

SG Courts

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

STRENGTHENING JUSTICE, SAFEGUARDING SOCIETY



A trusted Judiciary • Ready for tomorrow

CONTENTS

- 2 About the Singapore Judiciary
- 3 Chief Justice's Foreword
- 4 Message from the Presiding Judge of the State Courts
- 5 Message from the Presiding Judge of the Family Justice Courts
- 7 Highlights of 2023
- 9 **OUR PEOPLE**
- 10 Organisational Structure
- 12 The Supreme Court Bench
- 14 Judiciary Executive Committee
- 15 Supreme Court Registry Senior Management
State Courts Senior Management
- 16 Family Justice Courts Senior Leadership Team
International Judges
- 17 **ACCESS TO JUSTICE**
- 18 Initiatives by the Access to Justice Programme Office
- 19 Improvements to the Supreme Court Service Hub
- 20 Asynchronous Hearings on eLitigation
Information Sheet for Filing of Criminal Motions
Amendments to the Rules and Practice Directions 2021
- 21 New State Courts Mission
Implementation of Remote Private Transcription Services
Launch of Court Audio Services
- 22 Simplified Process for Civil Proceedings
Remote Trials and Assessments of Damages
Operationalising the Rules of Court 2021
- 23 Inter-Agency Collaboration for Implementation of *Guidelines on Reduction in Sentences for Guilty Pleas*
Asynchronous Hearings of Criminal Pre-Trial Conferences and Criminal Case Disclosure Conferences
Improvements to Assist Court Users for Night Court Cases
- 24 ServiceSG Pilot to Assist Parties with Online Services for Ongoing Claims in the Community Disputes Resolution Tribunals
Volunteer Capacity Building: Decoding the Community Disputes Resolution Act
Memorandum of Understanding with Harvey to Use Generative Artificial Intelligence in Disputes Involving Small Claims
Case Highlights Portal
- 25 New Family Justice Rules 2024
- 26 Family Justice @ Heartlands: Empowering the Community
Launch of Probate eService
Family Orders Guide: A New Edition
- 27 Laying the Foundation for Courtroom Communication
Publication of a Practice Guide for the Rules of Court 2021
- 28 **THERAPEUTIC JUSTICE**
- 29 Operationalising a Model for Therapeutic Justice in Our Family Justice System
- 30 **TRUST AND TRUSTWORTHINESS**
- 31 Supreme Court's Waiting Periods
- 32 Statistics
- 35 International Rankings
Continuous Oversight Assurance
Smart(er) Bundles
Increase in Written Judicial Decisions Even When No Appeal Was Filed
- 36 Significant Cases from the Supreme Court
- 38 Significant Cases from the State Courts
- 43 Significant Cases from the Family Justice Courts
- 45 **STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS**
- 46 State Courts' Sharing Sessions with Stakeholders
Partnership with PAVE: Widening Support to Court Users in Cases Involving Intimate Partner Violence
Streamlined Process for Admission of Advocates and Solicitors
- 47 Developments at the Singapore International Commercial Court (SICC)
- 48 SICC Conference 2023
SICC's Deepening Ties with China and India
- 49 Memoranda of Understanding and Roundtables
- 52 Visits and Courtesy Calls
- 54 Events with Partners
- 55 **DEVELOPING OUR CAPABILITIES**
- 56 Launch of Electronic Diary
Workshops on Generative Artificial Intelligence
Environmental Sustainability Initiatives
- 57 Setting Up of Three Specialist Divisions at the Family Justice Courts
Justice System Reforms Series
- 58 **CONNECTING WITH THE COMMUNITY**
- 59 Interview with State Coroner Adam Nakhoda
Conversations with the Community
- 60 Judiciary Volunteers Receive Appreciation Awards
- 61 A Day in Court 2023
Outreach and Engagement with Tertiary Institutions
Annual Training for Court Volunteer Mediators
- 62 Corporate Social Responsibility

ABOUT THE SINGAPORE JUDICIARY

The Judiciary is one of the three Organs of State, together with the Executive and the Legislature.

The Judiciary is made up of the Supreme Court, State Courts and Family Justice Courts, collectively known as the Singapore Courts. The Honourable the Chief Justice is the head of the Judiciary, who also oversees the Supreme Court.

ORGANS OF STATE



JUDICIARY interprets the laws and is a system of courts that upholds the law and ensures justice is accessible to all.



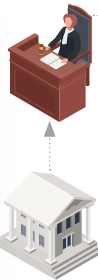
EXECUTIVE includes the Elected President, the Cabinet and the Attorney-General, and exercises powers according to the law.



LEGISLATURE comprises the Parliament and is the legislative authority responsible for enacting legislation.



The Supreme Court is headed by the **Chief Justice**. The Supreme Court consists of the Supreme Court Bench, Supreme Court Registry and Singapore Judicial College, and is supported by the Judicial Administration team. It hears both civil and criminal cases and is made up of the Court of Appeal and the High Court, which includes the Singapore International Commercial Court.



HIGH COURT
Comprises the General Division and the Appellate Division of the High Court.

COURT OF APPEAL
• Hears all criminal appeals against decisions made by the General Division of the High Court in the exercise of its original criminal jurisdiction.
• Hears prescribed categories of civil appeals and appeals that are to be made to the Court of Appeal under written law.

Appellate Division

Hears all civil appeals that are not allocated to the Court of Appeal under the Sixth Schedule to the Supreme Court of Judicature Act. It also hears any civil appeals or other processes that any written law provides is to be heard by the Appellate Division.

General Division

Exercises original and appellate jurisdiction in civil and criminal cases. It also exercises revisionary jurisdiction over the State Courts in criminal cases. It hears cases in the first instance as well as cases on appeal from the State Courts. Types of cases heard by the General Division include:

- Civil cases where the value of the claim exceeds \$250,000.
- Criminal cases where offences are punishable with death or an imprisonment term exceeding 10 years.
- Admiralty matters.
- Company winding-up and other insolvency-related proceedings.
- Bankruptcy proceedings.
- Applications for the admission of advocates and solicitors.

Appeals arising from a decision of the General Division in civil matters will be allocated between the Appellate Division and the Court of Appeal in accordance with the statutory framework set out in the Supreme Court of Judicature Act.

Singapore International Commercial Court (SICC)

- Hears and tries actions which are international and commercial in nature, in accordance with Section 18D(1) of the Supreme Court of Judicature Act.
- Hears and tries proceedings relating to international commercial arbitration, in accordance with Section 18D(2) of the Supreme Court of Judicature Act.
- Includes cases commenced in the SICC or transferred from the General Division to the SICC.



The State Courts are headed by the **Presiding Judge of the State Courts**, who is assisted by the Deputy Presiding Judge, Principal District Judges, Registrar and senior court administrators. District Judges and Magistrates' Courts respectively, and may hold concurrent appointments as Deputy Registrars, Coroners, Tribunal Judges and Tribunal Magistrates.



DISTRICT COURTS
• Hear civil cases with claims of more than \$60,000 and up to \$250,000 in value, or up to \$500,000 for claims for road traffic accidents or personal injuries from industrial accidents.
• Hear criminal cases where the maximum imprisonment term does not exceed 10 years or which are punishable with a fine only.



MAGISTRATES' COURTS
• Hear civil cases involving claims not exceeding \$60,000.
• Hear criminal cases where the maximum imprisonment term does not exceed five years or which are punishable with a fine only.



CORONERS' COURTS
Conduct inquiries into sudden or unnatural deaths or where the cause of death is unknown.



SMALL CLAIMS TRIBUNALS
Hear claims not exceeding \$20,000 or (if both parties consent in writing) \$30,000 for disputes involving a contract for the sale of goods or provision of services, an unfair practice relating to a hire-purchase agreement, a tort in respect of damage caused to property, certain statutory claims, or a contract relating to a lease of residential premises not exceeding two years.



COMMUNITY DISPUTES RESOLUTION TRIBUNALS
Hear disputes between neighbours involving unreasonable interference with the enjoyment or use of places of residence.



EMPLOYMENT CLAIMS TRIBUNALS
Hear salary-related claims and wrongful dismissal claims not exceeding \$20,000 or (for tripartite-mediated disputes) \$30,000.



PROTECTION FROM HARASSMENT COURT
Hears matters arising out of harassment, stalking and related anti-social behaviour, as well as false statements of fact.



The Family Justice Courts are headed by the **Presiding Judge of the Family Justice Courts**. They hear family cases and deal with the care and treatment of young persons, operating based on the principles of therapeutic justice.



HIGH COURT (FAMILY DIVISION)
• Exercises original jurisdiction and hears appeals against the decisions of the Family Courts and the Youth Courts in family proceedings.
• Hears ancillary matters in family proceedings involving assets of \$5 million or more.
• Hears probate matters where the value of the deceased's estate is more than \$5 million or if the case involves the resealing of a foreign grant.



FAMILY COURTS
• Divorce.
• Probate and administration.
• Maintenance.
• Protection against family violence.
• Deputyship.
• Adoption.
• Protection for vulnerable adults.
• Guardianship.
• International child abduction.



YOUTH COURTS
Cases under the Children and Young Persons Act, i.e. Family Guidance, Youth Arrest, Care and Protection.



MEDIATION & COUNSELLING
All cases coming before the Courts are managed proactively by judges from the start. Where necessary, the Courts can direct that parties undergo counselling and mediation to try and reach an amicable resolution of the dispute instead of proceeding with adjudication.

CHIEF JUSTICE'S FOREWORD

At the Opening of the Legal Year 2023, I emphasised the pressing need to reimagine our legal landscape, amidst profound societal shifts driven by advancements like artificial intelligence (AI), big data and technology. It was this imperative that guided the work of the Singapore Courts in 2023 as we persevered in our efforts to strengthen and refine our justice system.

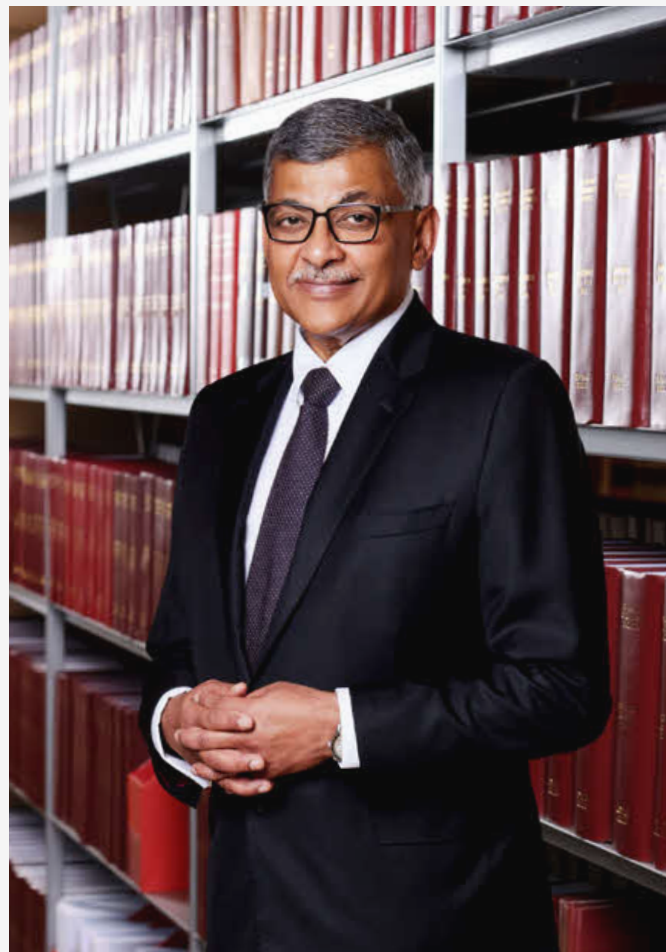
To this end, we implemented several changes to steer the strategic direction of the courts. Through the One Judiciary framework, we unified the three courts under a common vision (*A trusted Judiciary • Ready for tomorrow*) and shared core values (**F**airness, **A**ccessibility, **I**ntegrity, **R**espect). In addition, we strengthened the administration of our judiciary by establishing two new divisions. The Judicial Policy Division has been tasked with identifying emerging trends and developments to better address future challenges, while the Access to Justice Programme Office is spearheading a whole-of-judiciary effort aimed at transforming us into a more outward-facing and user-centric organisation.

