

Interview with Justice Azizul Rahman Suffiad

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Q: Considering the rich history of your family in Hong Kong, can you share with us your personal and family background before your study at HKU?

ARS: Tracing back to the 1860s, my lineage in Hong Kong spans five generations. Our roots begin with an ancestor who migrated from India, possibly on an East India Company ship. Accompanied by fellow Indian traders, mostly bachelors, they sought to establish new lives in Hong Kong. Faced with the impossibility of finding Indian brides, they likely turned to the Tanka women in the Typhoon shelters. This led to mixed Indian-Chinese heritage in their descendants.

Our family was part of a tight-knit Muslim community, resulting in intermarriages among the mixed-race descendants for several generations. My parents, both of mixed heritage, recognized the limitations of this pattern when it came to my generation. They told me, "Right, we'll let you go outside the circle and find yourself any partner that you choose on one condition, that partner will have to embrace Islam and become a Muslim as well." This strong religious undercurrent has always been integral to our family's identity. Following my graduation from The University of Hong Kong, I married a Chinese girl who embraced Islam before our marriage, a tradition upheld by all my siblings.

Q: We also learned that one of your great-grandfathers was a clerk to the Chief Justice. Did that have any impact on your decision to study law?

ARS: Yes, my great-grandfather. He was a clerk to the then Chief Justice. But it did not impact my decision. In fact, I only found out he was a clerk to one of the chief justices after I started studying law.

Q: How then did you decide to major in law at HKU, when the law department was newly established?

ARS: I'll let you in on a little secret. My first love was literature, and I initially aspired to study it. However, I was also an avid cricketer, representing my school, DBS, in the Second Division League. The same league included HKU, where Dafydd Evans, the founder of their law school, also played. After each match against HKU, Evans would approach me, asking, "Are you interested in joining HKU?" This was back in 1969, and his repeated inquiries sparked my interest in studying law at HKU. When I applied to the university, I chose the arts faculty as my first option and law as my second. To my astonishment, I was admitted to the law department. Upon acceptance, I received a handwritten note from Professor Evans himself, inviting me to join the HKU cricket team. I played cricket for HKU for the next four years and was honoured with the Terry McGee Cup.

Q: When you started the LLB programme, what was the law department like?

ARS: It was fantastic. We were still a department. It was situated in temporary quarters on Bonham Road, housed within two red brick buildings. You can see those two buildings in some old photographs, standing as the backdrop being the law department. Today, that site has been transformed into a children's playground, adjacent to the Nethersole Hospital and near Seymour Road. Our class was composed of 35 students, and we utilized both buildings for offices, tutorial rooms, lecture rooms, and a common room for students where we could relax and make some noise. The law library was also located there. We all knew each other well, as we were completely separated from the main campus. It was just us law students, the lecturers, and the staff. This seclusion fostered a strong sense of camaraderie and made us feel very much at home.

As law students, we spent most of our time at the library. Once we received a worksheet, the library was the only place where we could read up on the cases. Given that the library was quite small and we all needed the same books, it often became a race to get the necessary resources. As for myself and a few others who lived at University Hall near Pokfulam, we didn't mind the distance from Bonham Road. I would stay at the library until it closed at 10pm, as that was the only time when the books were readily available. Then, the next morning, around 8 or 9am, I'd be back at the law department.

Looking back, I can say it was a fun time because everyone knew each other at the library. We would sit next to one another and ask, "Look, I want this case. Do you know where it is?" There was a lot of camaraderie and mutual assistance among us. Sometimes you would see students with several law reports stacked in front of them, and one of them would be the one that you needed. So you would ask him, "Are you reading all these? Can I take one from you? Let me finish it and I'll give it back." There was a lot of this kind of support for each other.

We had a couple of adult students in our class as well. One was a police inspector, one was a health inspector, and one chap who has now passed away, he used to be a clerk in a solicitor's firm. He was, in fact, a Ceylonese from Sri Lanka. He was accepted into the Law Department. At the time, he was even older than Professor Evans. We both qualified to be barristers on the same day. He passed away some time ago, not surprisingly because he was older than Professor Evans, who also passed away after he did.

