients can easily understand approach and strategy" and "makes it a point to put clients at ease".

A client praises him for being "extremely efficient and to the point," while another says that "he is systematic and structured in analysing the issue at hand and will advise appropriately." 

FOO YUET MIN

director, dispute resolution,
Drew & Napier



Foo Yuet Min acts as lead counsel and advises clients mainly on civil disputes relating to a wide range of commercial and regulatory matters, always with the aim of achieving commercially viable solutions for clients. She has an

active practice in complex litigation and international arbitration.

Many of her matters involve SIAC and ICC arbitrations as well as arbitration-related court proceedings. She has particular experience and interest in dealing with multi-lingual proceedings and has conducted a bilingual international arbitration under the UNCITRAL Arbitration Rules.

Among her most noteworthy cases as lead counsel, Foo is representing a BVI company wholly owned by the Chairman of a leading Chinese menswear designer brand on a \$26 million claim in litigation involving complex issues of trusts, knowing receipt, dishonest assistance, equitable remedies, breach of contract, and banker/custodian-customer duties etc. She also represents clients in arbitration matters involving infrastructure, oil and gas and media rights disputes, among others.

She successfully represented a group of Indonesian companies in the landmark Singapore Court of Appeal decision in PT Perusahaan Gas Negara (Persero) TBK v CRW Joint Operation [2015] SGCA 30. The case was closely watched internationally, and the decision took runner-up position for "Most important published decision of the past year" at the prestigious GAR Awards 2016.

"She is strategic and sensible in her advice, and is upfront about which courses of action are likely to result in useful outcomes. There is a real feeling that she's on your side, and will not bring you into battles that aren't in your interests to fight," says a client. ^{ALB}

KAP-YOU (KEVIN) KIM

senior partner, Peter & Kim



Kap-You (Kevin) Kim, is one of the most renowned international arbitration practitioners in Korea and has been involved in some of the biggest and most

complex disputes in the region for close to two decades.

In 2021, a year after founding Peter & Kim, Kim led a counsel team that successfully represented Mirae Asset and its affiliates in a US litigation arising from the termination of a \$5.8 billion transaction. The decision by the Delaware Supreme Court is widely considered to be a landmark due to its relevance to disputes involving COVID-19.

Among other prominent engagements, he continues to represent the Republic of Korea as lead counsel in two separate investment arbitrations, including the one brought by Lone Star Funds in an ICSID arbitration, where the amount in dispute is close to \$5 billion.

Over the past 30 years, Kim has acted as counsel, presiding arbitrator, co-arbitrator, or sole arbitrator in more than 300 cases of international arbitrations under various arbitration rules. His track record as an advocate in international arbitrations is representative of his market-leading reputation and includes prominent victories like the successful representation of Hyundai Heavy Industries in a \$2.5 billion victory against an Abu-Dhabi state-run investment company.

Kim has served as the vice president of the ICC International Court of Arbitration (2014 – 2021), secretary-general of ICCA (2010 – 2014), member of the LCIA Court (2007 – 2012) and vice-chair of the IBA Arbitration Committee (2008 – 2010).

"Mr. Kim is able to cut through the complexity and find the best solution to move forward," says a client. ^{ALB}

RAKESH KIRPALANI

director, dispute resolution & information technology, Drew & Napier



As the chief technology officer of Drew & Napier, Kirpalani has combined his expertise in technology with his background in commercial dispute resolution

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ASIA SUPER 50 DISPUTES LAWYERS

TEJAS KARIA

Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas & Co, India

KEVIN KIM

Peter & Kim, Korea

SAE YOUN KIM

Kim & Chang, Korea

RAKESH KIRPALANI

Drew & Napier, Singapore

LEONG KAH WAH

Rajah & Tann Singapore, Singapore

SAKCHAI LIMSIRIPOTHONG

Weerawong Chinnavat & Partners, Thailand

DHRUV MALIK

Juris Corp, India

ADAM MANIAM

Drew & Napier, Singapore

DHIRAJ MHETRE

Khaitan Legal Associates, India

CHAKRAPANI MISRA

Khaitan & Co, India

ASIA SUPER 50 DISPUTES LAWYERS 2022

in the matter of litigation and arbitration. He has been acting for clients on all levels of the Singapore Courts and advising on risk management and disputes concerning technology, electronic evidence, compliance with technology-related regulatory issues and cybersecurity.

His client portfolio includes various multi-national corporations, multi-jurisdictional private equity funds and listed companies both in Singapore and other jurisdictions.

Kirpalani also leads DrewTech, which is Drew & Napier's technology practice that manages disputes and risks for clients in key areas where technology and the law interface.