We also introduced several initiatives in 2023 to enhance access to justice. For example, we extended the simplified process for civil proceedings in the Magistrates' Courts as an option that the parties to District Court proceedings may adopt. The simplified process provides for upfront document disclosure and early case management, which are measures designed to save time and costs. In the same vein, the Family Justice Courts (FJC) will soon be launching the new Family Justice Rules which will be significantly simplified and streamlined. The new Rules will be accompanied by the digitalisation of commonly used court forms, with guides and prompts to assist users on what they are required to file.

In addition to efforts relating to procedural rules, our courts also explored avenues to better support court users by offering practical assistance and information. This encompasses digital initiatives like the FJC's Probate eService, which enables users to file their documents entirely online with guided auto-populated fields. We also concluded a Memorandum of Understanding with Harvey, the company responsible for the eponymous legal generative AI platform, to study the potential of AI in assisting users in the Small Claims Tribunal to prepare their cases more effectively.

In addition, we significantly augmented the manpower and expertise of the Singapore Judicial College (SJC) in 2023, reaffirming our commitment to nurturing the growth of our people. Under the leadership of the newly appointed Dean, Professor Natalie Skead, the SJC has undertaken enhancements through the establishment of dedicated training centres and the formation of subject-matter advisory panels. The revamped SJC will play a pivotal role in our endeavour to create a community of judges dedicated to lifelong learning, who see themselves not merely as competent adjudicators, but as justice system reformers, leaders and learners.

We also sought to deepen our engagement with our stakeholders in 2023 in various ways. For instance, we established Users' Committees under the auspices of the Commercial Practice Panel to get better feedback from those who use our services. We also launched a year-long series



of interactions titled *Conversations with the Community*, which seeks to bring together the Judiciary, academia, legal and other sectors of society through a series of dialogues. In this way, we aim to heighten awareness of the critical work of the courts and foster conversations on pertinent topics concerning the law, our community and society at large.

Finally, we maintained our engagement with our foreign counterparts in 2023, through exchanges like the 7th Singapore-China Legal and Judicial Roundtable and the inaugural Singapore-India Judicial Roundtable. We also continued our collaborations with foreign judiciaries, with a notable project being the ongoing collaboration with the Kingdom of Bahrain to establish the Bahrain International Commercial Court, modelled primarily after the Singapore International Commercial Court.

The efforts of the Singapore Courts in 2023 reflect a commitment to respond effectively to the dramatic changes in the legal landscape so as to better serve the needs of our stakeholders. This is an ongoing journey that will continue in the years to come. As we navigate the dynamic challenges of our world, we must remain steadfast in our dedication to upholding justice and ensuring access to justice for all.

Sundaresh Menon
Chief Justice
Supreme Court of Singapore

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDING JUDGE OF THE STATE COURTS

2023 was a momentous year for the State Courts as we emerged from the long shadow cast by the COVID-19 pandemic and transitioned to relative normalcy. Notably, we commemorated the official opening of our new State Courts Towers. We unveiled our new State Courts mission and the revamped Five-Year Strategy Map, which collectively underscore our commitment to providing “accessible justice through quality judgments, appropriate dispute resolution and innovative court services”. We also became part of the integrated One Judiciary, with streamlined court operations focusing on enhancing the experience for all court users.

These developments provided a platform for us to reaffirm our institutional purpose and embrace the evolving role of the Judiciary within society. Beyond excelling in our conventional adjudicative role, which places an emphasis on parties obtaining prompt and fair outcomes, we also devoted equal attention to our broader systemic role. This entailed developing and operating systems and processes which facilitate equitable access to quality justice within the State Courts.

Ensuring access to quality justice through our adjudicative role

Our Judicial Officers continued to demonstrate commendable dedication and diligence in discharging their adjudicative function. Despite an increasing caseload, we attained strong clearance and disposition rates across all our Clusters. The combined clearance rate stood at 97%, while the disposition rate improved from 91% to 92% compared to 2022. We continued to place a premium on transparency and accountability, and our Judicial Officers remained mindful of the need to explain their decisions through written judgments. In 2023, the Singapore Academy of Law published 36 decisions from the State Courts. The State Courts also released 702 unpublished decisions during the same period.

Ensuring access to quality justice through our systemic role

We also took significant strides in working on initiatives beyond the courtroom, focusing on five key areas.

First, we partnered other stakeholders to work on initiatives which promoted better processes and outcomes. We contributed significantly to the work of the Sentencing Advisory Panel, which issued the *Guidelines on Reduction in Sentences for Guilty Pleas* on 1 October 2023. These guidelines seek to promote greater consistency and transparency in the sentencing process. We also worked with the Police to improve protection for complainants in domestic violence cases by ensuring early intervention and safety planning.

Second, we enhanced our public communications and outreach efforts to educate court users on what they can expect when they come to court. We engaged lawyers and social service agencies to generate awareness on the legal recourse available in the State Courts for victims of harassment and intimate partner violence. Further plans are in place to produce videos and other materials to clarify the intricacies of different court and tribunal proceedings.

Third, we continued our post-pandemic transition to remote and asynchronous hearings. In particular, asynchronous hearings of criminal pre-trial conferences and criminal case disclosure conferences were formally adopted in June 2023. The volume of cases heard asynchronously has increased steadily. We also continued to encourage the use of video conferencing technology when medical experts are required to testify at Assessment of Damages hearings.



Fourth, we continued to simplify court processes and will make legal costs more transparent to lower the barriers to entry, especially for the less well-resourced. The simplified process in civil hearings, originally applicable in the Magistrates’ Courts, has now been extended to District Court proceedings. Costs guidelines for civil cases heard in the District Courts are also being developed and will soon be published.

Finally, we remained a thought leader in engaging our international counterparts with a view to studying and adopting judicial best practices. The State Courts are a founding member of the International Consortium for Court Excellence and the International Judicial Dispute Resolution Network. The work of the latter culminated in the collective endorsement of the *Best Practice Guide for the Establishment, Implementation and Promotion of the Judicial Dispute Resolution Process*, which was published in May 2023.

The way forward

Very often, it is ground-up initiatives which lead to concrete solutions for the everyday problems faced by court users. Last year, we held our inaugural ‘Imagine, Ideate, Ignite’ event during the mid-year hearing break. Access to justice problem statements were assigned to cross-cluster groups for members to brainstorm and devise innovative solutions. Some of these solutions are being studied for possible implementation. On top of their hearing duties, many officers from the State Courts are also heavily involved in the Access to Justice Workgroup, which was formed in January last year to work on various access to justice projects.

While we have made encouraging progress, our work remains far from complete. My officers and I will continue to embrace the complementary facets of both our adjudicative and systemic roles to ensure that the hearings systems and processes in the State Courts are always geared towards the evergreen objective of access to quality justice.

Vincent Hoong
Presiding Judge
State Courts

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDING JUDGE OF THE FAMILY JUSTICE COURTS

The Family Justice Courts (FJC) made significant progress in 2023. The FJC team kept pace with a caseload of 28,203 cases, which represented an increase of 1.4% over the previous year, while maintaining a high rate of case disposition. This is a testament to the dedication of our Judicial Officers and court administrators, who also successfully implemented a suite of initiatives to better serve the families, children, youths and vulnerable persons who come through our door.

In 2023, we made further strides in enhancing access to justice. As the Chief Justice observed in his 2023 Opening of the Legal Year Response, access to justice “must be at the core of our justice system”, and “[e]ven the best justice system will be worthless if it is inaccessible”. This is especially true of the FJC, where a high proportion of court users are self-represented. To better serve our court users, the FJC expanded the repository of legal information made available on the SG Courts website. The online resources span a wide range of family law topics. For example, our Case Highlights portal features more than 135 summaries of notable cases, serving to elucidate important principles of family law for the benefit of court users. In addition, our *Family Orders Guide* provides appropriate templates to guide court users in the drafting of bespoke court orders.

The FJC also leveraged on technology to improve the delivery of our services. One such project was the Probate eService, which was launched on 15 April 2023 at the Family Justice @ Heartlands event at One Punggol. The Probate eService is an online service for simple probate applications that a sole executor can use to apply for a Grant of Probate. It provides a framework within which applicants are guided through the application process to prepare and submit the required documents. The eService also permits applicants to share their applications with their lawyers should the applicants eventually decide to seek representation or legal advice.

A re-organisation of the FJC was undertaken to further reap the benefits of specialisation, in line with our continued drive for excellence in the administration of family justice. The establishment of the FJC as a specialist court with dedicated resources was a response to the unique nature of family disputes, which differ fundamentally from conventional civil litigation. Procedures and practices specifically designed to address the particular needs and complexities of family justice have since been instituted. Building on this foundation, we further fine-tuned our processes by designating three specialist courts in September 2023: the Court of Protection, the Maintenance and Enforcement Court, and the Youth Court. This move was made to strengthen the protection of vulnerable parties and augment enforcement efforts, as well as to promote the consistent development of case law. Fixed teams of Judicial Officers and court administrators were assigned to these courts, with a view to cultivating their expertise and specialist capabilities to better manage the needs of the parties before them. It is only through making such enhancements that the FJC, as an institution, can stay abreast of the evolving demands of our work. The FJC affirms its commitment to the continual optimisation of its operations.



Significant headway has been made towards adopting therapeutic justice (TJ) since 2020. Work was undertaken in 2023 to introduce a triage process to channel appropriate cases to multi-disciplinary teams comprising a hearing judge, a mediator and a family court specialist. From 2024, all divorce applicants will be required to submit a Joint Triage Checklist at the start of a case, which provides us with an initial indication of the nature of each matter. This facilitates the judicious allocation of resources to where they are most needed to help distressed families find sustainable solutions, resolve their disputes and embark on a journey of healing. This also enables the court to refer parties for appropriate therapeutic interventions early, if such interventions are necessary. Building on earlier efforts initiated and supported by the FJC, the Singapore Academy of Law, in conjunction with the Singapore University of Social Sciences, organised the second run of the Family Therapeutic Justice Certification Programme. This effort aligned the Family Bar with the FJC’s vision of TJ by equipping the Family Bar with the necessary knowledge and skills to assist the court in the service of parties before the FJC.

The FJC also advanced its collaboration with the Bar, and our stakeholders, partners and volunteers. In anticipation of the commencement of the new Family Justice Rules in 2024 (FJR 2024), the FJC closely consulted with the Family and Probate Law Practice Committees of the Law Society of Singapore on the rule changes and took on board feedback from practitioners through a series of dialogues. To provide practitioners sufficient time to familiarise themselves with FJR 2024, an exposure draft was published in August 2023, with our family judges speaking on the rule changes at the Law Society’s Family Conference in 2023. These sessions will be complemented by further training sessions for the Bar in the lead-up to the implementation of FJR 2024.

Our collaborative efforts extend beyond our shores. We continue to cultivate and fortify our ties with

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDING JUDGE OF THE FAMILY JUSTICE COURTS

judiciaries in the region and internationally. With the convergence of globalisation and the digital age, we are seeing an unprecedented level of interconnectedness of people from around the world. Family disputes that transcend jurisdictions commonly escalate into complex litigation, and often proceed in parallel in multiple jurisdictions. International cooperation is required not only to manage and resolve such disputes effectively, but also to mitigate the emotional distress and financial burdens that are associated with them. We have, over the years, established valuable connections with courts and institutions overseas. One salient example is our participation in the Council of ASEAN Chief Justices' Working Group on Cross-Border Disputes Involving Children. The Working Group, which is co-chaired by Singapore and the Philippines, with all ASEAN states being represented, has its secretariat staffed by the officers of the FJC. At the last meeting of the Working Group, which was hosted by Singapore in July 2023, the Working Group reached a new understanding on the establishment of a procedure for the administrative verification of court orders. We look forward to deepening our bonds and establishing new ties with our international counterparts in the years to come.