Q: Did you have all your meals around the law building?

ARS: Round about that area. Just outside the law department, there were steps leading to Sai Ying Pun. Sometimes we would walk down those steps to Sai Ying Pun for our meals. There were more restaurants there than on Bonham Road. But even along Bonham Road, there were quite a few eating places.

Q: Were there any courses or professors which you found very helpful or memorable?

ARS: Well, we had Professor Evans and four lecturers in those days. The first four lecturers were John Rear, Alan Smith, Bernard Downey, and Leonard Pegg. They had their offices in the same red brick building and were always ready to give a helping hand whenever any students knocked on their door to ask for assistance. Professor Evans, as I remember, taught us Administration of Trust and Equity.

Q: Did you have a favourite course?

ARS: Yes. It's a toss-up between contract and criminal law. I found it easier to reason it out logically when it came to contract and criminal law. Land law, trust and administration seemed very artificial. Tort law was also interesting.

Q: Did your academic interest back at HKU have any impact on your judicial career?

ARS: Well, quite a great impact. When I started practice, gradually, after the first few years, I started limiting myself to taking up criminal and personal injuries cases. Towards the end of my practice, I was basically doing mainly criminal work and personal injuries. So when I joined the judiciary, I was given a questionnaire as to my preference of cases. My first choice was criminal cases. But unknown to me then, whatever you chose, they would consciously not give it to you, but with a good reason: since you felt sufficiently competent with that, they would want you to become more competent in some other areas, so that you would not end up doing criminal work and nothing else.

Andrew Li, who was the Chief Justice, went to one of the judges' conferences, came back and said, "Did you guys know that all the top judges in other jurisdictions are familiar with a number of different areas of law, not just a specialty?" Because in those days, Hong Kong practitioners were moving towards specialisation. When I first joined the bar in the mid-70s, there was little specialisation. Even for silks like Henry Litton, they would take up work whether it is civil or criminal. Since there were only about four silks in Hong Kong, there was no room for specialisation. But when I joined the judiciary in 1994, Andrew Li was quite bent on having his judges not specializing in any one particular area of law but being able to do anything that came along. That was even more so for the Court of Appeal.

I was there almost as a reserve because, in one of the cases, Judge Tom Gall did the first part of the fire-bombing in the Immigration Department case, but after finishing that case, he was supposed to do the second part as well. The first part was the most serious, with seven defendants. He did that part. Then in the second part, there were something like 30 defendants. All those people who were sitting there, who were present, they wanted to charge everyone with conspiracy in that firebombing. Tom Gall fell ill after the first case, so he couldn't do the second part. The chief judge of the High Court at that time called me up and said "Look, other judges' diaries have been marked. Please take over the second part from Tom Gall." So, I did the second part. But by and large, they wanted me to

do civil cases rather than criminal cases. Judge Seagroatt was then the Personal Injuries judge. So, they wanted me to assist him with the Personal Injuries list. So I did. And when Judge Seagroatt retired, I took over from him as the Personal Injuries judge. So tort also had a great impact on me. With personal injuries, it's almost exclusively tort law.

Q: Students in the LLB programme at HKU also learn about your decisions, including in the Luk Wing Nin case.

ARS: Yes, I keep telling my grandkids these days, whenever you go into a lift, you see the door open, don't just step in without looking. I mean, it's made to be fail-safe. But there's always that tiny percentage where something goes wrong with the machinery. And in the *Luk Wing Nin* case, nobody saw how the cleaner fell. She was only found in the lift well several days after she was reported missing. But they also found her bucket, her broom and something leaning against the wall on one of the higher floors. And it was suspected that the door opened. She must have heard the door open without looking and she just stepped in. Unfortunately, there was no lift. So she fell down. There was a lot of expert evidence in that case. The expert for the defendant opined that it's impossible. So I asked him, "Well, if it's impossible, how do you explain that?" Nobody can explain it. And on the balance of probability, it must have been due to some fault with the lift, with the door opening and without a lift there.

