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A NEW PARLIAMENT AND A FRESH AGENDA

A note from Indranee Rajah S.C., Senior Minister of State for Law

On 15 January 2016, we saw the opening of the 13th Parliament and the President's Address. As is usual, the opening of parliament was in two sessions - the swearing-in ceremony for MPs in the afternoon and the President's Address in the evening.

The President's Address sets out the government's priorities for this term. The full text of the President's speech can be found [here](#).

We don't have an easy journey ahead. These are our challenges:

- a tough economic outlook;
- the persistent threat of terrorism;
- an ageing society;
- how to remain a strong, cohesive society even as we become more diverse.

The key to tackling and overcoming these challenges is resolve and unity. We are going to have to do it as a team, all of us acting with a common purpose and conviction, and each contributing our different strengths, talents and abilities to this effort.

Having regard to these challenges, the government's priorities in this term are to:

- keep Singapore safe and secure;
- renew our economy;
- foster a more caring society;
- transform our city;
- work together with all Singaporeans to build our nation.



Photo: MCI



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Given the tough economic environment, the renewal of the economy is something that must obviously be on the minds of many in the legal profession.

The Committee on the Future Economy, chaired by Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat, will be looking at developing strategies to see how we can not only address our economic challenges, but thrive in spite - or maybe because - of them. We have ever made a virtue of necessity and turned weaknesses into strengths. We must do the same now.

An important part of the future economy will be professional services, including legal services. We need ideas, big and small, to bring our legal services to the next level and to capture greater regional market share. We welcome all ideas and suggestions that lawyers may have to grow the pie. You can email me (indranee_rajah@mlaw.gov.sg) or Praveen Randhawa at MinLaw (praveen_randhawa@mlaw.gov.sg). There will also be other engagement sessions and events at which you can contribute your thoughts.

Even as we work on the future, however, there is much to be done in the here and now.

In the Addenda to the President's Address, the ministries have set out their priorities for this term of government. The Addenda for MinLaw and MOF are available on www.mlaw.gov.sg and www.mof.gov.sg respectively.

For MinLaw these are:

- advancing access to justice;
- promoting the rule of law;
- developing legal services to support our economy and our society.

To this end, MinLaw will be focussing on the following in the next few years:

LEGAL REFORMS

- We will look into substantive reforms for both civil and criminal law.
- We intend to simplify court procedures and make enforcement of judgements easier, cheaper and more effective.
- We will make further family law reforms. In particular, we are considering legal reforms to:
 - (a) the Guardianship of Infants Act;
 - (b) the Intestate Succession Act; and
 - (c) the Inheritance (Family Provision) Act.
- We will unify and update the bankruptcy and insolvency regimes into a single piece of legislation.



DEVELOPING SINGAPORE AS AN INTERNATIONAL LEGAL SERVICES AND IP HUB

- Last term we saw the launch of the SICC and the SIMC. This term, we will continue to drive Singapore as an international legal services and IP hub.
- We will help practitioners develop expertise in key practice areas.
- We will encourage Singapore law practices to raise productivity, build capability, innovate and adopt new technology.
- We will continue to develop IP capabilities and make it easier to obtain IP protection abroad.



LEGAL SECTOR MANPOWER DEVELOPMENT

- UniSIM Law School will be launched. This will provide a pipeline of specialist criminal and family law practitioners. (The recommendations of the Steering Committee will be out soon. Keep an eye out for it.)
- We will work with SAL, SILE and Law Society to develop initiatives for continuing professional development of lawyers.

RULE OF LAW

- We will continue to promote the rule of law at home and abroad.
- We will work on facilitating the enforcement of Singapore judgements in other jurisdictions.
- One step in pursuit of this objective will be to implement and ratify the Hague Convention on Choice of Courts Agreements. In due time, when other countries sign, implement and ratify the Agreement, it will expand the enforceability of Singapore judgements.
- We will promote Singapore as a venue for inter-state maritime disputes in collaboration with the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS).

COMMUNITY LEGAL SERVICES

- Last term, MinLaw began providing funding for CLAS. This allowed CLAS to help many more accused. This term we will continue work with the Law Society, lawyers and law firms to deliver legal aid and ensure that those in need have access to justice.
- We will strengthen the moneylending regime.
- We will implement the recent revamp of the pawnbroking regime.



OPTIMISING THE USE OF LAND

- SLA is the custodian of state land. It is a stat board under MinLaw.
- MinLaw will work with SLA to optimise land use in land-scarce Singapore.
 - We will explore greater use of subterranean space.
 - We will promote more innovative use of space e.g. use of land under viaducts for sport, recreational and social purposes.
- We will work with IDA on Singapore's Geospatial MasterPlan in support of the Smart Nation initiative.



As you can see, MinLaw has its work cut out for it. There is much to do. But it is all worth doing.

We have just finished SG50. We are now writing the beginning paragraphs of the next chapter of Singapore's history and the development of the legal profession. Hopefully when we look back 50 years from now (at least those of us who are still around and alive and kicking!), we will be able to say without hesitation that we accomplished our mission of advancing access to justice, spreading the rule of law and putting Singapore legal services on the world map.

– Indranee Rajah S.C., Senior Minister of State for Law
26 January 2016