The FJC is at a crucial inflection point. In 2024, we are poised for significant developments ahead. This would include the implementation of legislative amendments, such as the introduction of mutual agreement as the sixth fact to establish an irretrievable breakdown of a marriage under the Women's Charter 1961, and working with the Ministry of Social and Family Development

to expand the co-parenting programme that it runs. In addition, we will be implementing the FJR 2024 that I alluded to earlier. The new rules will have a simplified structure with a reduced number of provisions. This will further enhance access to justice, as the new rules will be easier to navigate and use. Further, we will embark on a phased digitalisation of the most commonly-used Court Forms. Through the incorporation of signposts, step-by-step prompts, and information on the documents to be filed, the digitalised forms will simplify and demystify court procedures.

The FJC will also be moving into its new home at Havelock Square in 2024, bringing all the FJC's services under one roof. The new courthouse will boast 25 courtrooms and 52 hearing chambers. There will also be a unified registry for all our justice divisions at the central lobby. Besides greater convenience for our court users, the new courthouse will offer features which have been specifically tailored to their needs.

The FJC treasures the promise of each new day, and a brighter future for the families and individuals we serve. We look forward to working closely with the wider judiciary family, the Bar, and all our stakeholders, partners and volunteers to transform that promise into reality, and to charting new horizons in 2024 and beyond.

Teh Hwee Hwee
Presiding Judge
Family Justice Courts



HIGHLIGHTS OF 2023

14 JULY

STATE COURTS TOWERS
OFFICIALLY OPEN

The State Courts Towers were officially opened on 14 July 2023, an event meant to be held two years earlier but rescheduled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Graced by Guest-of-Honour, then-President Halimah Yacob, the landmark event was hosted by The Honourable the Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon and witnessed by guests, including Minister Edwin Tong, Justices of the Supreme Court, senior members of government and the legal community, as well as key stakeholders who had supported the design and construction of the Towers.

In his opening address, the Chief Justice said that the opening of the State Courts Towers in December 2019 marked a significant milestone to improve the delivery of justice and ensure accessibility to people in Singapore. This proved to be critical during the pandemic, when it was imperative for courts around the world to maintain access to justice despite physical access to the courts being restricted.

The Presiding Judge of the State Courts, Justice Vincent Hoong, anchored this milestone further in his speech: "The one constant in the State Courts that will never change is our mission to ensure access to quality justice for all. In fulfilling this mission, we will ensure that the judiciary remains an institution worthy of the trust that our people have reposed in it."

The State Courts Towers are equipped with facilities to handle the increasing workload of the State Courts and better serve court users. The courtrooms are outfitted with video-conferencing facilities for counsel, parties and witnesses to appear remotely. Special assistance is also available for court users with hearing and visual impairments, with assistive listening systems and wayfinding capabilities incorporated in courtrooms and the Towers. All courtrooms come with platform lifts and low-height service counters to facilitate access for those with mobility impairments.

Court users are also able to better connect with the available avenues for assistance. The HELP Centre at Level B1 hosts the Community Justice Centre, the Public Defender's Office and Pro Bono SG. These services share a single front desk, which guides court users to the appropriate provider of legal and other aid for both civil and criminal matters.

State Courts Towers
in Numbers

178 metres high – the tallest government building in Singapore to date



39 link bridges connecting the Court Tower and Office Tower



53 courtrooms



54 hearing chambers



60 solar panels installed on the roof

From State Courts Building
to State Courts Towers

2011 An open design competition was launched for the construction of a new Subordinate Courts complex.

2013 The Urban Redevelopment Authority of Singapore conferred the Subordinate Courts Building conservation status.

2014 The Subordinate Courts were renamed the State Courts.

2019 The State Courts moved into the State Courts Towers, which retain the address of 1 Havelock Square.

2023 Then-President Halimah Yacob officially opened the State Courts Towers.



In operation since December 2019, the State Courts Towers were officially opened on 14 July 2023.



Then-President Halimah Yacob (centre) officially opened the State Courts Towers together with Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon (left) and the Presiding Judge of the State Courts, Justice Vincent Hoong.



From left: Justice Tan Siong Thye, Minister Edwin Tong, then-President Halimah Yacob, Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon, Justice Vincent Hoong and Justice See Kee Oon.

HIGHLIGHTS OF 2023

9 JANUARY

OPENING OF THE LEGAL YEAR

About 300 members of the legal community attended this annual event, which was held in person at the Supreme Court auditorium on 9 January 2023. Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon, Attorney-General Lucien Wong and then-President of the Law Society, the late Adrian Tan, delivered their customary speeches. In his response, the Chief Justice reflected on the changes that have taken place over the past few years, focusing on three broad areas: the impact of these changes on the legal profession, the need to reimagine our legal landscape, and the critical issue of access to justice.

The Supreme Court Bench took a group photo at Parliament Green to mark the Opening of the Legal Year 2023.



22 AND 23 MAY

INTERNATIONAL JUDICIAL DISPUTE RESOLUTION NETWORK MEETING

The International Judicial Dispute Resolution Network (JDRN), which includes the Judiciary of Singapore as one of the founding members and secretariat, convened on 22 and 23 May 2023 in New York City for its second meeting. Hosted by the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York, the two-day meeting brought together the global network of judiciaries to advance the adoption of the judicial dispute resolution process around the world to enhance the administration and delivery of justice.

Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon (third from left) and the Presiding Judge of the State Courts, Justice Vincent Hoong (third from right), with the Singapore delegation at the JDRN meeting in New York City.



10 AND 11 JANUARY

SINGAPORE INTERNATIONAL COMMERCIAL COURT CONFERENCE

The annual Singapore International Commercial Court (SICC) Conference was held on 10 and 11 January 2023. It was held in a hybrid format, with participants attending in person at the Supreme Court and by live video link. This was the first in-person meeting of the Supreme Court Bench and SICC International Judges since the COVID-19 pandemic. Following the opening address delivered by Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon, a lineup of speakers and panellists shared their views and perspectives around the theme of 'Forging Ahead in International Commercial Dispute Management'.

The Supreme Court Bench and SICC International Judges gathered for a group photo – the first in three years.



21 AND 22 AUGUST

MASS CALL

A total of 432 newly-minted Advocates and Solicitors were called to the Bar over three sessions at the Supreme Court auditorium on 21 and 22 August 2023. For the first time since 2019, this event was held in a fully physical format. In his address at the first session, Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon outlined the impact of generative artificial intelligence (AI) on legal systems, with an emphasis on new legal tools and issues arising from generative AI.

Mass Call 2023 welcomed 432 newly-minted Advocates and Solicitors to the legal profession.



OUR PEOPLE

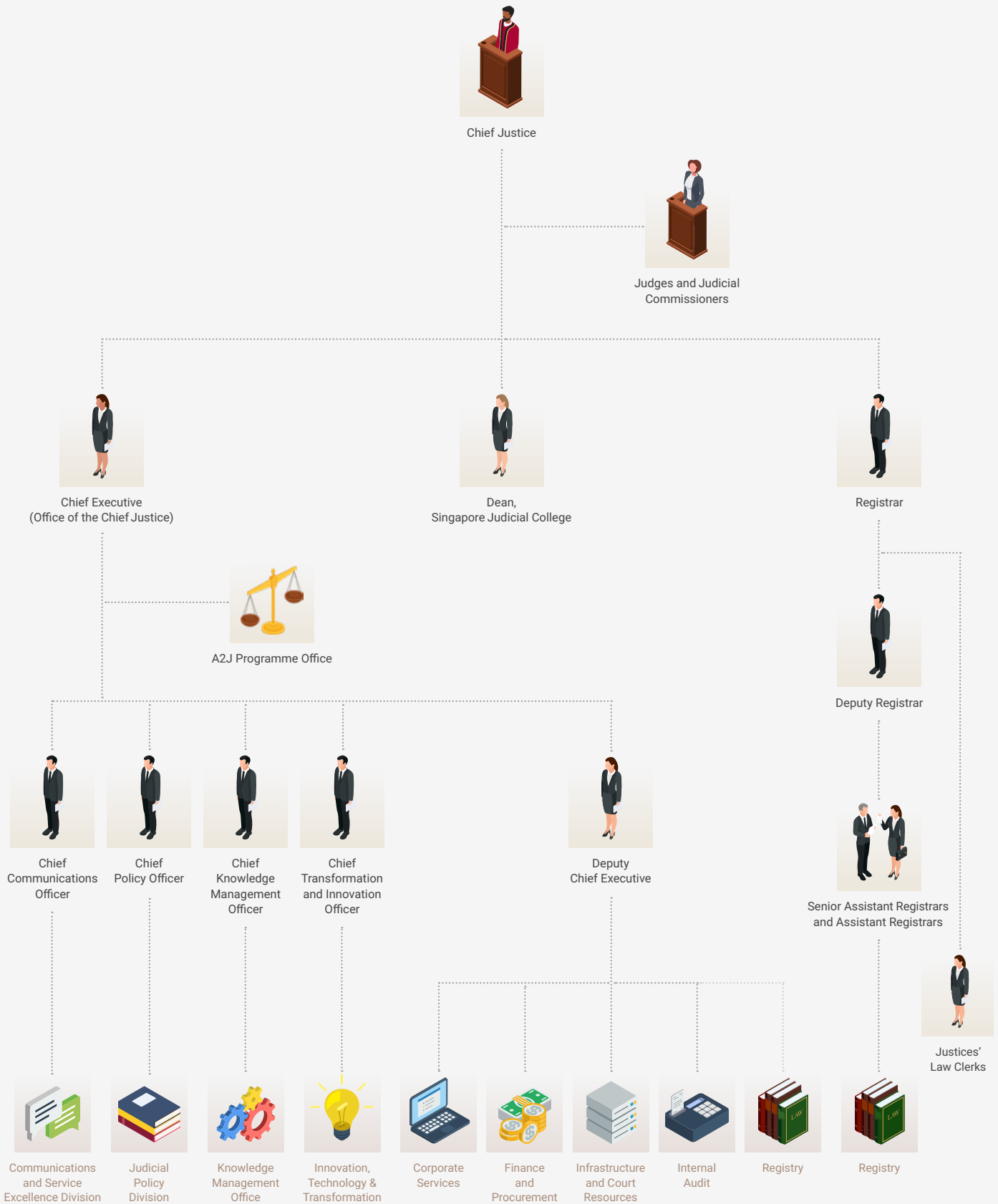


Demonstrating integrity, professionalism and a forward-thinking mindset, those who collectively make up the Singapore Judiciary embody the mission to ensure proper administration of justice.

A trusted Judiciary • Ready for tomorrow

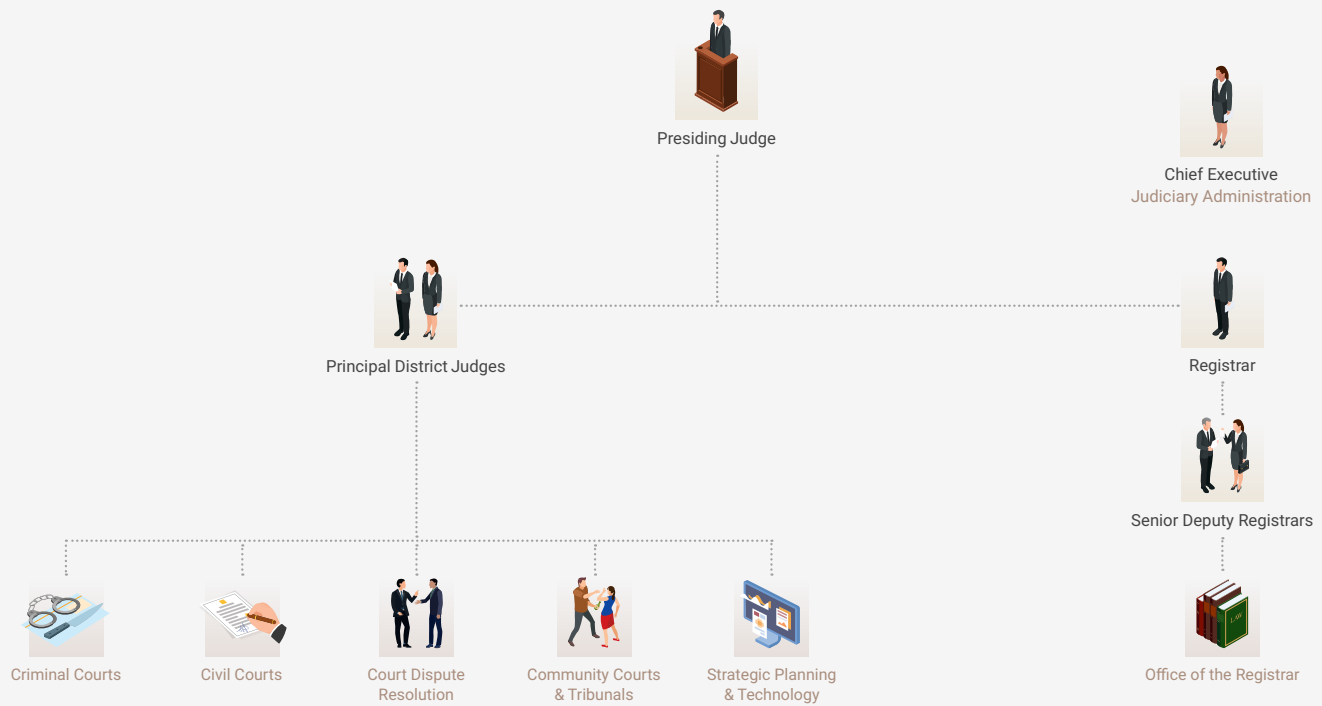
ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE (AS OF 1 APRIL 2024)