Among his recent remarkable cases, Kirpalani recently acted in a High Court suit concerning a \$2.6 million claim, involving both financial and technological issues in the financial services sector, particularly in the growing payment processing space. Kirpalani and his team successfully discharged the freezing injunction, on a second attempt for, among other things, breach of undertakings given to the Court by the plaintiff when applying for the injunction.

He also acted for an issuer of digital tokens on the Ethereum blockchain for 1.4-million-euro (\$1.55 million) claim in a litigation matter, which concerns novel issues of law and technology, particularly blockchain technology.

A client praises Kirpalani for being "prompt, clear and concise with his advice," while another comments that "Rakesh is able to distil the issues at quickly and provide timely advice." 

SAKCHAI LIMSIRIPOTHONG

partner, Weerawong, Chinnavat & Partners



Sakchai Limsiripothong, who has been with the firm for over 19 years, has extensive experience in dispute resolution in commercial, construction, banking,

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ASIA SUPER 50 DISPUTES LAWYERS

MULYADI

Nurjadin Sumono Mulyadi & Partners, Indonesia

RAMESH NAGARATNAM

RBN Chambers, Singapore

LINH D. NGUYEN

VILAF, Vietnam

WASEEM PANGARKAR

MZM Legal, India

MAHESH RAI

Drew & Napier, Singapore

SHANKH SENGUPTA

Trilegal, India

NATHEE SILACHAROEN

Chandler MHM, Thailand

MIGUEL U. SILOS

Cruz Marcelo & Tenefrancia, Philippines

DEBBY SULAIMAN

Hiswara Bunjamin & Tandjung in association with Herbert Smith Freehills, Indonesia

HAFZAN TAHER

Soemadipradja & Taher, Indonesia

bankruptcy, business reorganization, employment, intellectual property, tort, trade matters, as well as labour and white-collar crime matters.

In recent years, he represented the Export-Import Bank of the United States, the official export credit agency of the Federal Government of the United States and a major creditor of Thai Petrochemical Industry Public Company Limited, in the successful defence of tort claims valued at 190 billion baht (approximately \$5.9 billion) in the largest claim in the Central Bankruptcy Court of Thailand to date.

Sakchai also acted for one of the major property developers in Thailand in relation to disputes between the major shareholders of the company, in which the disputed project value was 6,500 million baht, regarding many civil cases between the major shareholders of the company.

A client describes Sakchai as "a commercially-focused litigator with an analytical eye," while another praises him as being "concise and punchy, really homing in on points with a good command of the evidence." 

ADAM MANIAM

director, dispute resolution, Drew & Napier



Maniam is widely regarded as one of the rising stars of the Singapore bar. He has an active practice in complex and high-profile litigation and international arbitration matters relating to a wide range of sectors.

He also advises on regulatory issues and has been engaged to advise on and investigate fraud, anti-money laundering and competition law issues that have arisen in both private and listed companies.

Among Maniam's most significant cases is a multi-jurisdictional dispute involving assets worth approximately \$1.48 billion. The dispute involved one

of the largest representative actions ever filed in the Singapore Courts.

Maniam also acted for members of the De La Sala family in the largest trust case ever heard in Singapore, involving disputed assets estimated to be worth between \$600 million and \$800 million. Maniam successfully argued numerous applications against Senior Counsel and was also successful in hearings before the Court of Appeal.

A client of Maniam has the following praise for him: "Adam has very good subject knowledge, is cooperative and goes the extra mile to help the client. I found his capabilities top of the line. An excellent lawyer having equally good personal traits." ^{ALB}

MULYADI

**senior partner, Nurjadin Sumono
Mulyadi & Partners**



As a dispute resolution specialist, Mulyadi focuses his energies primarily on civil and criminal litigation and has been practicing for over 25 years. He also

handles issues relating to administrative procedures, commercial arbitration, bankruptcy, and insolvency as well as industrial disputes.

Mulyadi routinely handles complex, high-profile litigation cases. He advises many companies on a wide range of issues from a variety of sectors and especially in the suspension of debt payments obligations, representing both creditors and debtors. Mulyadi has also represented various major Indonesian banks advising on debt settlement, while also representing them in civil lawsuits against their debtors to fulfil debtors' obligations to their creditors.

Mulyadi has represented many domestic and foreign clients in lawsuits, throughout the investigation process, in dealing with the police and all the way through to the prosecution process and into the courts.

