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EMPLOYER

**HONG KONG'S
ARBITRATION SCENE
IS BOUNCING BACK**

**CLIENTS PICK
THE REGION'S TOP
TMT PRACTITIONERS**

**JAPANESE FIRMS
HAVE EXPANSION ON
THEIR MINDS**

OF CHOICE

THE REGION'S BEST LAW FIRMS TO WORK FOR

ASIAN LEGAL BUSINESS

EMPLOYER OF CHOICE

With the COVID pandemic rewriting the workplace rulebook, retaining and recruiting talent remains one of the biggest challenges for law firms. Compensation alone is no longer the crown jewel as younger professionals are increasingly valuing work-life balance, autonomy, and a visible career development trajectory. ALB spotlights law firms that are regarded by their employees as not only places where they work, but where they also find engagement and fulfilment.

BY SARAH WONG

HONG KONG

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INDIA

Fox Mandal
Nitya Tax Associates
Pioneer Legal
Saraf & Partners
Sarathak Advocates and Solicitors

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ABNR Counsellors at Law
AKSET
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(Dentons HPRP)
Makes & Partners
UMBRA

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Adnan Sundra & Low
Jazzmine Khoo & Associates
MahWengKwai & Associates

PHILIPPINES

ACCRALAW
DivinaLaw
Villaraza & Angangco (V&A Law)

SINGAPORE

Allen & Gledhill
Drew & Napier
Helmsman
Providence Law Asia
RPC

SOUTH KOREA

Bae, Kim & Lee
Kim & Chang
Yulchon

THAILAND

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

VIETNAM

LNT & Partners
Tilleke & Gibbins
VILAF

The legal industry has been traditionally seen as a cutthroat world, with gruelling working schedules and stringent client demands often inevitably encroaching on lawyers' work-life balance and mental wellness.

The stereotype was embodied by a recent online circulation of an internal document from Paul Hastings, where junior associates were told to buckle up to meet "non-negotiable expectations" ranging from staying responsive 24/7 to crossing out "I don't know" from their vocabulary.

The reactions were mixed – a combination of fury, amusement, and justification was observed from Big Law partners, in-house counsel, and human resource specialists alike, sparking an industry-wide reflection on law firm culture. The incident has also signalled a dissonance between upholding parochial law firm hierarchy and championing talent investment underpinned by progressive values including diversity and equity.



DREW & NAPIER

With Cooley and Sherman & Sterling amongst the latest international law firms making deeper talent cuts in a bid to correct overcapacity responding to lower demand levels, on top of the already dismal rates of attrition among associates

observed in markets such as the United States, firms in Asia are offering a rare sight. Many of them are doubling down on their commitments to increase human capital, and in some cases, their investment has no doubt paid off.

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TILLEKE & GIBBINS

Tilleke & Gibbins, one of Thailand's largest law firms with offices spanning Southeast Asia, has been swarmed by a sea of praise from employees across its network. It was described as a "wonderful working environment" with "good leaders with serious working attitude" as well as "friendly and supportive peers," according to one associate.

A partner at Tilleke also commends the firm for showing compassion to its employees. "We had one young lawyer untimely pass away 12 years ago, and since then, every quarter, our firm's staff contribute to a fund for his wife and special needs daughter, and also all employees and the firm helped contribute when a staff member got cancer

and needed expensive treatments," the partner tells ALB.

Apart from workplace atmosphere and solidarity, the availability of hands-on opportunities is also highly prized by younger lawyers. For example, Indonesia-based UMBRA – Strategic Legal Solutions is hailed as a firm where associates "will be directly involved in

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UMBRA

the transactions regardless of their positions," allowing them to expand their skills and experience in the legal field.

Employees at Drew & Napier have the same thing to say about the Singapore Big Four firm. In contrast to a Hunger-Games-like scenario, "the senior lawyers are excellent and willing to train. The environment is not toxic but

friendly although the expectations are still high," says an associate, calling the firm "a good place to learn."