SUPREME COURT

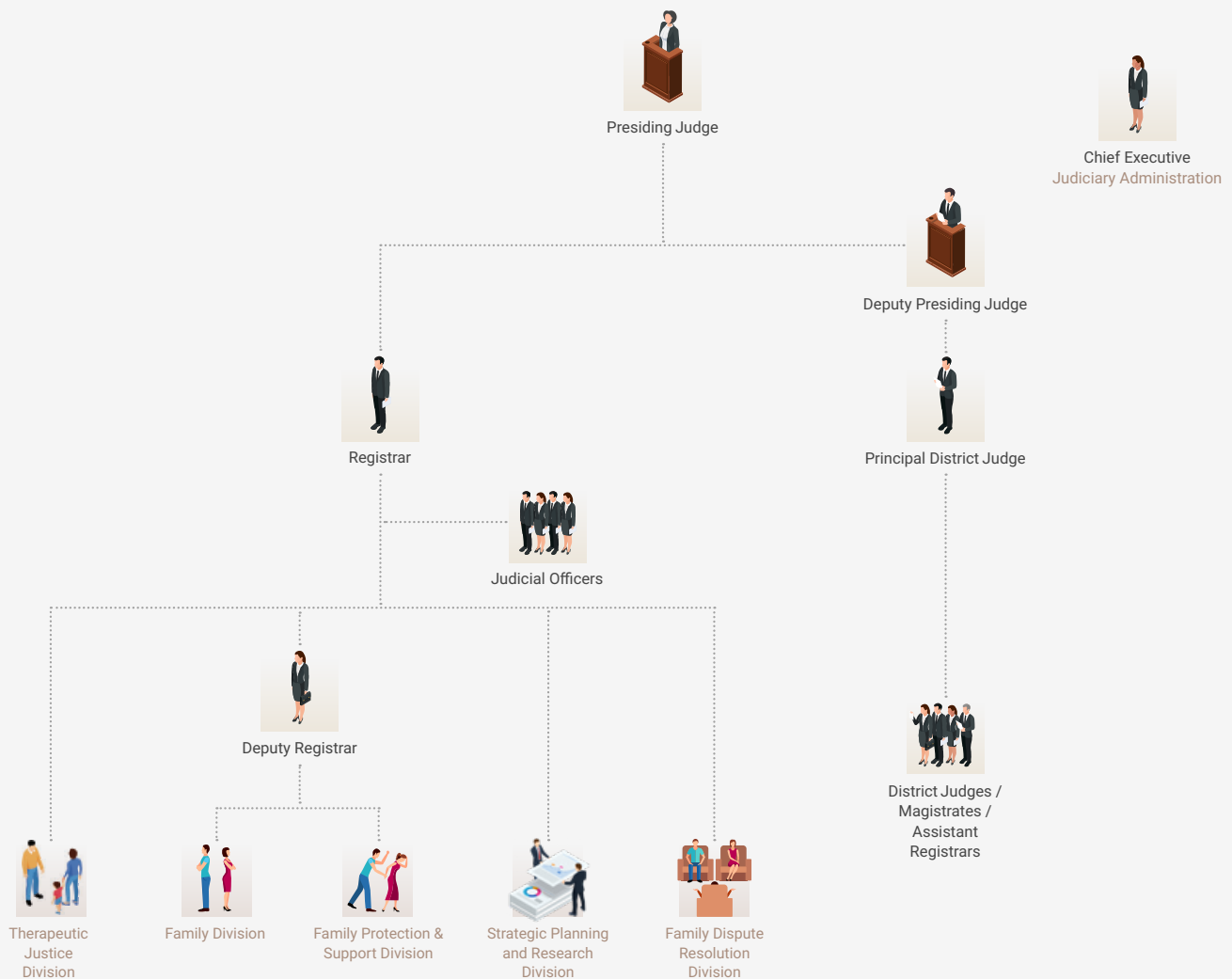


ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE (AS OF 1 APRIL 2024)

STATE COURTS



FAMILY JUSTICE COURTS



THE SUPREME COURT BENCH (AS OF 1 APRIL 2024)



CHIEF JUSTICE

1 Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon

JUSTICES OF THE COURT OF APPEAL

2 Justice Tay Yong Kwang

4 Justice Belinda Ang

3 Justice Steven Chong

JUDGES OF THE APPELLATE DIVISION

5 Justice Woo Bih Li

7 Justice Debbie Ong

6 Justice Kannan Ramesh

8 Justice See Kee Oon
Justice See is also the President of the Industrial Arbitration Court.



JUSTICES OF THE HIGH COURT

1 Justice Choo Han Teck

3 Justice Chua Lee Ming

5 Justice Hoo Sheau Peng

7 Justice Pang Khang Chau

2 Justice Vinodh Coomaraswamy

4 Justice Valerie Thean

6 Justice Aedit Abdullah

THE SUPREME COURT BENCH (AS OF 1 APRIL 2024)



JUSTICES OF THE HIGH COURT

1 Justice Audrey Lim

3 Justice Dedar Singh Gill

5 Justice S. Mohan

7 Justice Philip Jeyaretnam

Justice Jeyaretnam is also the President of the Singapore International Commercial Court.

2 Justice Vincent Hoong

Justice Hoong is also the Presiding Judge of the State Courts.

4 Justice Mavis Chionh

6 Justice Andre Maniam



JUSTICES OF THE HIGH COURT

1 Justice Kwek Mean Luck

3 Justice Goh Yihan

5 Judicial Commissioner Alex Wong

7 Judicial Commissioner Kristy Tan

2 Justice Hri Kumar Nair

4 Justice Teh Hwee Hwee
Justice Teh is also the Presiding Judge of the Family Justice Courts.

6 Judicial Commissioner Christopher Tan

JUDICIAL COMMISSIONERS

THE SUPREME COURT BENCH (AS OF 1 APRIL 2024)



SENIOR JUDGES

- 1** Senior Judge Andrew Phang
- 2** Senior Judge Judith Prakash
- 3** Senior Judge Lee Seiu Kin
- 4** Senior Judge Chan Seng Onn
- 5** Senior Judge Tan Siang Thye

JUDICIARY EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE (AS OF 1 APRIL 2024)



- | | | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>1 Ms Juthika Ramanathan
Chief Executive, Office of the Chief Justice</p> <p>2 Professor Natalie Skead
Dean, Singapore Judicial College</p> <p>3 Mrs Clara Goh
Deputy Chief Executive</p> <p>4 Mr Tan Boon Heng
Registrar, Supreme Court</p> | <p>5 Mr Edwin San
Registrar, State Courts</p> <p>6 Mr Kenneth Yap
Registrar, Family Justice Courts</p> <p>7 Mr Patrick Nathan
Chief Communications Officer / Chief Risk Officer</p> <p>8 Mr James Leong
Chief Knowledge Management Officer / Chief Policy Officer</p> | <p>9 Mr Tan Ken Hwee
Chief Transformation and Innovation Officer</p> <p>10 Ms Theresa Yeo
Senior Director, Corporate Services</p> <p>11 Ms Cher Ming Hui
Senior Director, Finance and Procurement</p> <p>12 Ms Papinder Kaur
Senior Director, Infrastructure and Court Resources</p> | <p>13 Mr Paul Quan
Executive Director, Singapore Judicial College</p> <p>14 Mr Justin Yeo
Deputy Executive Director, Singapore Judicial College</p> <p>15 Mr Toh Kon Sing
Ministry Family Chief Information Officer</p> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

SUPREME COURT REGISTRY SENIOR MANAGEMENT (AS OF 1 APRIL 2024)



1 Mr Tan Boon Heng
Registrar

2 Mr Phang Hsiao Chung
Deputy Registrar
Mr Phang is also the Divisional Registrar for the Singapore International Commercial Court.

3 Ms Ng Teng Teng, Cornie
Senior Assistant Registrar
Ms Ng is also the Divisional Registrar for the General Division of the High Court (Civil).

4 Ms Chong Chin Chin
Senior Assistant Registrar
Ms Chong is also the Divisional Registrar for the Court of Appeal and the Appellate Division of the High Court.

5 Ms Cheng Pei Feng
Senior Assistant Registrar
Ms Cheng is also the Divisional Registrar for the General Division of the High Court (Crime).

6 Mr Lee Yeow Wee, David
Senior Assistant Registrar
Mr Lee is also the Divisional Registrar for the General Division of the High Court (Civil).

STATE COURTS SENIOR MANAGEMENT (AS OF 1 APRIL 2024)



1 Justice Vincent Hoong
Presiding Judge

2 Mr Edwin San
Registrar

3 Ms Thian Yee Sze
Principal District Judge, Community Courts and Tribunals

4 Mr Toh Han Li
Principal District Judge, Criminal Courts (Group B)

5 Mr Victor Yeo
Principal District Judge, Court Dispute Resolution

6 Mr Toh Yung Cheong
Principal District Judge, Strategic Planning and Technology

7 Ms Jill Tan
Principal District Judge, Criminal Courts (Group A)

NOT IN PHOTO:
Mr Clement Seah
Principal District Judge, Civil Courts

FAMILY JUSTICE COURTS SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM (AS OF 1 APRIL 2024)



1 Justice Teh Hwee Hwee
Presiding Judge

3 Mr Kenneth Yap
Registrar

5 Mr Kevin Ng
District Judge / Assistant Registrar /
Senior Judicial Head, Family Dispute Resolution

7 Ms Jen Koh
District Judge / Deputy Registrar /
Senior Judicial Head, Family 1

2 Mr Chia Wee Kiat
Deputy Presiding Judge

4 Mr Muhammad Hidir Abdul Majid
Principal District Judge, Family Protection
and Support / Assistant Registrar

6 Ms Toh Wee San
District Judge / Assistant Registrar /
Senior Judicial Head, Family 2

INTERNATIONAL JUDGES (AS OF 1 APRIL 2024)



1 Justice James Allsop

2 Justice Thomas Frederick Bathurst

3 Justice Sir Jeremy Cooke

4 Justice Sir Henry Bernard Eder

5 Justice Robert French

6 Justice Roger Giles

7 Justice Dominique T. Hascher

8 Justice Douglas Samuel Jones AO

9 Justice Lord Jonathan Hugh Mance

10 Justice Beverley McLachlin PC

11 Justice Yuko Miyazaki

12 Justice Lord Neuberger of Abbotsbury

13 Justice James Michael Peck

14 Justice Sir Vivian Ramsey

15 Justice Anselmo Reyes

16 Justice David Wolfe Rivkin

17 Justice Sir Bernard Rix

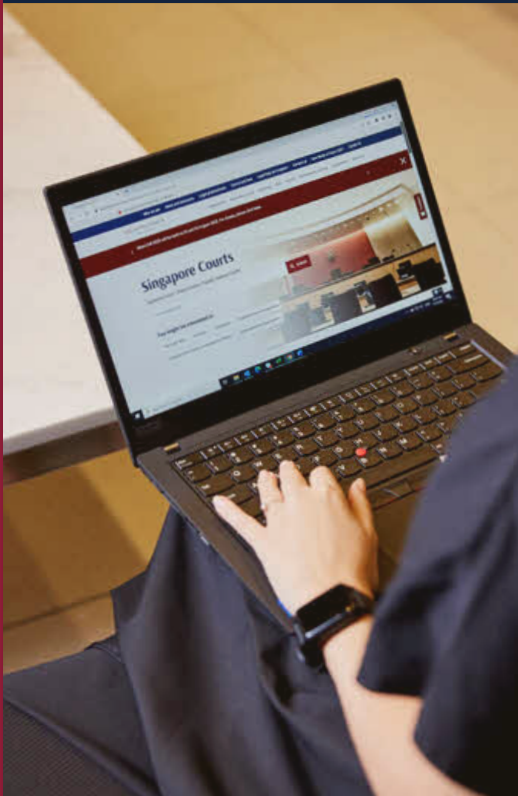
18 Justice Arjan Kumar Sikri

19 Justice Christopher Scott Sontchi

20 Justice Simon Thorley KC

21 Justice Zhang Yongjian

ACCESS TO JUSTICE



Making justice accessible to all,
and removing barriers that
stand in the way of people's rights,
is a necessary condition for
a fair and equal society.