Q: Did you have any career goals when you were studying for the LLB?

ARS: Well, as I told you, it was really the influence of Professor Evans that got me into law school. When I got into Law, my first thought to myself was that I wouldn't be doing criminal work. I didn't want to mix with criminals. But let me give you a bit of background first before I go further. In the Law department, students set up the Law Association.

Every year during the summer vacation, the Law Association will sound out practitioners downtown to see if they will take on some law students to give them a bit of insight into the practicing world. So quite a few solicitors firm and quite a few barristers replied saying that yes, they're happy to do so. And in my first summer vacation, I was lucky enough to be assigned to Henry Litton. I went down, but he did not take me to the courts to watch him perform. He only gave me research work. Right, I have got this case, this, this, this. I want you to research these matters for me. He would give it to me and I was thrown over to the Supreme Court Library to do the research for him. So after I dug up some cases and whatnot, I would go back and discuss with him. And it was okay for the first year, but then in my second year, I was assigned to follow Martin Lee.

Martin was completely different in the way he treated law students. He treated them like pupils. So, my classmate and I both followed Martin and were taken to court. At that time, Martin Lee was involved in a wide variety of work, including civil and criminal cases. The good thing was that he was not only working in the High Court but also in various other courts, such as the magistrate's court,

handling cases ranging from appeals to summonses. This exposure allowed us to witness a diverse range of work. When you work in criminal cases in the magistrate's court, you are not always dealing with serious criminals like drug traffickers or triad members. This experience piqued my interest in criminal law. Therefore, when I began practicing, I had no hesitation in taking up criminal cases in the magistrates' courts, as I had learned a great deal from observing how Martin handled cases in those courts.

Q: After getting all these interesting experiences with Martin Lee and with Henry Litton, as you came out of law school, what was your thought? How did you feel about starting a legal career?

ARS: In those days, there were not many big chambers like there are today: Des Voeux Chambers, Temple Chambers, and others. Brook Bernacchi's chambers was considered one of the larger chambers at the time, and Oswald Cheung's chamber was another prominent one. However, as Martin's pupil, I was not familiar with either of those chambers. After completing my pupillage, I had to search for chambers. A schoolmate of mine, a mature student from Ceylon, who also qualified as a barrister on the same day as me, was also in search of chambers. So we teamed up and connected with two other individuals who were also beginning their practices. They were Chris Mumford and John Necholas.

The four of us joined hands and rented a room in Prince's Building. The four of us, just newly starting, with no one who was senior. John Necholas was probably the most senior. He had probably been in practice for one or two years before us. However, he was not a QC, nothing of that sort. We started our chambers without a specific name, just the four of us in one room, with the names of the four barristers listed at 1201, Prince's Building. Coincidentally, our chambers were located next to PC Woo & Co., a reputable firm of solicitors on the same floor. PC Woo & Co. usually had their own counsel whom they instructed. We would occasionally interact with some of the solicitors, especially when using the common toilet. One of the solicitors from PC Woo eventually stopped practicing as a solicitor and became a magistrate in the magistrate's court after some years.

Q: How did you navigate and overcome the difficulties back then as a young barrister?

ARS: When one started, there was no way barristers could advertise themselves. So all you did was sit there and wait for cases to come. Back in those days, one of the solicitors who came to me quite a lot was Henry Liang. Later on, he joined another firm started by Winston Chu, Winston Chu and Co. At that time, both Henry Liang and Winston Chu, were solicitors at Peter Mo & Co. Henry approached me because a law student who was a couple of years junior to me at HKU had joined his firm. During a casual conversation, he asked her, "Can you suggest a junior barrister who can assist me with some work?" She recommended me to him. Years later, he shared this story with me.