Flexibility is another much-prized trait that wins hearts and minds across law firms. UMBRA is said to have "adapted to the situation of today's legal industry, in a way they provide a work-from-anywhere policy, and easy access

technology to support the WFA policy," according to an associate.

Bangkok-based Weerawong, Chinnavat & Partners is also applauded for embracing workplace flexibility. "They give us certain degree of freedom to work from home and to manage our work schedule," say associates, who are also happy that they get to work

UMBRA
STRATEGIC LEGAL SOLUTIONS

ASIAN LEGAL BUSINESS EMPLOYER OF CHOICE 2023

Thank you for all the support to us during all these years!



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CHANDLER MHM

closely with supervisors to chart their career paths.

Chandler MHM, also a market-leading firm in Thailand, stands out by championing diversity and inclusion within the organisation. "The firm has a long unique history and diversity environment which drive their crew to be more energetic," says one associate. Others complement Chandler MHM for embodying an "integration of Thai and Western values" as the firm bolsters its international presence.

As a result, these firms have emerged victoriously as the "employers of choice" for not only lawyers but also office support staff. They thrive by keeping their talent happy, who in turn are driven by a sense of meaning and purpose, rather than a Monday-through-Friday kind of torpor.

MORE THAN MONEY

It's no doubt a delicate act for organisations to ruthlessly pursue a constant boost of competitiveness while staying compassionate to the troops at the same time. But as the COVID-19 pandemic prompted many people to reshuffle priorities in life, incentivisation has been given a new layer of meaning.

As a result, compensation alone - with its significance undisputed - is no longer the most effective weapon to reel in and keep top talent. Firms which understand that would more likely gain a headstart navigating the tight labour market.

Jessada Sawatdipong, co-managing partner at Chandler MHM, acknowledges that competitive and fair compensation still plays a crucial role in his firm's talent strategy, which recently has finessed its compensation structure.

However, "fulfilling work and opportunities for career advancement are also very important. We focus on nurturing our talent to provide opportunities for promotion within the firm (we recently made a number of promotions). This includes providing strong support for lawyers developing new areas of practice in which they have a particular passion, and which fulfils the needs of our clients," says Jessada.

Pramudya Oktavinanda, managing partner at UMBRA, concurs. "Given the hyper-challenging nature of our legal industry and the accompanying pressures, lawyers that work only for the money would quickly succumb to burning out," he says.

Purpose, instead, has become increasingly indispensable for lawyers weighing whether a firm is worth giving their all for.

"Deeply involving our lawyers in exciting and state-of-the-art transactions helps in motivating them to be a better professional. No amount of procedural plans, tight supervision, or incentive schemes could ever substitute for the inner motivation derived from the personal satisfaction of learning new things and doing a job well done," says Pramudya, adding that staff also receive free counselling and sports programs for them to stay physically and mentally fit.

"After all, nothing kills the excitement faster than doing mundane meaningless job every day," he notes. "Being a lawyer is not a mere job, it is your identity and way of life."

COLLEGIALITY VS FLEXIBILITY

Apart from purpose and motivation, the factor that comes up most often in defining a desirable workplace is camaraderie. To Drew & Napier, that's the concrete holding the firm together.

"There is what it means to be part of the Drew family: being shoulder-to-shoulder through thick and thin, shar-

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ing loyalty and camaraderie, celebrating one another's successes and willing one another to do well, for ourselves and our loved ones," says the Singapore Big Four firm.

But with the pandemic subsiding, there have been growing calls for a full return to office among professional service industries. Law firms, pressed with needs to shore up face-to-face contacts with clients, are walking the tight rope of maintaining workplace flexibility without losing sight of the importance of collegiality nurtured through in-person interactions.