INITIATIVES BY THE ACCESS TO JUSTICE PROGRAMME OFFICE

Access to Justice as a Key Focus Area

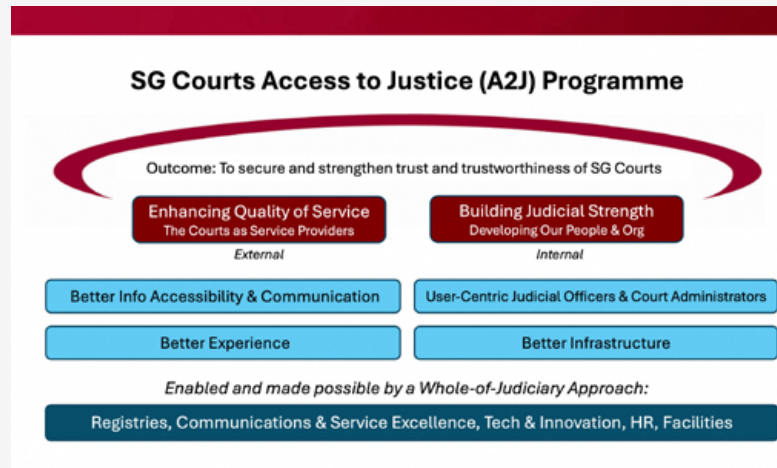
The Access to Justice (A2J) Programme Office was set up in April 2023 to consolidate and drive A2J efforts across the Judiciary. The A2J Programme Office, under the Chief Executive's Office, seeks to drive the Judiciary's transformation into a more outward-facing, user-centric organisation.

The four key roles of the A2J Programme Office are to:

1. **Drive A2J policy.** We define what is considered A2J in the Judiciary's context, and look at international best practices to define standards and benchmarks.
2. **Drive A2J projects.** We drive projects to enhance A2J by understanding users' pain points, addressing gaps and enhancing their service experience.
3. **Track and scale A2J efforts.** We monitor the progress of projects through regular reporting to the Chief Justice, and scale up best practices where possible.
4. **Support a culture of A2J.** We promote A2J through ground-up projects and various forms of communication to support and sustain a mindset of A2J in every officer.

A2J Strategy

We have structured our A2J strategy to focus on two key thrusts. First, we want to enhance the quality of service, which speaks to our external role as service providers. Second, we want to build judicial strength, which involves internally developing our people and organisation to adopt a user-centric lens.



The Access to Justice strategy.



A2J Workgroup

To create a ground-up movement for every officer to play a role in A2J, the A2J Workgroup was set up in 2023. It comprises 30 officers from across all three courts within the Judiciary (i.e. Supreme Court, State Courts and Family Justice Courts).

Since the Workgroup's formation, six groups have been formed to examine different aspects of A2J, such as streamlining processes and enhancing information availability to court users. In 10 months, these groups (consisting of 20 officers) made 21 recommendations, carried out 11 pilots, and engaged more than 80 users to understand pain points and test solutions.

To carry the momentum of A2J among officers, the *A2J Times* e-newsletter was launched to publicise the various A2J initiatives across the Judiciary. We hope to encourage more officers to join the A2J movement.

The A2J Workgroup convened for its third meeting on 28 September 2023.

IMPROVEMENTS TO THE SUPREME COURT SERVICE HUB

The Supreme Court Service Hub was officially opened by Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon on 29 November 2022. Like the State Courts Service Hub, which opened in 2018, the Supreme Court Service Hub seeks to provide a quick and seamless service experience for court users. For added convenience, both service hubs are able to address cross-court enquiries pertaining to court processes and applications.

The Supreme Court Service Hub is a one-stop facility where services like the Service Bureau, Business Centre and Community Justice Centre are co-located. Court users can also attend Commissioner for Oaths (CFO) services and Duty Registrar's appointments at this location.

The facilities at the Service Hub are continually enhanced based on court users' feedback. For example, the queue kiosk was moved into the Service Hub from its original position next to the Information Counter. Court users who miss the queue kiosk no longer have to exit the Service Hub, take their queue numbers and then re-enter the Service Hub.

Other improvements made to better the service experience for court users include repositioning the queue display screen for greater visibility, installing privacy screens at the Business Centre terminals to offer more privacy, and constructing a standing countertop at the Service Hub so that court users can write and complete forms comfortably.

In addition, arrangements were made for the Supreme Court's CFO to accept cross-court affirmations. This gives court users the flexibility to have their court documents commissioned at the Supreme Court, when previously they had to present them at the court where their matters were heard.

The facilities at the Service Hub are continually enhanced based on court users' feedback.

Benefits for Self-Represented Persons

The establishment of the Supreme Court Service Hub has benefitted court users, particularly self-represented persons (SRPs). They enjoy the convenience of making enquiries, seeking information on court processes and performing their transactions at one location, instead of having to shuttle between multiple locations within the same building.

For SRPs who wish to check on the status of their hearings, there are self-help terminals where frontline service officers can assist them to access their case details via the respective case management systems for each court. These officers can also provide additional assistance, such as explaining relevant processes in the users' preferred language.

Chief Justice Menon had said at the opening of this facility in November 2022: "The Supreme Court Service Hub is a manifestation of our commitment to cater to the needs of our court users, especially self-represented litigants, and to help them navigate the justice system. It is only by continuously improving our court users' experience in this way that we can maintain the public's trust in the judiciary."



Self-represented persons have benefitted most from the establishment of the Supreme Court Service Hub.

ASYNCHRONOUS HEARINGS ON eLITIGATION

The Supreme Court conducted a pilot for asynchronous hearings on the eLitigation platform in March 2023. To facilitate such asynchronous hearings, eLitigation was enhanced with new features such as:

- Instant messaging.
- Document sharing.
- Task lists and deadline tracking.
- Issuance of orders and directions by the Court.
- Quick search for asynchronous hearing messages and documents.

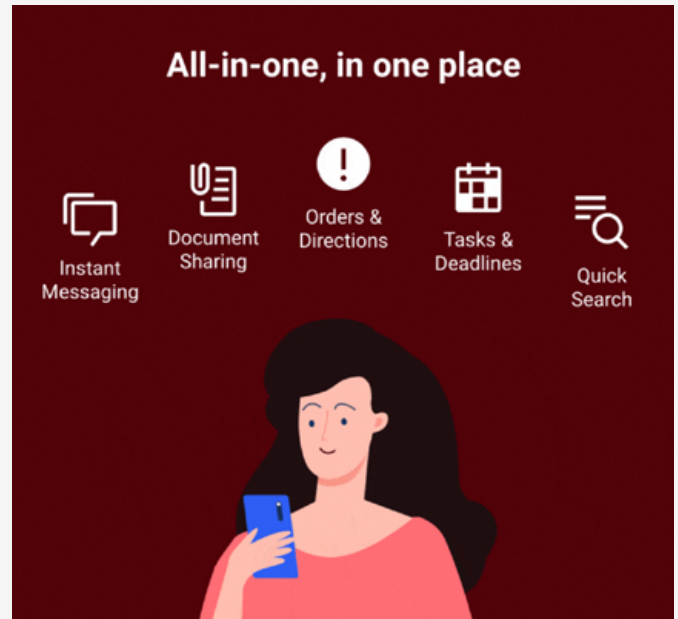
The pilot seeks to provide another platform – via eLitigation – to allow a “chat” function between the Court and the lawyers directly, without the need for Registry Case Officers and law firm paralegals to prepare letters on both ends, thereby enabling more seamless communication between the Court and the lawyers.

During the pilot, the Court shortlisted appropriate cases and wrote to lawyers who were eLitigation subscribers to invite them to participate in asynchronous hearings for pre-trial conferences, case conferences and directions-related hearings. The parties participated remotely via the eLitigation website in their own time, within the schedule fixed by the Court.

INFORMATION SHEET FOR FILING OF CRIMINAL MOTIONS

Amendments to the Supreme Court Practice Directions 2021 were made, with effect from 1 November 2023, to introduce a requirement for applicants in criminal motions for an extension of time to lodge a Notice of Appeal (NOA) or a Petition of Appeal (POA) to attach to the supporting affidavit an information sheet in a prescribed form. This requirement applies to such criminal motions filed in the General Division of the High Court and the Court of Appeal.

The information sheet in the prescribed form starts with an overview of the law relating to criminal motions for extension of time to lodge an NOA/POA, and contains sections which guide applicants to provide all material information. As most such criminal motions are filed by SRPs, this is helpful for applicants as it ensures that they set out all information necessary to support the application.



New features were added to the eLitigation platform to facilitate asynchronous hearings.

AMENDMENTS TO THE RULES AND PRACTICE DIRECTIONS 2021

The Hague Convention of 15 November 1965 on the Service Abroad of Judicial and Extrajudicial Documents in Civil or Commercial Matters (Hague Service Convention) came into force for Singapore on 1 December 2023. The Hague Service Convention simplifies and streamlines processes for the service of judicial and extrajudicial documents in civil and commercial matters across borders.

In tandem with this, amendments were made to the Rules of Court (ROC) 2021, the Singapore International Commercial Court Rules 2021 and the Family Justice Rules 2014 to give effect to service in and out of Singapore under the Hague Service Convention.

The Practice Directions 2021 were also amended to:

- Provide transparency in waiting times for Supreme Court matters under ROC 2021.
- Formalise an initiative where the Sheriff will direct the enforcement applicant to engage its solicitors to serve Notices of Attachment in all cases where the enforcement applicant is represented by solicitors in the enforcement proceedings, so as to support the increasing number of filings for attachments of debt.
- Permit a claimant who is applying to serve an originating process out of Singapore to apply for an extension of the validity of the originating process (if the claimant expects that the originating process may expire before being served on the defendant) at the same time in a single application, instead of filing a separate application, thus saving time and costs.

NEW STATE COURTS MISSION

The new Singapore Judiciary vision sets out the aspiration for the Judiciary as a whole and anchors us with our nation's goals and values, while the mission statement from each court defines its main purpose and how it will achieve this.

The new State Courts mission sharply focuses on providing accessible justice through quality judgments, appropriate dispute resolution and innovative court services.