Henry initially approached me based on the recommendation he received. After giving me a few opportunities, he continued to return to me for work repeatedly. During that period, I relied on him

for a significant amount of work. However, when he later joined Winston Chu & Co., they focused more on conveyancing and did very little litigation. He expressed regret, apologizing for the shift in the firm's focus, saying, "I'm sorry this firm we're not handling as much litigation." But still, there was one civil litigation that a friend of his went to him concerning a flat. Henry came to me with that case involving a dispute between a vendor and a purchaser. Despite the uncertainty of the situation, I accepted the brief and proceeded with the case.

Q: How did you find the courtroom work? Back then there were a lot of non-local lawyers. How were the dynamics in the courtroom?

ARS: One significant difference is that barristers in those days, coming over from England and specializing in criminal law, often lacked a comprehensive understanding of the law. In criminal cases, where the focus is primarily on facts, many UK barristers would solely concentrate on presenting the facts in court without a strong grasp of the legal principles. Despite the importance of understanding the law in criminal proceedings, some barristers were found to be lacking in this aspect.

An illustrative incident involved a UK magistrate who transitioned to private practice in Hong Kong. During a case in the High Court, where I was co-defending with him, I raised a legal point regarding the charging of both the substantive offence and conspiracy on the same set of facts, which is legally impermissible. That counsel was unaware of this legal principle, displaying a lack of knowledge of the law. This experience highlighted the disparity in legal expertise among barristers. Of course, there are some who demonstrate a profound understanding of the law, such as Michael Stuart-Moore, a respected High Court and Court of Appeal judge in Hong Kong, while others coming from England with a focus on criminal cases, showed deficiencies in legal knowledge.

Conversely, local counsel in Hong Kong, mainly graduates from the local universities, were noted for their strong legal acumen due to the comprehensive legal education they received. However, they were sometimes criticized for lacking practical skills in handling facts and applying a common-sense approach. On the other hand, barristers from England, though proficient in fact-based arguments and adept at cross-examining witnesses, often fell short in their legal understanding, especially in criminal law matters. This dichotomy underscored the varying strengths and weaknesses of barristers from different backgrounds in the legal profession.

Q: You told us earlier that gradually in your early career, you tried to specialize in criminal law. What part of criminal litigation did you particularly enjoy?

ARS: Advocacy will always be a part of one's arsenal. However, the type of advocacy one utilizes will vary depending on whether you are presenting a case before a jury or a judge. When addressing a jury, you aim to persuade them based on the facts presented. In contrast, when appearing before a judge, in addition to the facts, you must also navigate the complexities of the law. Oftentimes, legal

nuances and intricacies can present hidden challenges that may not be apparent solely through the facts of the case. Therefore, it is essential to adeptly handle both the factual and legal aspects when presenting before a judge.

Q: Since your mid-career, you gradually were more involved in the judicial activities in Hong Kong. How did your perspective change from advocacy to judicial work?

ARS: When you're sitting as a judge, you're sitting right on the fence. You can't fall to one side or the other. You've got to be impartial, and not just impartial. You must do it right. But as an advocate, you're given a lot more leeway when you're arguing something. If by your argument, you can convince the judge to do what he otherwise would not do, then you're doing a service to your client. But that may be temporary, because if you convince the judge too much to fall on the wrong side and he makes a wrong decision, then there's always a chance that the other side will appeal, and the appeal court will put it right. Now if that happens, then your client will have to bear the cost of both the trial and the appeal, and you're not doing a service to your client. But sometimes when you can just tip the balance a little bit without giving the other side a cause for appeal, then you're doing a service to your client. And as a counsel, you don't have to sit as properly on the fence as a judge. You can always, with a bit of advocacy, get the judge to do something that he may not otherwise do. If you can convince the judge to do that, then that's your advocacy power.

Q: Sitting on the other side of the courtroom, you must have realized that the advocates had the power to do that.

ARS: Oh yes, of course. That's why when you're a judge, you hear something that's a little bit off, you'll have to question the counsel. Well, what about this? And he'll have to answer you. So the beauty of having practiced 17 years before going up on the bench is that you know all these little tricks that an advocate can employ when you're sitting up there.