ASIAN LEGAL BUSINESS

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TAN CHUAN THYE SC

**Rajah & Tann Singapore,
Singapore**

NICHOLAS TAN

Allen & Gledhill, Singapore

IAN TEO

Helmsman, Singapore

HIROYUKI TEZUKA

Nishimura & Asahi, Japan

EUGENE THURAISSINGAM

**Eugene Thuraisingam,
Singapore**

GREG JOSEPH SJ TIONGCO

**Tiongco Siao Bello,
Philippines**

CLARENCE VALDECANTOS

ACCRALAW, Philippines

NIRUCH WINIYAKUL

**Kudun and Partners,
Thailand**

LEONARD YEOH

Tay & Partners, Malaysia

BAHARI YEOW

Gan Partnership, Malaysia

Clients have a special admiration for Mulyadi as he is very professional in his ability to provide the best solutions based on legal remedies combining a comprehensive and effective strategy required by clients. ^{ALB}

MAHESH RAI

**director, dispute resolution;
deputy head, construction &
engineering, Drew & Napier**



Rai is an expert in litigation and arbitration with particular focus on complex, high-value and cross-border disputes across sectors of construction and

engineering, infrastructure, telecommunications, IT, shipping, energy and commodities. He is also the Deputy Head of Construction & Engineering practice of the firm and advises on front-end construction matters.

Rai has acted for clients in some major disputes, including successfully representing a large EPC contractor in a complex 9-year arbitration to substantially reduce the claim amount from \$430 million to \$6,000; acting in a significant ICC arbitration against the Indonesian government to win more than \$20 million, the first case in Asia where costs of funding were awarded; advising for on a significant copyright infringement suit against one of the most renowned operators of luxury hotels in the world, in which he successfully established the defendant infringed the rights of the copyright proprietor; and representing a Korean multinational conglomerate in a UNCITRAL arbitration against Asia's largest petrochemical plant over claims amounting to \$434 million arising from construction dispute.

A client rates Rai as "top of the class," while another adds: "Working with Mahesh and his team has been seamless from start to finish. As soon as Mahesh stepped in, our long-standing dispute got resolved in no time." ^{ALB}



IAN TEO

managing director, Helmsman



One of the founding directors of the firm, Teo is an authority on commodities trading and shipping law. Notwithstanding Teo's reputation as a thought

leader amongst commodities and shipping lawyers, Teo and the firm, under his helm, have developed a strong reputation in general commercial disputes work outside of shipping and trading.

Among his key works in the past year, Teo has acted for the owners of five bunker tankers in a successful appeal before the Court of Appeal in a landmark judgment on bills of lading arising out of the insolvency of OW Bunkers, which garnered widespread interest not only amongst legal practitioners, but also academia and the international trading community at large.

Since the start of this year, he has been guiding various global commodities traders on complex legal issues arising from Indonesian coal export ban introduced on Dec. 31, which significantly disrupted the global supply of coal.

The very recent Russian sanctions are also keeping Teo busy advising clients on substantial contracts with Russian counterparties and contracts with significant Russian connections.

Client praise for Teo includes: "Meticulous in his case preparation, effective and persuasive in his advocacy," and "keen eye for details and

whose advice is always commercially sound." ^{ALB}

EUGENE THURAISSINGAM

managing partner,
Eugene Thuraisingam



As the founding partner of the firm, Eugene Thuraisingam's practice focuses on international arbitration, commercial litigation, criminal defence and investigations, and public interest litigation.

In the past year, he has represented clients in three of the most significant constitutional law challenges before the Singapore Court of Appeal. These cases helped to develop important jurisprudence on issues of freedom of speech, freedom to assemble, and the constitutionality of section 377A of the Penal Code, which criminalizes sexual acts between men.

Thuraisingam has also secured high-profile victories in the area of criminal law, including acquittals for clients who faced the death penalty for murder and drug trafficking, and two doctors accused of sexual offences. Most notably, he successfully persuaded the Court of Appeal to re-open a previously concluded appeal to render an acquittal – a first in Singapore's legal history.

In commercial disputes, Thuraisingam acted for a claimant in a large multinational arbitration concerning the ownership of a lucrative oil and gas concession, and also

acted for a defendant against a large financial institution over claims arising from a shareholders' dispute in a listed company. Both claims were in excess of \$100 million and were settled successfully.

Thuraisingam's approach is to prioritize successful solutions to his clients' problems. Whether it is an arbitration hearing or a long-drawn criminal trial, he understands his clients, their disputes, and the bigger picture, every step of the way.

"He is worth every cent clients are paying. He has strong integrity and principles. He is also very wise in providing advice and help," says a client. ^{ALB}

BAHARI YEOW TIEN HONG

partner, Gan Partnership



Yeow has over 20 years' experience in the field of intellectual property and litigation. Being a qualified patent, trademark, and industrial design

agent, he also sits as a panelist at the Asian International Arbitration Centre (Domain Name Dispute Resolution). He currently serves as a member of the Group Standing Committee for Copyright of the Asian Patent.