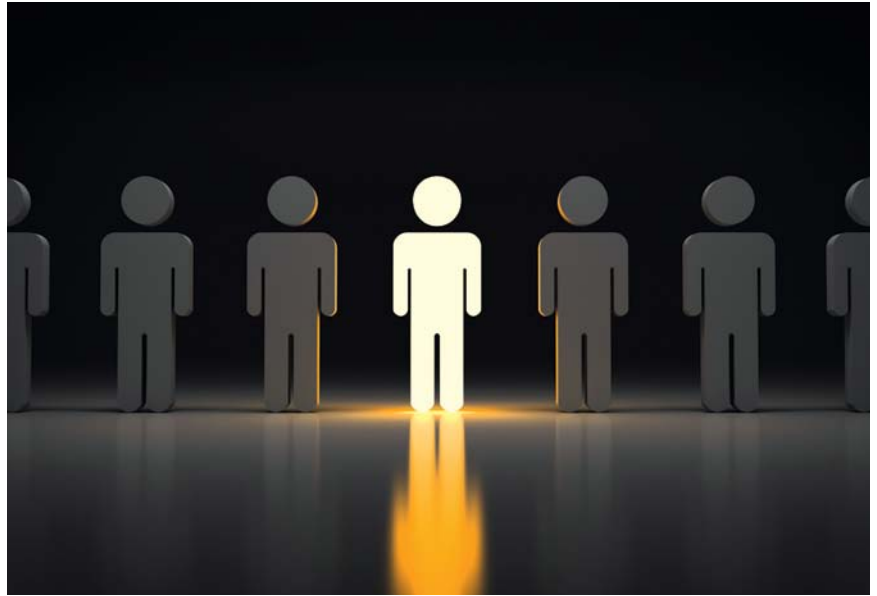
"We find that having the flexibility of choosing your own working place is very effective in keeping our talent happy and productive. We were the first major law firm in Indonesia to implement a permanent work-from-home policy and our productivity has simply skyrocketed compared to pre-pandemic times," says Pramudya of UMBRA.

But nodding to the power of physical presence, Pramudya says lawyers are not allowed to work from locations outside Jakarta to stand by for face-to-face meetings. Each practice group is also encouraged to organise regular bonding sessions.

"As we grow bigger, we will eventually have to find the right mix of physical and online presence for our talents. Working flexibility is important, but at the same time, instilling culture and camaraderie among the lawyers and staff are also equally important, and it is not always easy to build these relationships in a pure online experience," adds Pramudya.

Thomas Treutler, managing director of Tilleke & Gibbins' Vietnam office, says his firm has been adapting to the reversion to pre-pandemic behaviour while internalising remote working as a necessary option.

"It's clear that remote working is here to stay, and we've tried to embrace the positives of the ability to 'work from anywhere' while minimising the negatives. We offer a flexible system where our lawyers have the opportunity to work remotely but are encouraged to make the office their primary place of work, so that they can take advantage



of our world-class facilities as well as the opportunities to work collaboratively with other excellent lawyers," says Treutler.

WIN-WIN SITUATION

To not only attract but also keep the best people, leaders believe the key ultimately boils down to the prestige and market strength of the law firm itself.

"These days, job seekers always do their research - they know who the leaders in the market are, who's getting the interesting work, and which of their law school friends are thriving, professionally and personally, in their work environment," says Tiziana Sucharitikul, co-managing partner of Tilleke & Gibbins in Thailand.


"We need to build and maintain our firm's prestige, which is demonstrated by the quality of our client base, our reputation in the market, and our unrivalled opportunities for career development," explains Tiziana. Darani Vachanavuttivong, her co-managing partner adds that a strong performance management system is vital to the firm's development.

Lawyers who choose the winning team will benefit professionally as the firm grows. On the other hand, "as our lawyers raise their profiles in the market and build and develop their practice areas, this would ensure their professional success as well as that of the firm.

We recognise that individual professional achievement, fulfilment at work and the success of our firm go hand in hand," says Jessada of Chandler MHM.

Jessada highlights training and mentoring as quintessential in ensuring that the firm marches forward together with its people. "There are changing expectations in terms of how that support is provided in terms of delivery and communication style. We are investing heavily in training, new technologies and infrastructure to meet changing expectations," notes Jessada, who adds that the firm encourages continuous feedback and open discussion to understand the expectations of its lawyers.