IMPLEMENTATION OF REMOTE PRIVATE TRANSCRIPTION SERVICES

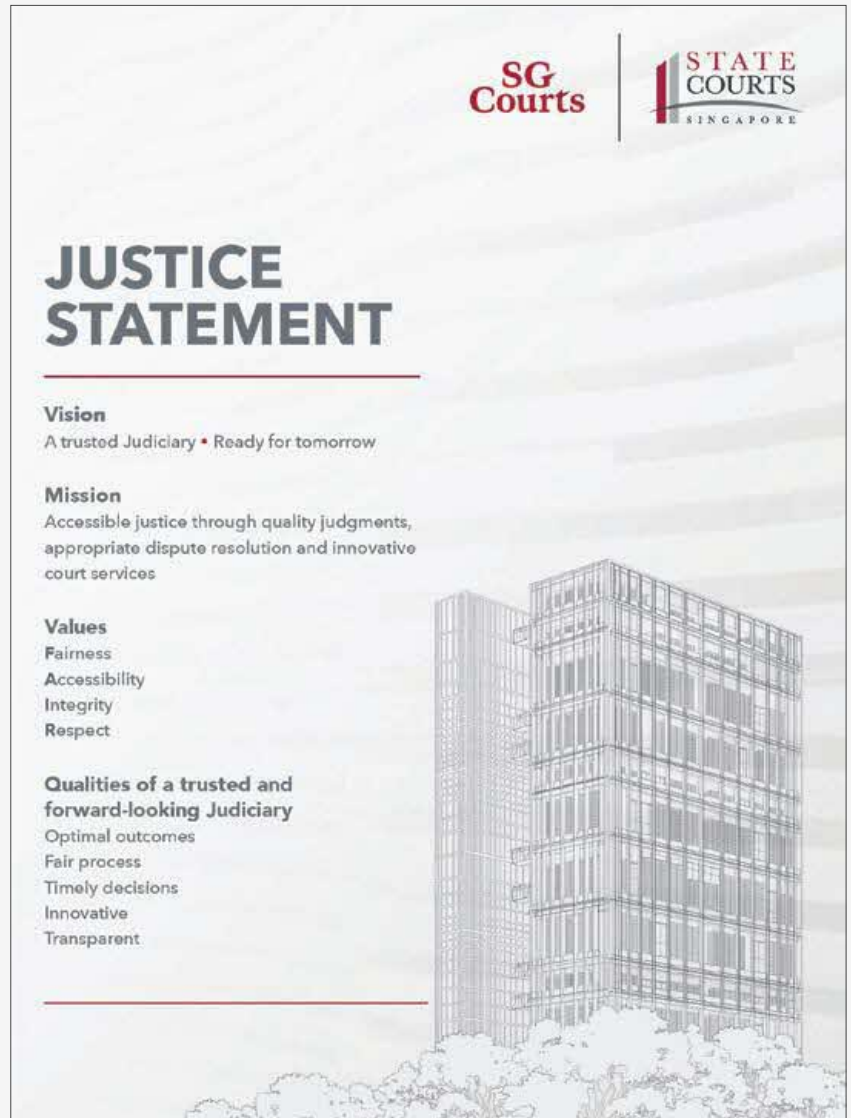
With effect from 1 April 2023, real-time private transcription services (PTS) may be provided remotely by the appointed PTS providers¹, as long as the judge presiding over the case has agreed with said mode of service delivery.

Prior to remote PTS, the transcriber (also known as court reporter) was required to physically render his or her services in the courtroom via the court audio feed for both physical and virtual court hearings. This posed a challenge for the PTS providers, as there was a limited number of court reporters in Singapore due to the niche skillset, and they would need to fly in court reporters from overseas. Other challenges included business risks where the hearings could be vacated (e.g. due to COVID-19) while the court reporter was already en route to Singapore.

By facilitating remote real-time PTS, hearings that otherwise could not proceed due to lack of local real-time court reporters are now able to commence, leading to better access to justice and fulfilling SG Courts' needs.

By facilitating remote real-time PTS, hearings that otherwise could not proceed due to lack of local real-time court reporters are now able to commence.

¹ Epiq Singapore Pte Ltd and Opus 2 International Singapore Pte Ltd are the only white-listed PTS providers appointed by SG Courts whom parties can engage directly for real-time transcription of hearings.

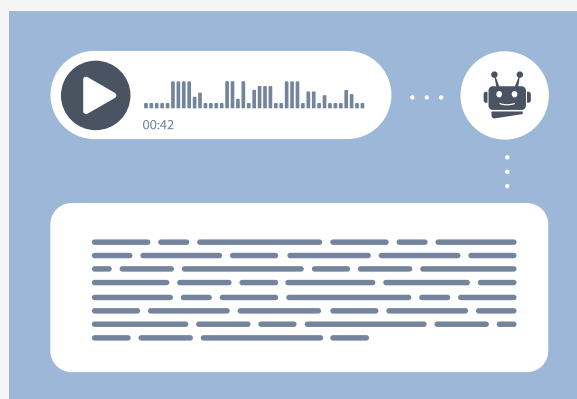


The State Courts are committed to delivering accessible, timely and quality justice.

LAUNCH OF COURT AUDIO SERVICES

In December 2023, SG Courts launched the system-wide Court Audio Services system. It integrates audio recording and explores the use of artificial intelligence (AI)-driven automated transcription technology.

Expensive human-operated real-time transcription services may not have to be resorted to, if the automated transcription is adequate. The automated transcription is also linked to the audio recording so that the corresponding audio can be easily checked to verify specific portions of the transcription.



SG Courts launched an AI-driven automated transcription that is linked to the audio recording.

SIMPLIFIED PROCESS FOR CIVIL PROCEEDINGS

The simplified process for civil proceedings in the Magistrates' Courts was extended to civil proceedings in the District Courts, with effect from 1 December 2023. The simplified process applies to District Court civil cases where all parties consent to its application, and parties are now required to consider the applicability of the simplified process when filing their first documents in District Court cases.

The increased applicability of the simplified process to District Court civil cases saves time and costs, and helps achieve greater access to justice.



Video conferencing technology is increasingly being used in court trials and chamber hearings.

REMOTE TRIALS AND ASSESSMENTS OF DAMAGES

The use of video link in court proceedings continues to be a useful tool, facilitating the appearance of parties and/or witnesses via video conference (VC), with parties' consent.

From 23 November 2020 to 31 July 2023, 96 civil trials (or portions thereof) were conducted via VC. Protocols have been enacted to broadcast VC civil trials on a projector within a physical courtroom, to ensure that the public's access to justice is maintained.

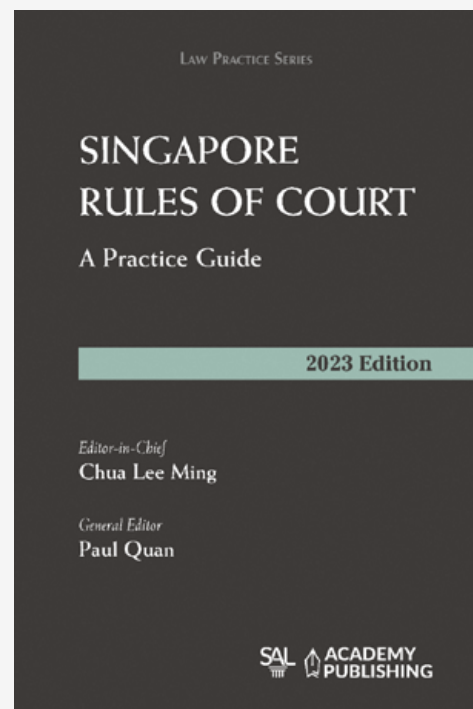
There were also 52 assessments of damages (ADs) (or part thereof) for chamber hearings conducted via VC from 1 April 2020 to 31 July 2023. Most recently, the State Courts have begun looking into opportunities for medical experts to testify remotely at ADs. It is anticipated that this will give doctors more flexibility, and ultimately make it easier for parties to secure hearing dates for ADs where doctors are required to testify.

OPERATIONALISING THE RULES OF COURT 2021

Following the introduction of the Rules of Court (ROC) 2021 on 1 April 2022, a cross-cluster team was tasked to produce the internal workflows and supporting infrastructure (e.g. modifications to eLitigation) necessitated by this change. Beyond this, ancillary documents such as Practice Directions and Forms were drafted to operationalise ROC 2021.

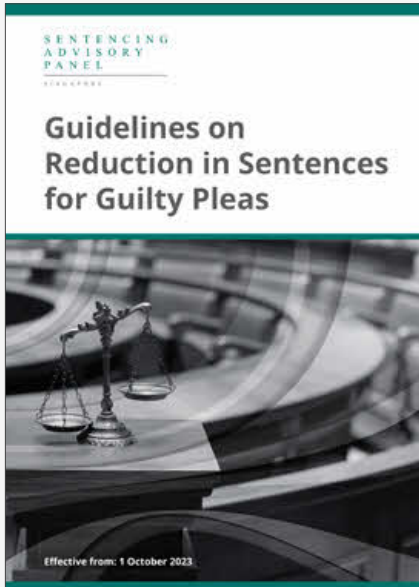
As ROC 2021 matured and more of its unique features were stress-tested over time, the team has revised workflows, refined documents, and rooted out teething issues at the eLitigation backend. Operationalising ROC 2021 continues to be a work in progress, and it is anticipated to be an iterative project improved by continuous feedback.

In particular, as part of SG Courts' commitment to promote access to justice, efforts are underway to update the existing ROC 2014 guides on the SG Courts website to help self-represented persons (SRPs) better understand the processes under ROC 2021. In the same vein, multiple briefings have been conducted to equip court staff with the knowledge to assist SRPs as may be necessary.



Singapore Rules of Court – A Practice Guide serves as a handy court companion for judges and legal practitioners. Efforts are also underway to update the existing ROC 2014 guides on the SG Courts website to help SRPs better understand the processes under ROC 2021.

Operationalising ROC 2021 continues to be a work in progress, and it is anticipated to be an iterative project improved by continuous feedback.



The Sentencing Advisory Panel's Guidelines are effective from 1 October 2023.

ASYNCHRONOUS HEARINGS OF CRIMINAL PRE-TRIAL CONFERENCES AND CRIMINAL CASE DISCLOSURE CONFERENCES

The State Courts have continued their transition to more remote and asynchronous hearings. In June 2023, asynchronous hearings of pre-trial conferences (PTCs) and criminal case disclosure conferences (CCDCs) were adopted in criminal cases as a pilot programme.

Under the programme, parties can update the Court via a checklist in ICMS ahead of a scheduled PTC or CCDC. On the hearing date, the Court will issue directions and fix the next court event in ICMS. This leads to time and cost savings, as there is no need to wait for parties to attend a PTC or CCDC hearing together. It also obviates the need of lawyers to wait for their turn to attend a physical or virtual case conference.

This pilot programme was jointly implemented with the Office of the Registrar. Currently, about 80 PTCs and CCDCs are heard asynchronously every week, and there are plans to increase the number of cases heard in this manner.



INTER-AGENCY COLLABORATION FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF GUIDELINES ON REDUCTION IN SENTENCES FOR GUILTY PLEAS

The Sentencing Advisory Panel operationalised its *Guidelines on Reduction in Sentences for Guilty Pleas* on 1 October 2023. The Guidelines set out the reduction in sentence that a court will consider based on the stage when an accused person indicates his or her plea of guilt. This allows an accused person to make a more considered decision as to how he or she wishes to proceed.

The State Courts' Criminal Court Cluster collaborated in the operationalisation of the Guidelines, including enhancements to the Integrated Case Management System (ICMS).



Located at the State Courts, the Night Courts deal with regulatory and minor traffic offences, and provide convenience to those who can only attend to their cases after working hours.

IMPROVEMENTS TO ASSIST COURT USERS FOR NIGHT COURT CASES

Several improvements and enhancements were made in 2023 to improve the court user experience for Night Court cases. For example:

- To improve **queue management**, queue guide poles were deployed for court users to follow and avoid blocking court entrances. Large, prominent signages were also placed near the lift lobby and escalators on Level 4 of the State Courts, to inform court users to join the queue and prepare their Letters of Authorisation in advance for checking by duty officers.
- Enhancements were made to the **registration kiosk user interface**, such as simplifying legal terms so that court users can use the kiosk without requiring assistance.
- The Night Courts allowance was revised to expand the pool of **Night Court volunteers**.
- **Informational posters** were shown on television screens in the Night Courts to brief court users on what to prepare or say during the court hearing.
- **Printing facilities** were set up at the kiosk area on Level 4 for court users to print their documents.

SERVICE SG PILOT TO ASSIST PARTIES WITH ONLINE SERVICES FOR ONGOING CLAIMS IN THE COMMUNITY DISPUTES RESOLUTION TRIBUNALS

ServiceSG centres offer integrated delivery of services across public agencies to serve citizens better, and in a more citizen-centric manner. In 2023, the State Courts' Community Courts and Tribunals Cluster (CCTC), with input from the A2J Programme Office, partnered with ServiceSG to offer Community Disputes Resolution Tribunals (CDRT) eServices to citizens in the heartlands.