Some significant matters that Yeow has been involved in includes acting for one of the world-leading glove manufacturers and suppliers in a high-profile action against infringers covering trademarks and copyright infringement, passing off, and unlawful interference.

Due to his humble, approachable but solution-driven personality, Yeow has gained wide recognition and won multiple awards for his expertise in all types of IP litigation. In 2021, Yeow was named by ALB in the inaugural list of Asia Super 50 TMT Lawyers.

"The intellectual property team headed by Bahari Yeow is just great," says a client. "They are able to provide clients with sound advice/opinions which are not only based on the law but are relevant and adaptable to the business I am in." ^{ALB}

Meet DivinaLaw's litigation leaders

Nilo T. Divina

Nilo is a seasoned corporate and banking lawyer with 31 years of experience in the industry. He established DivinaLaw in 2006 and has led the aggressive growth of the Firm in a short span of time, making it one of the biggest law firms in the country today.

Before he entered private law practice, Nilo was the former Executive Vice President, General Counsel, and Corporate Secretary of one of the former leading banks in the Philippines. He also served as the General Manager, Executive Adviser to the Board, and Corporate Secretary of the Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office.

Nilo is equally active with his roles in the academe, serving as the Dean of the Faculty of Civil Law of the University of Santo Tomas since 2009 and teaching in the University of the Philippines College of Law. He is likewise recognized in the Philippines as one of the top experts in Commercial Law and is a sought-after bar reviewer and legal consultant.

Nilo has authored five books in Commercial Law that are considered as primary resource material for law students and lawyers alike.

He has received numerous awards and citations as an academian, practising lawyer, and managing partner. DivinaLaw has similarly received various awards and distinctions because of Nilo's pioneering ways of managing a law firm and the firm's brand of dynamic lawyering. Since 2018, Nilo has consistently been named among the Top 100 Lawyers in the Philippines by the Asia Business Law Journal. In 2021, he was awarded Managing Partner of the Year in the Asian Legal Business (ALB) Philippine Law Awards and was among the highly recommended lawyers in ALB magazine's Philippines Client Choice Lawyers.

Nilo holds a post-graduate diploma in International Tax Law from the Robert Kennedy College in Switzerland. He obtained his Bachelor of Law from the University of Santo Tomas Faculty of Civil Law where he graduated magna cum laude and class valedictorian. He has a Bachelor of Arts in Behavioral Science from the University of Santo Tomas where he graduated cum laude.

Alden Francis C. Gonzales

A senior partner with nearly three decades of legal experience, Alden is co-head of DivinaLaw's Litigation group and head of the firm's Labor group.

In 1986, Alden worked with SyCip Gorrez Velayo and Co as an auditor, later returning in 1991 to practice law in the tax division of the firm. Since then, Alden has represented many clients from various sectors of society before all levels of the Philippine Court system. Armed with extensive knowledge on legal practice and strengthened by his background as a certified public accountant, Alden proves to be a distinct and versatile name in the field.



- 1 - **Nilo T. Divina**
Managing Partner
- 2 - **Alden Francis C. Gonzales**
Senior Partner
- 3 - **Estrella C. Elamparo**
Senior Partner
- 4 - **Enrique V. Dela Cruz, Jr.**
Senior Partner

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Alden has been a member of the academe for nearly as long as he has practiced, working as a professor of civil law in his alma mater, the University of Santo Tomas where he graduated magna cum laude. He has also been a bar reviewer at the university since 2007.

He has consistently been named among the Top 100 Lawyers in the Philippines by the Asia Business Law Journal since 2018.

Estrella C. Elamparo

Estrella is a seasoned litigator with more than 25 years of experience in various areas of litigation and has handled many high-profile cases.

She heads DivinaLaw's Commercial and Criminal Litigation group and the firm's Risk and Crisis Management group. She also pioneered the firm's legal education and policy advocacy practice in recognition of the fact that many of the clients' problems cannot be addressed by litigation but sometimes call for a change in legislation or government regulation.

In the early years of her practice, she was appointed public prosecutor in the City of Manila and became a state prosecutor with the Department of Justice. She had worked in various law firms and was appointed general counsel of the biggest government financial institution in the country, the Government

Service Insurance System, in 2006 during what many believed was a tumultuous time for the government agency. It was there where she further honed her public relations and crisis management skills, aided by her communications background.

Elamparo secured her journalism and law degrees from the University of the Philippines and master's degree in health care ethics and law from the University of Manchester, United Kingdom through a Chevening Scholarship.