Adds Vietnam-based Treutler at Tilleke, "our lawyers want to learn, want to grow, want to improve. We offer regular informational sessions featuring outside speakers as well as our own team members to expand knowledge and promote best practices, and we also offer promising young lawyers abundant chances to travel abroad for conferences and training."

With all the right tools, attitude, and approach, at the end of the day, it is the teamwork that's making the dream work. "We want our lawyers to understand that we always work together as a team and we can only be successful when everyone is driven and shares the same passion," says UMBRA's Pramudya. 

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Latham & Watkins

SUPRATIM CHAKRABORTY

Khaitan & Co

SAPNA CHAURASIA

TMT Law Practice

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ABNR Counsellors at Law

ASIAN LEGAL BUSINESS

ASIA SUPER 50 TMT LAWYERS 2023

In its third annual Asia Super 50 TMT Lawyers list, Asian Legal Business showcases the leading lawyers in the region's technology, media, and telecommunications practices who have won wide acclaim from clients. The list is in alphabetical order, and certain lawyers have been profiled.

LIST BY ASIAN LEGAL BUSINESS, TEXT BY BINGQING WANG



RAKESH KIRPALANI

*director, dispute
resolution and
information technology,
Drew & Napier, Singapore*

Rakesh Kirpalani is the director of dispute resolution and information technology at Drew & Napier, where he specialises in resolving complex commercial and technological disputes through litigation and arbitration.

At 37, he was appointed Chief Technology Officer at Drew & Napier, thanks to his unique combination of legal,

commercial, and technological talent. He has led the firm's digital transformation and paved the way for the adoption of legal technology practice in the firm. He leads the DrewTech team, which manages disputes and risks for clients in areas where technology and the law intersect.

Kirpalani is an experienced trial advocate and appellate lawyer who practices at all levels of the Singapore courts. He also advises on risk management and disputes relating to technology, electronic evidence, employment,

Image: Sergey Nivens/Shutterstock.com

compliance with technology-related regulatory requirements and cybersecurity.

With extensive skills and knowledge in the information technology field, he manages both the legal and technological aspects of cases for clients, regulators, judges, and arbitrators. His diverse client base spans multinational corporations, private equity funds and listed companies across Singapore and other jurisdictions.

Kirpalani has worked on various noteworthy cases, including acting as international counsel to a multinational regulated institution in response to a ransomware attack, representing investment companies in arbitration over failed deployment of IT systems, advising an Indian data analytics company on data exposure due to server misconfiguration, and advising a company listed on the Singapore Exchange on migration issues to a new platform. He also advised an insurance major on using secured and unsecured electronic signatures in insurance transactions involving legal matters requiring technical knowledge of public and private key encryption and document hashing.

During his legal career of over 16 years, Kirpalani has been widely acclaimed in the industry for his exceptional work in commercial dispute resolution, technology regulations and cybersecurity. He has been recognised as being amongst the top 50 disputes lawyers in the region in 2022. He is also listed as one of the standout lawyers in the TMT field for three consecutive years since 2021 by Asian Legal Business.

One of his clients praises him for his ability to provide creative and effective legal solutions and commends, "No other Singapore lawyer is as approachable as Rakesh. It is so easy to communicate with him because he instinctively knows what in-house counsel is looking for."

"Rakesh demonstrates a unique ability to straddle the tech and legal space. He is very sharp and can identify potential risks and liabilities in novel issues caused by emerging technology. He can ensure that our leaders fully comprehend and appreciate the issue while remaining professional and ethical.

Rakesh's grasp and understanding of the local TMT landscape never fail to assure us that we are guided by one of the best in the market," adds another. ALB



GILBERT LEONG

senior partner,
Dentons Rodyk, Singapore

Gilbert Leong is a senior partner and head of intellectual property and technology practice group of Dentons Rodyk. He also co-heads the patents, TMT, licensing, data privacy and protection and cyber securities practices.

With a wealth of experience as a seasoned commercial and IP counsel, Leong is well-versed in negotiating and drafting commercial agreements pertaining to the distribution of goods/services, procurement and tenders, manufacturing agreements, licensing, maintenance, acquisition of intellectual property (trademarks and patents), consultancy services and IP structuring.