Under the six-month pilot, which started in August 2023, SRPs received assistance in submitting selected online applications to the CDRT at the ServiceSG centres at Our Tampines Hub, One Punggol as well as within community clubs (ServiceSG@CCs).

VOLUNTEER CAPACITY BUILDING: DECODING THE COMMUNITY DISPUTES RESOLUTION ACT

In 2023, CCTC and Pro Bono SG collaborated to conduct a series of webinars for lawyers volunteering at the Community Legal Clinics on the proceedings in CCTC's specialist courts and tribunals. This initiative aimed to better equip volunteer lawyers with the necessary knowledge of these specialised proceedings, so that they may provide sound legal advice to SRPs.

The inaugural webinar was held on 30 August 2023. It focused on the procedures and remedies available under the Community Disputes Resolution Act (CDRA) 2015. Two district judges from CCTC were on the panel to facilitate an informative discussion on various issues arising from CDRA 2015, including the importance of mediation, common breaches, and notable cases dealt with by the tribunal.



Panelists from CCTC and Pro Bono SG jointly conducted the capacity-building webinar for volunteer lawyers.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING WITH HARVEY TO USE GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN DISPUTES INVOLVING SMALL CLAIMS

In August 2023, SG Courts signed a two-year Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with American legal tech start-up, Harvey. Their goal is to develop a generative AI programme to help self-represented litigants in Small Claims Tribunals cases. Other uses of generative AI are also being explored.



CASE HIGHLIGHTS PORTAL

At the Opening of the Legal Year in 2022, Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon announced that the Family Justice Courts would look into providing case summaries of important precedents to assist court users who manage their own cases.

The Case Highlights Portal, hosted on the SG Courts website, contains bite-sized summaries of important family law precedents. By offering case summaries in a digestible format, these precedents span topics including divorce and its ancillary matters, adoption, and the protection of family members and vulnerable persons, and aid litigants in the conduct of their cases.

The Portal currently contains summaries of 136 precedents (as of September 2024) and is accessible free-of-charge to members of the public. The Portal will be updated periodically to ensure that it remains reflective of the latest developments in family law.

The Case Highlights Portal, hosted on the SG Courts website, contains bite-sized summaries of important family law precedents.

NEW FAMILY JUSTICE RULES 2024

In August 2023, the Family Justice Courts (FJC) published a draft set of the new Family Justice Rules (Draft New Rules) on the Singapore Judiciary website. In line with the recommendations made in the *Report of the Committee to Review and Enhance Reforms in the Family Justice System* (RERF Committee Report), the Draft New Rules are the outcome of a comprehensive review and redesign of the current Family Justice Rules (FJR) 2014.

Simplification and Streamlining of the Rules

The Draft New Rules are split into three separate volumes. This is an entirely different architecture from FJR 2014, which exists as a single omnibus for all manner of proceedings at the FJC.

The three volumes, which distinguish between the different rules, are:

1. **Family Justice (General) Rules**, also known as General Rules, which govern all general family proceedings not covered in the other two specific volumes.
2. **Family Justice (Probate and Other Matters) Rules**, also known as Probate Rules, which govern proceedings relating to probate and related matters.
3. **Family Justice (Protection From Harassment) Rules**, also known as POHA Rules, which govern proceedings under the Protection from Harassment Act 2014 (POHA)².

As a result, the number of provisions in each volume has been significantly reduced. While FJR 2014 contains more than 1,000 provisions, the General Rules now contain less than half of these provisions, at about 450³. This restructuring will enable court users to quickly differentiate which rules apply to their cases and reference the correct volume. It also simplifies the process and saves time for court users, as they no longer have to sieve through irrelevant provisions that do not apply to them.

Nomenclature Changes

In line with ROC 2021, the Draft New Rules simplify the terms used and generally adopt the nomenclature of ROC 2021 so that the rules are more accessible to the public and easy to understand. Certain terms are also further simplified in the General Rules. For example, the technical terms “memorandum of appearance” and “counterclaim” are no longer used. Instead, a respondent who wishes to contest an application will now file a “notice to contest” and a “cross-application”.

Single Mode of Commencement

Further, in line with the RERF Committee’s recommendations⁴, there will only be a single mode of commencement in the General Rules for all non-quasi-criminal proceedings. Under the Draft New Rules, all matters will be commenced by way of an Originating Application, which replaces the Originating Summons in FJR 2014. This includes the commencement for divorce proceedings.



The Draft New Rules are the outcome of a comprehensive review and redesign of the current Family Justice Rules (FJR) 2014.

Expansion of the Simplified Track

The existing simplified track for divorce proceedings will be expanded to cover applications for judicial separation.

Additionally, the simplified track will also be available so long as parties have reached an agreement on the grounds and facts for divorce or judicial separation, even if they have not reached an agreement on the ancillary matters. This will allow parties to expedite and obtain their Interim Judgment or the Judgment of Judicial Separation on an uncontested basis, moving on to focus on the ancillary matters. This will encourage parties to put in significant efforts at attempting amicable resolution and negotiations before filing the application.

With these changes, even if parties do not reach a complete agreement on all issues, they can still benefit from the time savings of the simplified track with a partial agreement.

Streamlining of Forms

Currently, the requirements for the filing of documents under FJR 2014 are found in the relevant paragraphs of the FJC Practice Directions (PD) and the relevant forms⁵. Therefore, court users have to refer to FJR 2014, the PD and the forms to gather relevant information required for the filing of a particular document.

Moving forward, as far as possible, these requirements will be prescribed in the PD or specified in the forms. Where appropriate, the forms will also incorporate the requirements and supporting documents which are traditionally set out in the PD. This will be more intuitive and convenient for all court users.

² POHA applications will be heard in the FJC only when there are pending related family proceedings, and if it is just, expeditious and economical for the disposal of the POHA application [see Sections 161(2)(c) and 161(3) of POHA].

³ This is based on the Draft New Rules published on the Judiciary website on 10 August 2023. The Probate Rules and POHA Rules are even shorter, with about 270 and 28 provisions respectively.

⁴ Recommendation 2.2 of the RERF Committee Report (13 September 2019).

⁵ For example, the requirements for a Statement of Particulars filed in divorce proceedings relying on the fact of separation are found in Rule 44(3) of FJR 2014, paragraph 14(5) of the PD, and Form 8 of the PD.



Members of the public attended the Family Justice @ Heartlands roadshow at Wisma Geylang Serai on 25 November 2023.

FAMILY JUSTICE @ HEARTLANDS: EMPOWERING THE COMMUNITY

The Family Justice @ Heartlands initiative is a collaborative outreach effort involving the Law Society of Singapore, the Ministry of Social and Family Development, and the People's Association. It aims to educate, empower and equip citizens in family law and therapeutic social support. Through a series of seminars, the initiative covers key topics in family law, providing valuable knowledge to the public.

Prior to 2023, two webinars and one physical roadshow were conducted. In 2023, three more roadshows were conducted.

The first roadshow was held at One Punggol on 15 April 2023. This session also saw the launch of the Probate eService, a new online service for easier probate applications.

The other two roadshows were held at Buona Vista Community Club on 19 August 2023, and Wisma Geylang Serai on 25 November 2023. Both sessions covered areas of law relating to probate and administration, mental capacity and lasting power of attorney. Partners from Pro Bono SG, My Legacy and the Agency for Integrated Care set up booths to share about their services.

Feedback from these roadshows was positive, with most participants finding the sessions helpful.

LAUNCH OF PROBATE eSERVICE

On 12 April 2023, the FJC introduced a new online service to assist SRPs in filing their applications for a Grant of Probate. The Probate eService offers a step-by-step guided process for eligible named sole executors to prepare and submit the necessary documents to the FJC.

The Probate eService is integrated with Singpass and the Immigration and Checkpoints Authority (ICA), which reduces the need for applicants to provide personal details and the death certificate of the deceased. Instead, applicants can pre-populate the form fields by extracting information from other government portals and retrieving information on the deceased directly from ICA. It minimises form-filling errors and guides applicants through a series of questions to prepare the correct documents required for subsequent filing in Court.

Additionally, applicants can conveniently make payments of court fees, receive notices from the Court relating to their application, and obtain the Grant of Probate directly through this eService.

Ultimately, the Probate eService streamlines the application process, allowing members of the public to manage and resolve the personal affairs of their departed family members more expeditiously. It enhances the citizen experience and simplifies legal procedures so that citizens may undertake probate applications without engaging lawyers in straightforward cases.



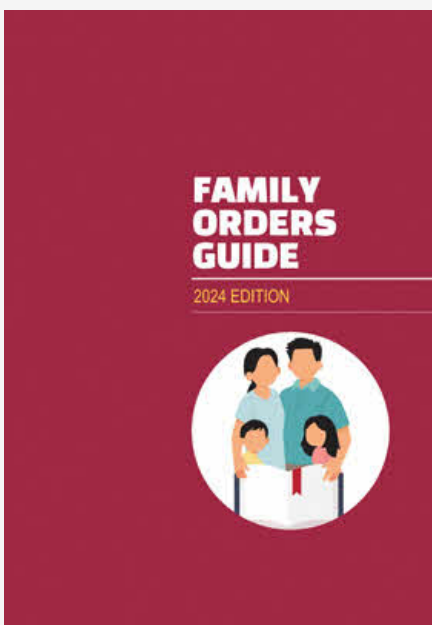
FAMILY ORDERS GUIDE: A NEW EDITION

On 28 March 2024, the FJC issued the 2024 edition of the *Family Orders Guide*, a resource designed to assist court users by providing the suggested language of commonly-made orders. It provides guidance to court users in the drafting of court orders, by either selecting the appropriate order template or adjusting a template to meet the requirements of their case.

The guide is presented in a clear and user-friendly format whereby each order template is assigned an identifier. This identifier serves as a common point of reference for court users and judges.

Since its initial launch in 2021, the *Family Orders Guide* has been expanded and updated to reflect adjustments in terminology and phrasing. These updates ensure that the guide remains current and aligned with procedural changes. The guide is comprehensive in scope and covers a variety of orders, including those concerning child-related matters, maintenance, division of matrimonial assets, probate, mental capacity, adoption and procedural orders. This ensures that users can find relevant guidance across various family law matters.

Launched on 28 March, the 2024 edition of the *Family Orders Guide* is designed to enable court users to find relevant guidance across various family law matters.



LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR COURTROOM COMMUNICATION

The Singapore Judicial College (SJC)'s *101 Core Foundational Programme on Courtroom Communication* aims to equip judges and Judicial Officers with the essential skillsets for effective communication within the courtroom setting.

The 2023 instalment of the programme deployed a design thinking approach, with a focus on access to justice. Judicial Officers were equipped with a deep understanding of practical strategies to navigate courtroom dynamics with confidence and professionalism.



Above and left: As part of the *101 Core Foundational Programme on Courtroom Communication*, participants learned how to effectively deliver oral judgments and address challenges in remote courtrooms.

PUBLICATION OF A PRACTICE GUIDE FOR THE RULES OF COURT 2021

Singapore Rules of Court – A Practice Guide, a collaboration between the Singapore Academy of Law and SJC, was published in 2023. The book offers authoritative insights into the new civil procedural rules.

Spearheaded by Judge Paul Quan, the guide aims to assist legal professionals in effectively navigating the new rules, ensuring accessibility and justice for all court users. The editors, Judge Paul Quan and Justice Chua Lee Ming, remain committed to refining the guide based on user feedback, demonstrating their dedication to supporting the legal profession.

***Singapore Rules of Court – A Practice Guide* offers authoritative insights into the new civil procedural rules.**



Justice Andrew Phang presented a commemorative copy of the guide to its editors, Justice Chua Lee Ming (far left) and Judge Paul Quan (left).

THERAPEUTIC JUSTICE



Through the lens of therapeutic justice,
the legal system epitomises
an ethos of care in helping families
heal and move forward.