She has reaped several awards, foremost of which is the very first Woman Lawyer of the Year (2017) of the Asian Legal Business Southeast Asia Law Awards. She was recognized as one of the Top 100 Lawyers in the Philippines in 2020 and 2021 by the Asia Business Law Journal.

Enrique V. Dela Cruz, Jr.

Enrique is a senior partner at DivinaLaw who heads the firm's arbitration, data privacy, IP and fintech groups. He has 20 years of experience in litigation, arbitration, public-private partnership contracts, and election law practice. He is currently a member of the London Court of International Arbitration (LCIA) — Asia Users Council, and the International Association of Privacy Professionals (IAPP).

He graduated from the University of Santo Tomas, Manila with a degree in AB Legal Management (cum laude) in 1996, and Bachelor of Laws (with honors) in 2000. In 2001 he earned a Master in Public Management from the Ateneo School of Government in Manila. In 2002, he completed an Executive Program on Leadership and Public Policy at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. In May 2005, he obtained his Master of Laws - LLM in International and Comparative Business Law (with distinction) from the London Metropolitan University in the UK, as a Chevening Scholar of the British Council. He also completed a Single Masters Course in international trade from the University College London in the UK. In March 2020, he was awarded a FINTECH Certification by Harvard University, USA.

Currently, he teaches law at the University of Santo Tomas, Manila, and the Bulacan State University – College of Law. He is also a lecturer at the University of the Philippines (UP) Center for Local and Regional Governance. He is also a lecturer at the Bar Review Institute of the UP Law Center and a Member of its Committee of Experts in Political Law.

He is an incumbent municipal councilor of Baliwag, Bulacan and was previously board member of the Province of Bulacan from 2010 to 2019. He was the former president of the National Movement of Young Legislators of the Philippines, and national treasurer of the Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines.

He was recognized as one of the Top 100 Lawyers in the Philippines in 2020 and 2021 by the Asia Business Law Journal.

STUART BERAHA

Latham & Watkins LLP

CHARUWAN CHAROONCHITSATHIAN

Tilleke & Gibbins

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ASIAN LEGAL BUSINESS

ASIA'S TOP 15 TMT LAWYERS

The technology sector has become increasingly prominent in the past few years, partly because of the pandemic, and partly due to the emergence of new areas – from AI to fintech to decentralised finance and everything in between. To succeed in this dynamic environment, the best TMT lawyers have had to keep up with rapidly changing business and regulatory trends.

BY ASIAN LEGAL BUSINESS

Effective and forward-looking advice from technology, media, and telecoms (TMT) lawyers is becoming increasingly critical in the Asian region. As the pandemic pushed a number of facets of life online, technology today is being used more than ever before. Additionally, an explosion of activity in sectors ranging from blockchain to fintech, to non-fungible tokens and AI has meant that TMT lawyers have had their hands extremely full.

“Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the main story has been ‘digital transformation’ where our clients (and) companies from different industry sectors have been prompted to create new strategies in implementing their

business model,” says Daniel Pardede, a partner at Hadiputranto, Hadinoto & Partners (HHP), a member firm of Baker & McKenzie International.

The legal industry propped up the boom in activity for all kinds of technology.

“Digitalizing their day-to-day activities to make them more user friendly and reachable for their customers is now inevitable. For example, the use of smart technologies such as 5G, artificial intelligence/robotics, machine learning and IT are now more interconnected to assist companies to design their digital transformation plans,” says Pardede.

Activity in TMT was noticeable across the Asian region. In the Philippines, for

A Q&A with Lim Chong Kin, one of ALB Asia's Top 15 TMT Lawyers

Can you tell us something notable about your work in the past 12 months?

I act for a number of regulators in ASEAN countries and their matters are always most interesting and notable. Unfortunately I am not at liberty to share them unless and until they make the front page news where it goes into the public domain. Even then, I have to be careful about what I can share as client identity as well as matter confidentiality are of utmost importance. Often I could be working day and night holed-up in my study (during Covid-times) and when I finally re-appear, my family would ask me what I have been doing and all I can do is smile and shrug.

Regulatory work is highly challenging. You have to work under extremely demanding timelines, often imposed because you are assisting the client to grasp control of a situation happening in real time that could have serious ramifications on the industry or public impact. Besides needing a sound foundation in the areas of law that would be relevant to the issues you are advising (this is where you need a pool of talented lawyers for research), you must also have a keen sense of logic in helping clients design regulatory solutions that can be implemented in practice to bring about the desired policy outcome.

Variety is the spice of life and I also enjoy very much the technology-related work for our private sector clients. The notable trend we are seeing for the past 12 months is the number of China-based technology companies that are moving in a significant way to Singapore as part of their strategy to internationalise.

