



## Mass Call 2026

### Speech by President of The Law Society of Singapore Professor Tan Cheng Han SC

1. I am delighted, on behalf of the Law Society and its members, to welcome all of you to our learned and honourable fraternity. We, members of the Law Society, look forward to working with you, and to seeing you develop into skilled and ethical professionals dedicated to the administration of justice. All of you have been admitted in a special year as 2026 marks the 200<sup>th</sup> year since the Second Charter of Justice was issued on 27 November 1826. The Charter marked the beginning of Singapore's modern legal system based on the rule of law.
2. Notwithstanding the objectives of the Second Charter, this did not preclude the English judges from occasionally giving effect to the customs of the other inhabitants where this did not undermine English law. Decades after its introduction, in an 1883 case between *Lim Guan Teet v. Yew Boh Neo*<sup>i</sup> on a promissory note, a consent order was recorded that if the plaintiff "goes to swear according to Chinese custom by cutting off head of a cockerel, and burning joss sticks before the temple in Pitt Street, he shall have verdict, if plaintiff refuses to do so, there will be verdict for defendants." The interpreter of the Court was directed to accompany the parties but apparently the agreement tumbled through because the priest of the temple declined to allow it!
3. More significantly, for reasons of culture, language and inadequate resourcing, the formal legal system was largely inaccessible to much of the population in the decades after the Second Charter was introduced. Accordingly, for a considerable period of time, dialect associations and secret societies helped maintain law and order within the Chinese community, including settling minor disputes.
4. The Singapore legal system has come a long way from those earlier days. Today, the rule of law in Singapore is strong and very much embedded in the DNA of the country. We have a world class judiciary led by the Honourable Chief Justice, a highly respected legal

profession with many Singapore lawyers featuring prominently in annual international rankings of leading lawyers, and good law schools with NUS Law being ranked as one of the best law schools in the world since the inception of global rankings in 2011. As the Chief Justice has also reflected in his address at the Opening of the Legal Year in January, this strong foundation has been built through the collective efforts of the Bench, the Bar and the wider legal community. All of you are now part of this proud tradition that has evolved over the last 200 years and you will have to play your part in the continued development of our legal system for the generations of lawyers who will in turn follow you. It is my hope that each of you will leave your imprint and contribute positively to Singapore's legal system.

5. To do so will require commitment and dedication to the legal profession. But this is not all. For those of you who aspire to fulfilling careers, I have 2 pieces of advice. First, to fulfil your potential, humility is essential. A good lawyer must have the humility to know that she needs to continue to learn. We need to be mindful of the prospect that we may be wrong so that we are open to alternative perspectives and views. Remember the old but very true saying that pride comes before a fall. Law is a complex social science and an overly dogmatic approach is unhelpful.
6. Second, integrity and doing the right thing is crucial. In the course of your practice, you will often be confronted with difficult scenarios and choices, and you must have the strength of character to hold fast to the moral and ethical underpinnings of our profession and not be swayed by what expediency may apparently offer. If nothing else, holding fast to your principles, however tempting it may be to do otherwise, is the best guarantee of a long and fruitful career.
7. To conclude, as we celebrate your call during this Bicentennial year, we look forward to at least another 200 years of a vibrant and strong legal system in Singapore that continues to be underpinned by the rule of law. It is now your responsibility together with other members of the profession to do your part in this journey as a shared responsibility with other stakeholders such as the judiciary and government. On this note, I again warmly welcome you as new brethren to the legal profession. May it please the court.

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<sup>i</sup> Kyshe, *1808-1884*, vol 1, at xxxv.