

Overview of MinLaw's Key Initiatives for 2021

The Ministry of Law (MinLaw) remains committed to the rule of law and building a trusted legal system in Singapore. Over the years, MinLaw has partnered our stakeholders to continually review and update our legal framework, to keep it current, accessible and forward looking. This is especially important as new challenges and opportunities arise in a constantly changing world.

In the coming year, MinLaw will continue to strengthen Singapore's legal framework; support the transformation of the legal industry and position the sector in support of a vibrant economy; and optimise the use of State properties.

A. Strengthening our legal framework

1. Community justice

- i. MinLaw and other agencies have commenced a **review of the Community Dispute Management Framework**, which includes studying how neighbour disputes can be better managed and resolved upfront; looking into measures to increase the take-up of community mediation; and improving the Community Disputes Resolution Tribunal (CDRT) process
- ii. The dedicated **Protection from Harassment Courts** will begin operation this year. It will strengthen protection against harassment

2. Access to justice

i. *Civil legal aid*

- The Legal Aid Bureau (LAB) will **add more topics to the iLAB chatbot** to make legal information more accessible
- LAB will **expand its partnerships with social agencies** to offer legal advice via video-conferencing at community touchpoints
- MinLaw is working with the Law Society Pro Bono Services to develop a **one-stop legal information portal** to provide clear and easily understandable information on common legal topics and information on the various sources of legal assistance available

ii. *Criminal legal aid*

- Ongoing study on enhancing the provision of criminal legal aid, and the possibility of setting up a **Public Defender's Office**
- The **new means test criteria for the Criminal Legal Aid Scheme (CLAS)** will be implemented this year. This will simplify the application process

iii. *Conditional Fee Agreements (CFAs)*

- MinLaw will introduce a **framework for CFAs**¹ to provide an additional litigation funding option for international arbitration, domestic arbitration, and certain prescribed proceedings in the Singapore International Commercial Court (SICC)

¹ CFAs are agreements where a lawyer, representing a client in a claim, receives payment of some or all of the legal fees only if the claim is successful. CFAs will allow litigants, including businesses facing insolvency or cash flow issues, to pursue meritorious claims which they may not otherwise have been able to pursue.

- MinLaw is also studying how CFAs may be adopted for certain categories of domestic proceedings, to enable litigants to pursue meritorious claims which they may not otherwise have been able to pursue

3. Civil justice

- i. MinLaw will work with the Courts to drive the **digital transformation of the litigation process**, e.g. by expanding the scope of non-traditional modes of hearing, subject to appropriate safeguards

B. Positioning our legal framework and legal sector in support of a vibrant economy

1. MinLaw will continue to pursue international civil cooperation and establish Singapore as a thought leader in international rule of law efforts
 - i. We are studying the possibility of acceding to the **Hague Service Convention**, to facilitate and streamline the transmission of judicial and extrajudicial documents for service abroad in civil and commercial matters
 - ii. We will continue to offer technical assistance on the **Singapore Convention on Mediation** to other countries and promote its adoption
2. To strengthen our status as a leading international dispute resolution hub, MinLaw will continue to support our dispute resolution institutions and implement other legislative amendments to keep our dispute resolution service offerings and infrastructure competitive
 - i. We are working on extending the **third-party funding framework** to domestic arbitration and certain prescribed proceedings in the SICC
3. MinLaw and IPOS will continue developing Singapore's intellectual property (IP) ecosystem, to maintain our top-ranked IP regime
 - i. We are working with partners on the **Singapore IP Strategy 2030**, which aims to strengthen Singapore as a global hub for innovation, intangible assets (IA) and IP; attract and grow innovative enterprises by leveraging IA and IP; and develop good jobs and valuable skills and talent in IP

C. Supporting the transformation of our legal industry

1. MinLaw will uplift the legal sector through technology, by:
 - i. Developing an integrated **Legal Tech Platform** that unifies law firms' existing technology tools and facilitates legal workflows
 - ii. Developing an **Industry Digital Plan** with IMDA and industry partners, that will provide a step-by-step guide for law practices to assess their digital readiness and identify suitable technology solutions to adopt at each stage of their growth
2. MinLaw will support our lawyers' efforts to gain domain expertise and market knowledge, and support our law firms' efforts to internationalise, through:
 - i. Launching the next run of the **China Ready Programme** later this year
 - ii. Leveraging the Singapore Jiangsu Cooperation Council to develop an **Internationalisation Corridor**

D. Co-creating solutions to optimise the use of State properties and building geospatial capabilities

1. Partnering stakeholders and the public on the use of State properties
 - i. SLA will work closely with the community to co-create solutions to optimise the use of State properties, e.g. State properties in **Changi Point**
 - ii. SLA will continue to convert under-utilised State land into community spaces, e.g. at Yarrow Gardens

2. Advancing geospatial capabilities
 - i. SLA will continue to **advance its geospatial capabilities**, through building up the Geospatial Trusted Centre and expanding centralised geospatial training and project services to more agencies.
 - ii. The full **OneMap 3D platform** will be made available to businesses and individuals in 2021