**Lim Chong Kin**

*Managing Director, Corporate & Finance
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Technology has evolved rapidly in the past years.

How do you keep up?

First and foremost, working with clients has allowed me to keep up with emerging technologies. At Drew & Napier, we work with many US, EU and China clients who are at the cutting edge of the technology industry. Therefore, it is always exciting to be exposed to new ideas and witness first-hand innovations that push the boundaries of current technology and advise these clients on the legal and practical issues.

Second, I also work for enlightened regulators in ASEAN, who themselves have a practice of crystal-ball gazing into the future to ascertain the trends of growth and the issues that may arise. They are always trying to stay a step ahead of the curve, although it gets difficult given the fast pace of technological development.

I am fortunate that representing both sides, the regulators and the technology companies, has enabled me to be swept along by them in keeping up with developments.

In addition, I have a very regimental daily practice of reading the news and subscribing to information feeds. I am always on the lookout for reports regarding breakthroughs in technology, current trends in the tech sphere, as well as any developments in legislation that may impact technology.

For younger lawyers looking to specialise in TMT, what would be your advice?

The tried-and-true advice that I have given for many years – doing internships at some of the leading technology companies while you are in law school can be very helpful, so that you are exposed to working with dreamers, inventors and engineers. Cultivate a mind that is curious, fascinated with technology, and dedicated towards finding out how technology works and how the law can enable technology to work in society.

If young lawyers can do the above, they should be able to connect with their clients successfully, and appreciate the importance of finding optimal solutions for clients based on their understanding of both the technology and the business case for the technology.

example, Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP), the central bank, has been a key driving force of a noticeable push to adopt digital technologies in banking and financial services, partly in response to the pandemic.

“For the past year, we have seen the increase in demand to embrace digital transformation in both the private and public sector – made more pressing by the pandemic and the BSP’s mandate to rapidly shift the Philippines to a digital economy,” says Mark S. Gorriceta, managing partner at Gorriceta Law.

Lim Chong Kin, managing director of the corporate and finance practice at Drew & Napier in Singapore, has noticed two trends that defined 2021.

“Our data protection, privacy and cybersecurity practice has assisted many clients such as e-commerce companies in the development of their data protection management frameworks. However, where companies seek to digitalise their operations, malicious actors see opportunity in disrupting both large and small

“Digitalisation is a trend that has taken a life of its own and we can expect digitalisation of businesses to continue at a red-hot pace as many consumers now expect access to work, products, services and experiences anytime and on-demand.”

— Lim Chong Kin, Drew & Napier

businesses for profit and have launched more frequent and increasingly sophisticated cyberattacks,” says Lim.

In response, Drew and Napier developed and launched its Data Breach First Responder service in 2021.

“Furthermore, in response to the increasing digitalisation of businesses, our TMT clients have been pushing out new networks and services to enable businesses to continue to operate in a virtual world,” says Lim, who is also Drew and Napier’s head of TMT.

He has noticed increased emphasis on cloud-related services and infrastructure.

“This could be due to many businesses migrating to the cloud for the flexibility and accessibility that it offers. Our clients have likewise been diversifying the cloud services that they offer to cater to a whole range of use-scenarios, such as hybrid cloud models, edge computing and scalable bandwidth. These bring about novel telecommunications issues that we have been

A Q&A with Mark Gorriceta, one of ALB Asia's Top 15 TMT Lawyers

Can you tell us about some of your notable work in the past 12 months?

We facilitated pioneer regulatory FinTech licenses throughout the past 12 months. On the banking front, we assisted several institutional and up-and-coming banks in their license applications and digital financial service offerings in line with the regulations of the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas ("BSP"). On the securities front, we were able to secure from the Philippine Securities and Exchange Commission ("SEC") the country's first Permanent Crowdfunding License for Investree Philippines Inc. We have also spearheaded acquisitions of key FinTech players in the country such as the acquisition of payment solutions leader Dragonpay Corporation's ("Dragonpay") by Jakarta-based B2B unicorn Xendit Pte. Ltd.'s ("Xendit"). We are also heavily involved in various fundraising campaigns and strategic licensing applications of onshore and offshore blockchain-based companies seeking to establish and expand their presence here in the Philippines. Presently, I am also involved in the BSP's Open Finance Oversight Committee as a representative of Fintech Philippines Association and the FinTech Alliance.



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Technology has evolved rapidly in the past years. How do you keep up?

As part of our Firm's commitment to be the leader in this space, we always strive to be deeply embedded in both the regulatory and private stakeholder discussions – bridging both the legal and regulatory framework vis-à-vis the mechanisms to enable innovative products

and services in the Philippines. Personally, being also active on the academic front – I also update myself by delivering lectures, participating in panel discussions, and contributing to legal publications concerning novel TMT issues as they arise.

