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## A NEW ERA IN LEGAL RELATIONS BETWEEN THE LION CITY AND THE LAND OF THE GOLDEN PAGODAS

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

Since Myanmar opened up in 2010, foreign investment and business activity have steadily increased. In 2012, Singapore was Myanmar's third largest trading partner, after China and Thailand. Bilateral trade reached USD1.4 billion in 2012, and in the first 5 months of 2014, Singapore topped the Foreign Direct Investment list in Myanmar. The Myanmar government has been moving rapidly on law reform in tandem with their economic development.

As they develop their own laws, they are also keen to understand and draw from the legal systems and legislation of other countries. Singapore is of interest, being a fellow ASEAN country with the same common law heritage.

Priority areas for Myanmar right now are laws on:

- trade and investment;
- banking and finance;
- property, construction and infrastructure;
- dispute resolution;
- intellectual property; and
- stock exchanges.

Legal services follow where businesses lead. As such, Myanmar has become one of the newest markets for legal services. Understanding the Myanmar legal landscape is therefore useful for us not just at the government level, but also for Singapore lawyers advising clients venturing into Myanmar, the numbers of which are set to grow. Any law firm setting up or providing services there also needs to understand their legal framework in order to navigate it properly.





Against this backdrop, the Myanmar government and we felt it would be useful to facilitate better access and understanding of each other's laws, and to provide more opportunities for our respective legal fraternities to interact. To that end, we decided to have a Singapore-Myanmar Integrated Legal Exchange. (We love our acronyms. So you can work out the acronym for that one 😊)

In early October 2014, I led a delegation comprising officers from the Ministry of Law (MinLaw), a representative from the Singapore Supreme Court and members from the Law Society of Singapore to Myanmar.

On this trip, MinLaw entered into MOUs with:

- the Supreme Court of the Union (SCU); and
- the Union Attorney General's Office (UAGO).

The MOUs formalise the legal exchanges that will take place between Singapore and Myanmar. They are the first to be signed between Myanmar and another Commonwealth and ASEAN country. The MOUs mark the start of a new era of legal exchange and cooperation between our two countries. Exchange initiatives include:

- attachments for Myanmar legal and judicial officers with Singapore government agencies and private sector law firms;
- legal workshops and seminars, to be held in both Myanmar and Singapore;
- establishing a platform at the government level to exchange legal materials, publications and legislation to promote greater understanding and access to each other's laws.

As a mark of the strong and friendly relationship between our legal fraternities, we also gave to the SCU and UAGO a complete set each of the Halsbury's Laws of Singapore.



SMS Indraneel with the Singapore delegation in Nay Pyi Taw.



SMS Indraneel, Union Attorney General Dr Tun Shin and Deputy Union Attorney General U Tun Tun Oo witnessing the signing of the MOU between MinLaw and UAGO.



SMS Indraneel presenting the Halsbury's Laws of Singapore to Union Chief Justice U Htun Htun Oo to mark the signing of the MOU between MinLaw and SCU.

## COMMERCIAL LAW WORKSHOP IN NAY PYI TAW

To kick off the exchange, the UAGO, MinLaw and the Law Society jointly organised a Commercial Law Workshop in Nay Pyi Taw, attended by officers from the UAGO and Myanmar economic ministries and Singapore private sector lawyers. The Singapore speakers and topics covered were:

- Mr Lok Vi Ming S.C. (President of the Law Society, Rodyk & Davidson) – *Rule of Law in a Developing Economy*;
- Ms Goh Wan Jing (WongPartnership) – *Overview of the Private-Public Partnership and the use of Standard Forms in the Construction Industry*;
- Ms Shannon Tan and Mr Kenneth Lim (Rajah & Tann Asia) – *Investment Law in Myanmar*.



Mr Lok Vi Ming S.C. (President of the Law Society, Rodyk & Davidson)



Ms Goh Wan Jing (WongPartnership)



Ms Shannon Tan and Mr Kenneth Lim (Rajah & Tann Asia)

Hearing about Myanmar and actually being there are quite different things. The lawyers who came on the trip will be able to tell you of their impressions. When you are there speaking to their officials, you get a sense of their urgency and need to make up for lost time, to get their legal frameworks in place and provide the right legal environment for business. For Singapore lawyers, Myanmar presents new opportunities for legal services and new areas of legal work. Hopefully, the MOUs will provide a strong start for both to meet our objectives.

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