Q: What was the decision-making process for you to become a judge at the time?

ARS: I became a judge in March 1998. I started as a Deputy Judge in August 1997. All the way when I was practising, I had never thought of becoming a judge. Maybe it was the realization that as an advocate, I can say what I want. The judge either buys it or he doesn't. But as a judge, you can't get it wrong. So the onus was very much greater on the judge. During the run-up to 1997, Andrew Li was designated to be Chief Justice once the handover was completed, and one day, he called me on the phone and said, "Come over to my chambers, I want to talk to you." I'd done a few cases as his junior in those days. So I went over. He said, "Look, we're not getting any younger. It's time for us not to be running around like that. Would you like to give it a try to sit as a deputy judge?" At that time, he didn't say where or what; he didn't give me any details. He just asked me, "Would you like to give it a try?" So initially I thought he was asking me to go into the District Court. He said, "Go back, talk to your wife, and let me know."

So I went back and talked to my wife. First, I was uneasy because sometimes you have a cowboy counsel coming before you and you need to put them right. You can't let them create disturbances and whatnot in your court. And I wasn't sure I was up to it when faced with such a counsel. On the first day, he asked me to go into the High Court to sit as a Deputy Judge. I was quite surprised. But at that time, I was just a junior counsel. I'd never taken silk, I'd never applied to take silk. And I think it was a surprise to many of the legal fraternity that suddenly, as a junior counsel, I was put in a High Court to sit as a Deputy. So after a while, he said, "Sitting as a deputy judge, you don't even have to make up your mind then, because we'll try you out just as much as you try us out. And then comes a time that you can decide whether you want to do it permanently or not." So I went on. Each month he signed a chit, put it on my desk, and said, "You've been appointed for another month." It was a month-to-month thing. So I just kept on. And after seven, eight months, he said, "Well, have you made up your mind?" By that time, I found that most of the counsel coming before me, they behaved themselves, and I didn't have to put them in place. So I was quite happy with that. In March 1998, Andrew Li appointed me to the High Court.

Q: What do you think was in his mind? Why did he pick you in particular for that position?

ARS: I don't know. In those days, his chambers were just next to Martin's, and he was very friendly with Martin. And I had been junior to Andrew Li for quite a few cases. I don't know whether he talked to Martin or what it was. But anyway, that was how it came about. I've never asked Martin whether he spoke to him beforehand or not.

Q: After you became a judge, you said you were originally afraid of some cowboy counsel appearing in the courtroom. Were there cowboy counsel later in all these years?

ARS: The only one occasion in a criminal case, one such counsel appeared before me. He took a number of points and created a lot of difficulties, no doubt with a view to laying grounds for an appeal. But by that time, I'd gotten enough experience to be able to put him in his place.

Q: And through your judicial career as a judge, what are some interesting or memorable cases that you still remember?

ARS: Well, in the later years, apart from just doing general civil work, personal injuries, work, personal injuries, run-of-the-mill thing, they started putting before me some quite high-powered intellectual property cases. And there was one case that was quite difficult for me. There was an international accounting firm by the name of BDO. They had quite a lot of branches internationally. They sued a bank in the Philippines, which also started branching out, whose name was Banco de Oro. In time they shortened it to BDO as well. So it was a trademark, passing off infringement, all these things lumped together, and that case went on for quite a while. In fact, it was one of my longest judgments.

Q: How long was the judgment?

ARS: It's over a hundred pages. Yes, that was quite memorable. I found against the plaintiff, on the grounds that Banco de Oro had started back in the Philippines in the 1960s or 70s. Although they shortened the name to BDO, there was no passing off. It was never the intention to pass off, and the kind of work that the bank and the accounting firm did may have overlapped slightly in some very small areas, but ultimately, on the balance of probability, there was no passing off and no infringement. In the old days, Hong Kong Shanghai Bank would call themselves Hong Kong Shanghai Bank. But after a while, everyone sort of shortened the name to HSBC. Using a shortened form of the name was a very common thing. And I can't see that there was any confusion that could readily be caused by that. In fact, the plaintiff, BDO, had sued Banco de Oro in many other jurisdictions. All of them failed.