For younger lawyers looking to specialise in TMT, what would be your advice?

Young lawyers seeking to specialize in TMT must first master their fundamentals particularly in banking, securities, and public utilities laws and regulations. They must also familiarize themselves with the issuances of key regulators in this space, such as the BSP, SEC, the National Privacy Commission, and the Department of Information and Communications Technology, among others. In addition, to better understand the market and the products and services concerning this space, they must also study the technical side, particularly on reading and analyzing the flow of data and transactions, which is key to determining the legal and regulatory framework applicable to the business model. Moreover, given the rapid changes in this space, they must also take it upon themselves to keep up with global developments and trends in TMT.

assisting clients to navigate in their licensing applications and regulatory compliance," says Lim.

EFFECTIVE TMT ADVICE

With TMT client requests becoming more varied, the most successful lawyers are the ones that can keep up and evolve with changing technologies, regulations, and markets.

"Some of the most frequent kinds of advice has been transactional advice, which includes acquisition and regulatory advice on data privacy, negative content analysis, 4G/5G technology rollout, e-commerce, cloud services, data centres and artificial intelligence," says Pardede.

Lim has had clients come for advice on how to implement business models for technology use-cases or improve data protection management frameworks and compliance.

"We have also earned the trust of regulators to advise on various aspects of both existing and new regulatory

SUBMISSION BREAKDOWN

Country	Number of submissions
Hong Kong	19
Singapore	18
India	14
Korea	9
Malaysia	9
Japan	7
Indonesia	5
Thailand	5
Vietnam	4
UAE	2
Philippines	1
TOTAL	93

frameworks and provide meaningful advice on legal issues," he says.

Location is another consideration. In the Philippines, a common question for clients operating offshore is whether they must secure a license to reach Filipino or Philippines-based customers and partner with onshore entities.

"Our response is generally in the affirmative as a continuity of commercial dealings in body or substance of the business or enterprise passes Philippine jurisprudence's 'doing business' test," says Gorriceta, who is also the head of TMT at his firm.

KEEPING UP WITH CHANGES

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a faster-than-expected take-up of digital services and TMT sectors are expected to continue growing throughout Asia. Here again, the most successful lawyers have been able to stay ahead of the development curve.

"In Indonesia, government support to implement digital transformation

A Q&A with Daniel Pardede, one of ALB Asia's Top 15 TMT Lawyers

Can you tell us about some of your notable work in the past 12 months?

We have been assisting various clients in the telecommunication sector in Indonesia and overseas. One of the more notable recent cases of the TMT team at HHP Law Firm was advising PT XL Axiata Tbk and Axiata Group Berhad, as their Indonesian legal counsel, in relation to the acquisition of PT Link Net Tbk. We also assisted KCIC and Telkomsel on the assessment of their first spectrum lease cooperation for the operation of a high-speed rail. Most recently, we advised CK Hutchison Holdings Limited, as its Indonesian legal counsel, on the merger of PT Indosat Tbk and PT Hutchison 3 Indonesia to form Indosat Ooredoo Hutchison Tbk.

Technology has evolved rapidly in the past years. How do you keep up?

Technology is an important part of almost every job today, and technology is bringing the world closer together and



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creating new business opportunities in the process. No matter what industry you are in, the technology you use is developing rapidly. Thus, it is imperative to keep up with the changing

technology trends. A couple of ways to do that would be through following the latest technology updates in different social media platforms, virtual conferences or webcasts. It is also important to keep in communication with colleagues in the industry to see what the latest technology is like nowadays. Another way would be to have a conversation with some of the younger generations (i.e., millennials) as they are more tech savvy.

For younger lawyers looking to specialise in TMT, what would be your advice?

The technology space is growing and advancing at a high pace every year, and it's exciting. So it is important for younger lawyers who would like to focus on TMT to also keep up with this pace while maintaining a core understanding of the fundamental legal framework of the continuous innovations triggered by technology.

(including the relevant regulatory framework) has started to take shape. Assuming the Omnibus Law enacted by the Government in 2021 is implemented consistently, the wait-and-see period of investors may be over, and we are going to see growth in several TMT sectors," says Pardede, who points specifically to e-commerce, fintech, on-demand services, telecommunications and the rollout of 5G, and the internet of things (IoT).

In the Philippines, Gorricta hopes to finally see the release of much-anticipated Digital Asset Exchange (DAE) and Digital Asset Offering (DAO) Rules by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to support and institutionalise the growth of digital asset adoption and develop compliance mechanisms and safeguards to protect investors.

