

**OPENING ADDRESS BY
SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR LAW AND HEALTH EDWIN TONG SC
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Mr Han Yongan, President of Shaanxi's Lawyers' Association

Mr Gregory Vijayendran, President of the Law Society of Singapore

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Good morning. To our guests from Shaanxi, a very warm welcome to Singapore. It gives me great pleasure to join all of you here this morning as you start your study visit programme in Singapore.

2. Asia has seen remarkable economic growth in the past few decades. This is a product of many factors, including population growth, sound macroeconomic policies, foreign investments, and technology innovations. Here, I wish to highlight an important but often overlooked driver of economic growth – legal development.

3. Legal development must underpin economic development to achieve inclusive and sustainable growth. The rule of law facilitates trade and investment. It provides for a transparent and stable business environment, where investments are protected, contracts are enforced, and disputes are fairly and efficiently resolved. The legal services sector is also an important enabler for the economy. The demand for legal services and lawyers comes naturally as economic activity grows. Hence, legal development and legal services need to keep pace with economic growth.

4. Cross-border trade and commerce require the support of legal services and a sound legal framework to provide clarity and certainty. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), in particular, involves long-term, high-value and complex investment projects. We need to deal with issues that arise in a timely manner. Agreeing in advance how these disputes will be resolved can help strengthen trust between parties. Resolving commercial and investment disputes in accordance with the law and protecting the legal rights of all parties equally will help create a stable, fair and transparent business

environment built on the rule of law. Resolving disputes through commercial legal means can help preserve relationships and maintain harmony.

5. Singapore and China are “old friends”. In 1976, Singapore Founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew made his first official visit to China. On this trip, he visited Shaanxi and became the first foreign leader to view the terracotta warriors. [To display Slide 1: Founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew visiting the Terracotta Warriors in Xi’an.]

6. On 12 November 1978, 74-year-old Deng Xiaoping visited Singapore. [To display Slide 2: Founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew walking with Deng Xiaoping.] During his visit, Deng visited the Jurong Industrial Estate and the Housing and Development Board, and planted a pong pong tree at Jurong Hill. A month after Mr Deng returned to China, the Communist Party of China held its Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee, which marked the beginning of its historic reform and opening up.

7. This year is the 40th anniversary of Deng Xiaoping’s visit to Singapore, and of China’s reform and opening up policy. We have a commemorative marker and bronze bust of Deng Xiaoping along the Singapore River. We have arranged for the delegation to visit the bust later this week.

8. Singapore and China share a strong collaborative relationship in the area of legal and judicial cooperation. At the 14th Joint Council for Bilateral Cooperation (JCBC) meeting in September this year, cooperation on the BRI was designated as a dedicated agenda item, with legal and judicial cooperation as one cooperation area. Our institutions are already working together, an indication of their complementary strengths and expertise.

- a. In September this year, the Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC) and the Xi’an Arbitration Commission (XAAC) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in Xi’an. Both institutions agreed to work together to support businesses and help them resolve disputes

that may arise from cross-border commercial transactions under BRI. SIAC also has MOUs with the China International Economic and Trade Arbitration Commission (CIETAC) and the Shenzhen Court of International Arbitration (SCIA).

- b. In the mediation space, the Singapore International Mediation Centre (SIMC) has MOUs with the China Council for Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT) and the Hangzhou Arbitration Commission. SIMC will also soon sign a MOU with CCPIT to set up a BRI Mediators Panel.
- c. To strengthen judicial cooperation, our Chief Justices co-chair an annual roundtable. Both Courts agreed to set up a Working Group to develop a legal infrastructure to support the BRI.

9. Apart from government-to-government collaborations, collaboration between the private sectors in Singapore and China is also important. We hope to foster a conducive environment and create opportunities for such collaborations to take place. Hence, besides introductions to Singapore's legal system, a great emphasis of this study visit programme has been placed on the secondments to individual Singapore law firms. We hope that lawyers from both countries will have the chance to network, understand one another and forge strong and long-lasting relationships. It is our hope that this programme will help plant the seeds for collaboration projects in the near future between the lawyers and law firms in Singapore and Shaanxi.

10. These collaborations are mutually beneficial for both Singapore and Chinese law firms. Both sides can share expertise, experience and networks, and build on one another's strengths. In this way, Singapore and Chinese law firms can differentiate what we offer from other legal service providers and capture a larger slice of the regional market. By working together, we can create more opportunities and forge new partnerships of win-win cooperation.

11. To the Singapore law firms and lawyers here today, thank you for stepping forward and participating in this study visit programme. Your response has been

overwhelming. I hope that you too will find this exchange beneficial and you will use this opportunity to network and build long-term relationships with our Chinese friends.

12. Finally, I hope that all of you will enjoy the programme that we have put together for you and that you will find the interactions, networking and mutual learning in the coming month meaningful. I wish you all a fruitful and enjoyable stay in Singapore. Thank you.

Annex

Slide 1: Founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew visiting the Terracotta Warriors in Xi'an



Slide 2: Founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew walking with Deng Xiaoping