As the head of technology practice, Leong has offered guidance to clients on various aspects of IT hardware/systems acquisition, software development and marketing, large-scale IT/outsourcing projects, as well as telecommunication market access and infrastructural issues. He has recently been actively engaged in the fintech, insurtech and medtech industries.

Additionally, he is a well-established expert in data privacy and protection, having been involved in this field since the days when data protection was only talked about as a Model Data Protection Code for the Private Sector years before Singapore enacted legislation to protect personal data.

Leong has also advised significant organisations in the insurance, higher education, social media, e-commerce, hotels, financial services, transportation/logistics, IT, and telecommunication sectors on significant cyber breach incidents.

His recent work highlights include advising a Web 3.0 investment company on a target company possessing significant intellectual property and technology that would augment his client's

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Duane Morris & Selvam

WILLIAM Z. HO

K&L Gates

YOSHIKAZU IWASE

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ATD Law


STEVE TAN

Rajah & Tann

capabilities in the FinTech network. His expertise proved vital in conducting the sales and purchase transaction, dealing with complex issues such as whether the target had duly obtained consent from individuals, and the extent of open source used that may be enmeshed with any IP deployed.

Another significant case that Leong worked on involved advising on the integration and deployment of a new IT system for healthcare institutions and service providers across Singapore. The matter was particularly challenging due to the involvement of several parties from different sectors and the complex multilateral negotiation process. The project is of great significance to the healthcare sector in Singapore as it utilises technology to enable healthcare institutions to provide personalised medical treatment to patients.

One client speaks highly of him and considers his services "seamless, as he understands our business, technology and risk appetite" and adds that he is always able to "integrate legal, commercial and technology know-how into advice."

Another client adds: "Gilbert has deep knowledge, experience, and insight in technology elements not just as counsel having dealt with legal matters but having overseen and having that deep understanding of how things work for his own firm. Means he can apply the law appropriately." 



CHONG KIN LIM

*managing director,
corporate and finance,
Drew & Napier, Singapore*

Chong Kin Lim is the managing director of corporate and finance department of Drew & Napier, where he co-heads the competition law & regulatory practice and data protection, privacy and cybersecurity practice. He also heads the firm's telecommunications, media, and technology practice.

Lim has played a pivotal role in developing sectoral competition regulation in Singapore, particularly in the telecommunications, media, and postal

industries. He has advised sectoral competition regulators on liberalisation, market access, licensing, competition regulation, merger reviews and enforcement issues since 1999, and successfully defended the regulators in various ministerial appeals.

Lim's leadership has enabled Drew & Napier's TMT practice to gain unparalleled experience in transactional, licensing, and regulatory matters related to Singapore's telecommunications, technology, media and postal sectors. The TMT practice has worked on all significant developments in the market and serves a broad range of clients, including multinational corporations, local companies, telecommunication carriers, service providers, network operators and hardware manufacturers.

Additionally, he established the Drew Data Protection and Cybersecurity Academy, a first-of-its-kind offering value-added services like training and external DPO services. He brought on board experts from Singapore's Personal Data Protection Commission.

One of Lim's most notable works is the implementation and drafting of the converged competition code for telecommunications and media markets, an ongoing project that aims to harmonise the competition code for Singapore's telecommunications and media industries. The new converged Telecom and Media Competition Code (TMCC), which Lim and his team drafted, came into effect on May 2, 2022, establishing the regulatory framework for the telecommunications and media industries in the coming years as the primary guidebook governing various market-related issues.

His expertise also extends beyond Singapore. He is currently assisting the Authority for Info-communications Technology Industry (AITI) of Brunei in developing the personal data protection and licensing regulatory framework for the postal sector. The projects involve the development of legislation and regulatory instruments that would facilitate cross-border flows of personal data and secure effective oversight of the regulator concerning the postal market.