"This year, the regulatory and technical standards of the Philippine open finance ecosystem will be established, which will pave the way for the integration of all fintech players in the country," he notes.

METHODOLOGY

Evaluation criteria

- 1 **Most significant TMT work in career**
- 2 **Most significant TMT work handled in the last 12 months (1 Jan 2021 to 1 Jan 2022)**
- 3 **Key clients**
- 4 **New clients**
- 5 **Significant accolades/ third-party award or recognition**
- 6 **Client recommendations and comments**
- 7 **Comments from managing partners/ colleagues**

Increased digitalisation should also drive demand for infrastructures such as data centres, submarine cables and 5G networks.

"Singapore has been honing its reputation as among the best fintech hubs in the region, and we can likewise expect more fintech-related issues to emerge, such as the blockchain, regulation of cryptocurrencies, and Web 3.0. My team has been assisting clients in these spaces and we expect an even busier time ahead," says Lim.

And going forward, the best TMT-focused lawyers can expect plenty of work.

"While economies are slowly opening up from the COVID-19 pandemic, digitalisation is a trend that has taken a life of its own and we can expect digitalisation of businesses to continue at a red-hot pace as many consumers now expect access to work, products, services and experiences anytime and on-demand," says Lim. 

TIPS TO BUILD SOCIAL CONNECTIONS IN HYBRID WORK ENVIRONMENTS

BY NATALIE RUNYON

How can managers' attempt to build social connections within their teams allow law firms and tax & accounting firms to retain key employees in a hybrid work environment?

Earlier this year, we predicted that managers will determine the success of hybrid and remote work environments and therefore have a strong impact on employee retention going forward.

Indeed, managers' success in meeting the competing demands of flexibility, work culture, and employee performance hangs in the balance. And those managers who now find themselves leading a hybrid or remote team are essentially facing a concept that was foreign to most of them before the pandemic began. Additionally, their ability to manage people with unique identities and performance capabilities, and then customize their individual interactions to each person's uniqueness are essential, as such action fuels the feeling that each individual belongs in the organization.

These are the roots of organizational culture. Further, these actions are consequential because manager/employee interactions can enormously influence the day-to-day experiences of employees, especially in hybrid or remote work environments.

Obviously, employees working hybrid schedules are interacting with fewer people at work compared to when they were in the office. This gives the daily interaction between managers and team members an even greater influence on employees' retention and engagement as well as on their perceptions about their performance and opportunities for career development and advancement.

Part of this expanded role of

managers is forging friendships. A recent review of research in this area concluded: "If hybrid working does become the new norm, then creating human bonds is likely to be a crucial part of a manager's work."

At this stage of the pandemic, it's fair to argue that hybrid work is the new norm. Recent research from Harvard Business School conducted a randomized field experiment at a large global company in mid-2021. Researchers concluded that "performance effects" of synchronous and informal "virtual water coolers" moments between senior managers and remote interns enabled the remote interns to receive offers for full-time employment, achieve higher weekly performance ratings, and increase positive attitudes toward their remote internships.

Further, researchers indicated that these results have "immediate managerial relevance", and the remote time employees spent with managers led to "a 7.3 percent boost in the likelihood of the individual being offered a job compared to peers who were not given such time with their managers." Moreover, "their job performance also increased by around 10 percent as a result."

Managers play a pivotal role

Trust is at the centre of human relationships, and managers have an outsized influence on building trust between themselves and each employee and members of the team. The most effective human relationships are those where individuals feel they can fully be themselves. Indeed, these human friendship bonds can be produced during the normal course of work, often in some very simple ways, such as:

- Start video calls with a 10-minute "open mic" session where team

members can learn something about each other.

- Inject breaks into meetings where someone can share a funny story to infuse fun and moments of laughter into team collaborations and individual relationships.
- Create a meeting "pause" and have each team member answer a fun, get-to-know-you-better question, such as "If you could have one superpower, which one would you pick?"
- Incorporate a personal update, like sharing a new recipe you tried or TV show or movie you watched, at the start of a daily or weekly huddle.

All of these actions help to build trust and establish psychological safety for employees and allow each person involved to fully be themselves. They also assist in creating virtual environments, because, again, they are based on trust, where debate and disagreement without penalty is a team norm.

Since manager effectiveness will play a critical role in employee retention going forward, the number of offerings to boost managers' ability to lead in virtual environments will skyrocket.

Clearly, managers' role in driving human bonds in the virtual workplace is never more important as it is now. It is widely recognized that if employees have friends at work, they are more likely to feel "engaged, productive, and loyal" to their employer. 

Natalie Runyon is the director of enterprise content for talent, inclusion and culture at the Thomson Reuters Institute.

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