Q: Do you think as a judge you have a certain writing style? Are there certain rules that you try to follow when you write a judgment? For example, do you try to keep your judgments short?

ARS: Oh yes. For judgments, you really need to put down only the things that are relevant and necessary. Do away with all the unnecessary stuff. There are some judges nowadays who write 200 pages. There are some judges who write 6-page judgments on costs. In fact, when I was appointed judge, Andrew Li came and spoke to me. He wanted his judges to do everything quickly. When you have an interlocutory hearing, after you hear it, just give a few words orally as your judgment. There's no need to go into all sorts of lengths. But sometimes when your judgments go to the Court of Appeal, if your judgments are too short, they will say that you've neglected to cover this, neglected to cover that. So, you've got to find a balance to be able to cover everything and yet not have your judgment overly long.

Q: Some people say that if a barrister progresses to the judiciary, they ought to separate themselves from their peers. Hence it's a bit lonelier to be a judge than to be a barrister. Do you agree with that?

ARS: There's some truth in it. Because you don't want people to see that, ah, so-and-so is appearing before this judge, and he is someone that you see this judge go out for lunch with all the time. The industry is a very small place. So it's lonely in a way, but on the other hand, you've got to find a balance so that you don't forget old friends. Once I got into the judiciary, I received a lot of invitations for Christmas drinks. I will turn down invitations from solicitor firms I hadn't associated with before. But some are old friends and I don't turn down old friends. Those firms that I've always gone for a Christmas party with, then you just continue doing the same thing.

Q: How do you balance your work as a judge or as a barrister throughout your legal career and your work serving the Muslim community here and beyond?

ARS: There is very little conflict. Time is quite okay because, with the Muslim community, we have a monthly meeting, usually on a Saturday morning. And I've been the chairman of the Islamic Union since 1997. But there are lots of subcommittees to whom I can delegate the work, and they do a good job, much better than what I can do. I'm quite happy to delegate to these subcommittees all the work that needs to be done, and I'll just oversee what they do. Most of the time, I don't really need to step in because they do a very good job. It's a good thing to have capable people helping you.

Q: Does your legal training or legal career help you work for the Muslim community in any way?

ARS: Well, yes. As part of the welfare, we have a subcommittee called Tax and Legal Advice, which is given free to members. Before I became a judge, I was doing that. I was giving free legal advice to the Muslim community, whenever they came and asked for it. Very often it's a tenancy matter. Sometimes it has to do with inheritance. I think with matrimonial cases, most of the community wouldn't like to advertise their matrimonial differences. So these are not matters that they will come to the association to seek assistance on. They would rather go to a lawyer.

Q: And what in your view are the most kind of important legal issues for the Muslim community these days?

ARS: Recently, I think with the implementation of the national security law and what's happening in Gaza and Palestine, some members have come to me and asked, "Look, if I go into the street and start waving a poster about stopping the war in Palestine and all that, will I be in breach of national security law?" They're afraid of these things because they simply don't know.

Personally, I do not have clear answers. I know there are people doing that on the mainland. Well, I told them if you're doing that and what you do does not impact on national security, you shouldn't have anything to worry about. On the other hand, if you stand in the middle of the street and disrupt traffic with that, then you may get yourself arrested for some other offences, not national security.

Q: After your judicial career, you were appointed as the surveillance commissioner. How did you get into that role?