One of Lim's clients says, "Chong Kin is a very technically proficient and

commercially savvy lawyer. He has an in-depth understanding of the regulator and is a competent, professional, and experienced legal adviser. Their TMT team under his lead is superb and knowledgeable."

"His approach to the query is creative and transformational without compromising on compliance and regulatory requirements. Information is cascaded to us in a proactive manner to ensure compliance and, at times, intuitive. He allows us to have free access to very relevant learning sessions to keep us abreast of the latest trends and upcoming laws and regulations, and he partnered with subject matter experts on relevant topics on telco, cyber security, and other technology processes," adds another. ^{ALB}



PRAMUDYA OKTAVINANDA
managing partner,
UMBRA – Strategic Legal
Solutions, Indonesia

Pramudya A. Oktavinanda (Pram) is the managing partner of UMBRA – Strategic Legal Solutions. With expertise in mergers and acquisitions, spin-offs of public and private corporations, debt and pre-IPO restructuring, corporate compliance, project financing, public policy, and telecommunication, media, and technology, he has been highly sought after for handling transactions that require a combination of exceptional legal skills, deep understanding of business strategies, and the abilities to devise ingenious and practical solutions.

Throughout his legal career spanning nearly 20 years, Pram has served as the lead counsel to support several local and international governmental and commercial entities in various high-stakes legal matters both domestically and abroad. His wealth of experience covers over 300 deals at a minimum of \$65 billion.

One significant matter that Pram has handled in the recent year was the spin-off of Sigma Cipta Caraka's (SCC) Data Centre Business to Telkom Data Ekosistem (TDE) and new investment by

Telkom Indonesia in TDE and SCC for the establishment of the largest data centre and IT services companies in Indonesia.

This complex deal involved multiple transactions in restructuring Telkom Group's data centre and IT services via acquisition through a significant investment in SCC and TDE, followed by a spin-off entailing the creation of novel structures designed to ensure its swift completion within the tight timeline. The deal has attracted considerable attention for setting a new precedent considering that no regulatory guidance is yet in place for spin-off in the country.

Another important deal that Pram has advised on, which also won ALB's Indonesia M&A Deal of the Year in 2022, was the sale and leaseback transaction of 10,050 telco towers of Telkomsel to Mitratel. The deal was valued at 16.48 trillion rupiah (\$1.094 billion), making it the largest telco assets M&A transaction in Southeast Asia and the second largest in the Asia Pacific to date.

Pram has led the team to effectively facilitate the smooth closing of the deal through an innovative formula embedded in the relevant transaction documents to simplify the closing procedures and ensure the transitional regulatory waiver is granted for affiliated party transactions between subsidiaries of the listed company during the process.

Meanwhile, the unique bifurcation strategy and deemed consent notification have been developed to streamline and expedite the process to allow a seamless and efficient closing for the asset M&A that required the participation of multiple stakeholders with large numbers to transfer assets and contracts.

"I feel confident and at ease with him by my side, because Pak Pram would always find a solution even in those seemingly impossible moments and will ensure that our interest is well and reasonably defended during negotiation or discussion with counterparts," says one client.

"Most importantly, he gets things done. His commercial understanding and commitment to close a deal by finding innovative yet compliant means are simply unparalleled," adds another. ^{ALB}

VEERANUCH THAMMAVARANUCUPT

Weerawong, Chinnavat
& Partners

TONG LAI LING

Raja, Darryl & Loh

PHONG TRAN

VILAF

GREG TIONGCO

Tiongco Siao Bello Law

PANUPAN UDOMSUVANNAKUL

Chandler MHM

ROHINI VERMA

Wadia Ghandy & Co.

DOMINIC WAI

ONC Lawyers

LUKY WALALANGI

Walalangi & Partners

METHODOLOGY

- Lawyers were selected based on client feedback sent directly to Asian Legal Business between January and February 2023.
- The work of the lawyers nominated as well as the commercial standing of the clients' making recommendations were taken into account during the evaluation.
- Over 400 in-house counsels across 11 jurisdictions in Asia and overseas sent in recommendations for this list.