ARS: When I was a High Court judge, I was also a panel judge. The three panel judges in the High Court vetted all applications to determine whether to allow interception or surveillance. I served as a panel judge for eight years before retiring from the Judiciary. Following my retirement, the Chief Justice asked me to take over as Commissioner for Interception and Surveillance. This decision was based on past experience, as they realized that assigning an existing judge to the role would result in the loss of a permanent judge due to the full-time commitment it required. The first commissioner was K.H. Woo, who was a Court of Appeal Judge at that time. By appointing him as commissioner, they lost a CA judge entirely. In my case, I was appointed as Commissioner after retirement. Having

been a panel judge, it was just part of the daily work as a judge. Transitioning to Commissioner extended my retirement by six years.

Q: Those were six difficult years in Hong Kong society. Were there any particular challenges or difficult moments for you professionally?

ARS: No, because the powers relating to interception and surveillance are provided for by law. I had to keep a very close eye on the fact that the Law Enforcement Agency didn't step out of line when they were doing the interception and covert surveillance. And with the assistance of the panel judges, it was not difficult to see that the LEAs didn't step out of line. I didn't have to communicate with other departments, not as far as work was concerned. There were times when you had to communicate with other departments for administrative purposes and that was done through a government officer who was also seconded to the office of the commissioner.

Q: In your view, how has the legal profession in Hong Kong changed since the 1970s? And what are the most important changes, in particular following 1997?

ARS: Following 1997, I think changes were minimal. There were changes to some of the ordinances, For instance, the word "crown" was taken away, but these did not effect any real changes. It was just a change in name. On the other hand, in practice, arbitration became much more prevalent. And more than that, the popularity of mediation has made many practitioners qualified to become mediators. It also meant that a lot of cases are now settled by mediation rather than having a full-blown trial in court.

The other thing that changed quite a lot was the establishment of these big chambers, some of them growing to 50 or 60 barristers in chambers. And that makes up in total a lot of practitioners. They want to join these chambers thinking that these chambers would have a great amount of influence when it comes to work from solicitors. Some solicitors would just go to this set of chambers or that set of chambers. And that means the smaller group, like the four of us who started in a room by ourselves, would gradually be left out in the cold.

For the solicitor's profession, in the old days, there was a 2% rule for conveyancing, where solicitors' firms could not charge less than 2% of the price for the property. And that rule made it such that the big solicitors firm get all or most of the conveyancing work, whereas the small firms will be left out in the cold. But after the amendment to the law, removing this percentage of fees, I think it is to date not as lucrative for solicitors to be doing conveyancing work as in the old days. That had a great effect on work for solicitors and on their earnings.

Q: What's your view on the Hong Kong legal profession today and in the future?

ARS: I think that for those who are skilled in advocacy and law, it is still a very worthwhile profession to pursue. Furthermore, these changes would help eliminate many of the less competent advocates in the barrister profession, making it more competitive. However, it may also result in some smaller solicitor firms struggling to survive. I have heard of one or two solicitor firms that have had to close due to financial difficulties.

Q: Do you think the legal community or legal careers have been shaped by the ongoing social or economic factors in Hong Kong?

ARS: I believe that there are numerous social and economic factors that have greatly affected the legal profession, such as the competition from overseas legal markets. I think that over time, lawyers in Hong Kong may find it more profitable and worthwhile to practice law in mainland China if they become qualified there. This shift is not necessarily due to changes in Hong Kong itself, but rather the economic transformations happening in mainland China. This trend can be observed across the entire Hong Kong economy. With the development of the Greater Bay Area in progress and China's proven track record in achieving ambitious projects, many professionals have been drawn to opportunities in the mainland. For instance, decades ago, architectural firms from Hong Kong were recruited to work in mainland China because mainland architects lacked the expertise to construct high-rise buildings. Today, China's architectural achievements surpass those of many other countries, reducing the demand for Hong Kong architects. Consequently, due to the economic challenges faced by Hong Kong in recent years, many architects are experiencing difficulties in sustaining their businesses.

Q: To wrap up, do you have any advice you would give to LLB students today?

ARS: First of all, the age-old idiom, study hard. Secondly, if they want to practice in Hong Kong, they should really set their minds to making for themselves a good practice. Preparation is all-important.