OPERATIONALISING A MODEL FOR THERAPEUTIC JUSTICE IN OUR FAMILY JUSTICE SYSTEM

Development of an Operational Model for Therapeutic Justice

As part of their ongoing efforts to advance Therapeutic Justice (TJ), the Family Justice Courts (FJC) are working towards co-creating an operational model of TJ with their stakeholders. The TJ Model seeks to¹:

- (a) Articulate in greater depth the application of TJ in practical terms, including specific methodologies to put TJ into practice in the conduct of everyday court proceedings.
- (b) Express the shared values and language of TJ as it is practised in our courts, and provide guidance on the practice of TJ at different stages of the court process.

Towards this end, the FJC established a TJ Consultative Committee to participate and collaborate in the design of the TJ Model. The TJ Consultative Committee is chaired by the Presiding Judge of the FJC, Justice Teh Hwee Hwee, and includes representatives from the Ministry of Social and Family Development, the Legal Aid Bureau, the Family Bar, the Syariah Court Bar, academia and the mediation community.

The TJ Model will be a model developed *by* the family justice ecosystem, *for* the family justice ecosystem.



The TJ Model will be a model developed *by* the family justice ecosystem, *for* the family justice ecosystem.



As part of the Therapeutic Justice approach, a simple questionnaire that serves as a triage tool is to be completed by parties for the court to have a preliminary view of the case.

Introduction of New Court Processes

To further integrate TJ into the operations of the FJC, various new court processes have been introduced to bring the problem-solving approach further upstream in divorce proceedings. They include:

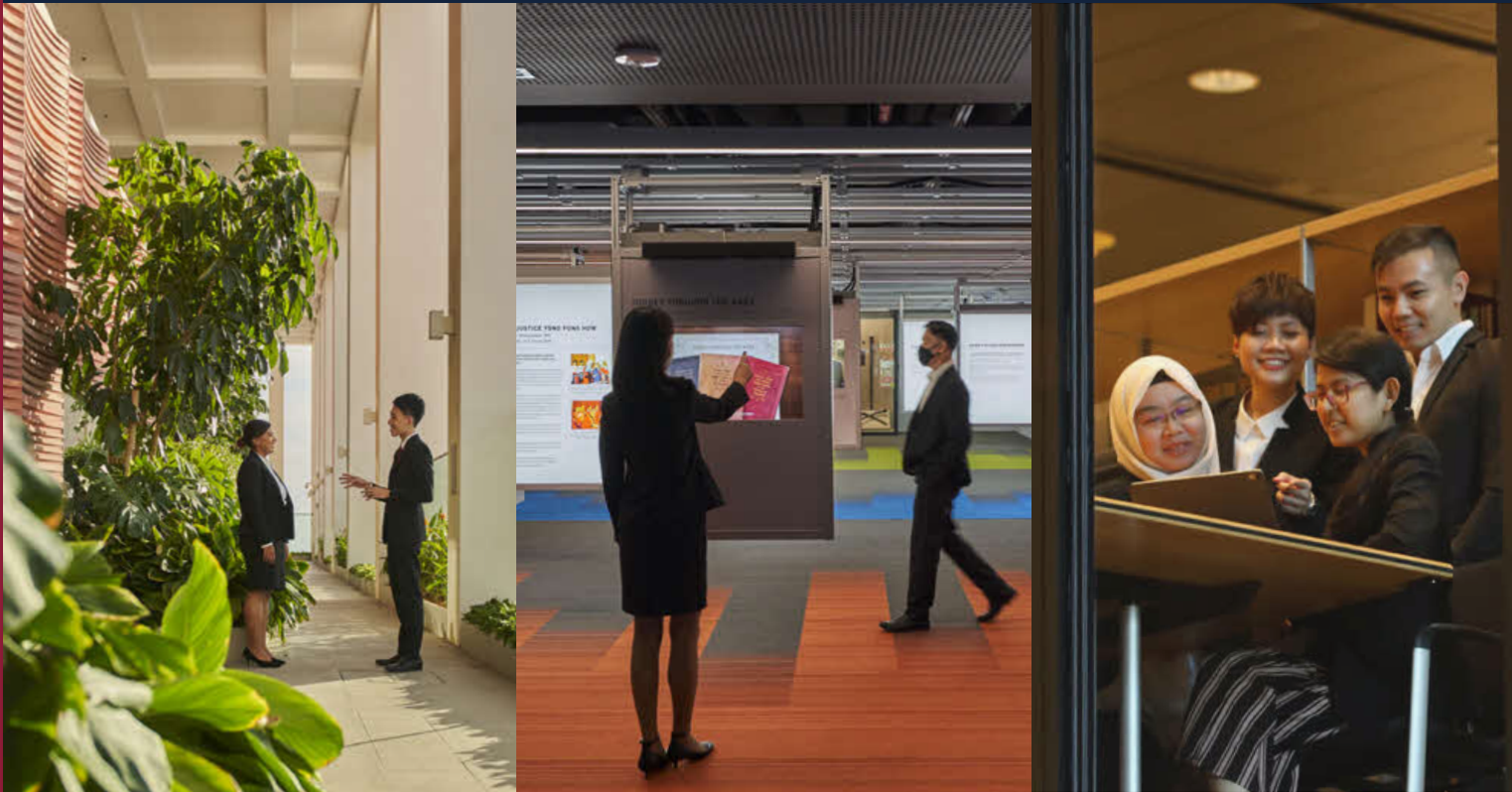
- (a) The **Joint Triage Checklist** – this is a simple questionnaire that serves as a triage tool to provide the court with a preliminary view of the case, to be completed and submitted by parties within six weeks from the commencement of proceedings.
- (b) The **TJ Cooperative Conference** – this serves as the first substantive court event where the judge (i) sets a clear TJ and cooperative problem-solving tone for proceedings at the outset; (ii) identifies key issues, discusses proposals and considers potential therapeutic referrals at this early stage; and (iii) assigns the next court event.
- (c) The **assignment of cases to be managed by a multi-disciplinary team** – depending on the needs of the family, the case may be assigned to a multi-disciplinary team to manage the case from the outset until the conclusion of proceedings. The team would consist of a mediation judge, a hearing judge and a court family specialist.

The adoption of such a comprehensive problem-solving and multi-disciplinary approach from an early stage will assist the court in (i) addressing the underlying issues and needs of families; (ii) customising the most appropriate approach for each case; and (iii) adopting a consistent judge-led approach in case management.

Materials on the new processes, including short write-ups, FAQs and a simple video, have been added to the webpage on TJ on the SG Courts website at www.judiciary.gov.sg/who-we-are/therapeutic-justice.

¹ Presiding Judge, Justice Teh Hwee Hwee, "Charting New Horizons in the Next Decade", Family Justice Courts Workplan 2024, 18 March 2024, at [13].

TRUST AND TRUSTWORTHINESS



Timely resolution of cases is a hallmark of effective and efficient court operations, instilling trust in the Judiciary and confidence in the trustworthiness of the Judiciary.

SUPREME COURT'S WAITING PERIODS

The **Supreme Court** sets targets for waiting periods for various court processes as part of its commitment to providing quality public service, and we endeavour to achieve at least 90% compliance with all targets set.

In 2023, all targets set for the entire year¹ were achieved. The key targets are set out below.

TYPE OF PROCEEDINGS	TARGET
Original Civil Jurisdiction	
Trial in Suit	8 WEEKS  from the date of setting down
Originating Summons (OS)	
(i) Inter partes	6 WEEKS  from the date of filing of the OS
(ii) Ex parte	3 WEEKS  from the date of filing of the OS
Bankruptcy OS	6 WEEKS  from the date of filing of the OS
Company Winding-Up OS	4 WEEKS  from the date of filing of the OS
Summons (SUM)	
(i) Application for summary judgment pursuant to Order 14 of the Rules of Court	5 WEEKS  from the date of filing of the SUM (statutory minimum period)
(ii) Any other application	3 WEEKS  from the date of filing of the SUM
Bankruptcy SUM (Application for discharge)	4 WEEKS  from the date of filing of the SUM
Original Criminal Jurisdiction	
Trial of Criminal Case	6 WEEKS  from the date of the final Criminal Case Disclosure Conference or Pre-Trial Conference before trial (whichever is later)
Appellate Civil Jurisdiction	
Registrar's Appeals to the General Division of the High Court Judge in Chambers	4 WEEKS  from the date of filing for appeal involving assessment of damages
	3 WEEKS  from the date of filing for any other appeal
Appeals to the General Division of the High Court from the State Courts	4 WEEKS  from the date of receipt of the Record of Proceedings (ROP) from the State Courts
Appellate Criminal Jurisdiction	
Appeals to the General Division of the High Court from the State Courts	12 WEEKS  from the date of receipt of the ROP from the State Courts

¹ These targets are found in Appendix B of the Supreme Court Practice Directions 2013 and items [S/N 2–5, 7–10, 12 and 14–17] in Appendix CA of the Supreme Court Practice Directions 2021. We will report on the targets found in the remaining items of Appendix CA of the Supreme Court Practice Directions 2021 (which only apply with effect from 1 November 2023) in the next Annual Report.

STATISTICS

One of the indicators by which the SG Courts' performance is measured is clearance rate, which is the number of cases disposed of in a year expressed as a percentage of the number of cases filed in the same year. The clearance rate can exceed 100%, as the cases disposed of in any year are not a subset of the cases filed in that year.

SUPREME COURT'S WORKLOAD



CASES FILED
12,363



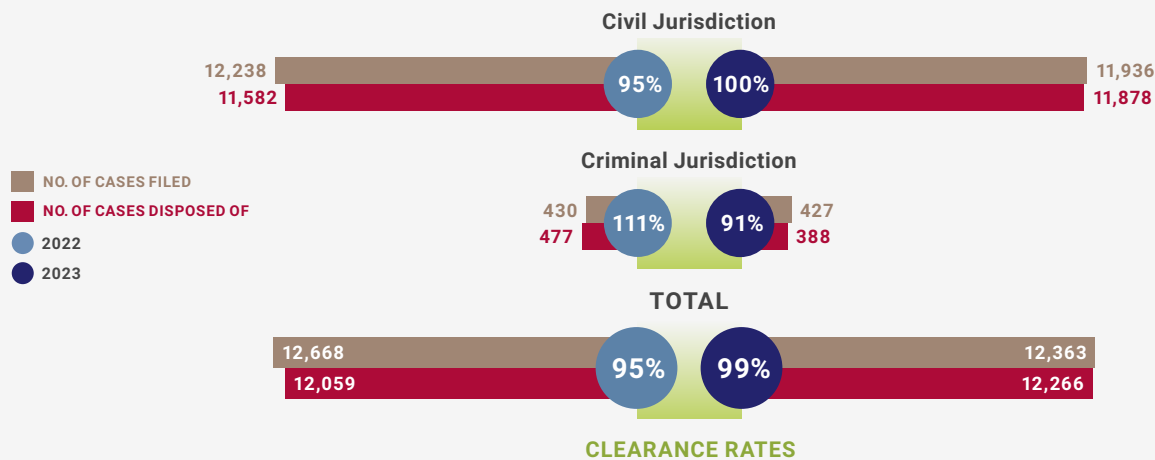
CASES DISPOSED
12,266



CLEARANCE RATE
99%

The Supreme Court received a total of 12,363 new cases in 2023. A total of 12,266 cases were disposed of in the same period. The clearance rate in 2023 for all civil and criminal matters was 99%, up by 4% from 2022.

The following shows a comparison of the filing and disposal numbers and clearance rates for civil and criminal proceedings between 2022 and 2023.



	NO. OF CASES FILED		NO. OF CASES DISPOSED OF	
	2022	2023	2022	2023
Civil Jurisdiction	12,238	11,936	11,582	11,878
Civil Originating Processes	6,885	7,336	5,998	7,334
Civil Interlocutory Applications	4,588	3,895	4,785	3,860
Appeals before the General Division of the High Court	441	316	458	307
Appeals before the Appellate Division of the High Court	121	138	114	123
Applications before the Appellate Division of the High Court	94	113	89	112
Appeals before the Court of Appeal	59	56	71	67
Applications before the Court of Appeal	50	82	67	75
Criminal Jurisdiction	430	427	477	388
Criminal Cases	73	63	87	57
Criminal Motions before the General Division of the High Court	84	98	85	93
Magistrate's Appeals	196	185	219	173
Criminal Revisions	6	9	6	7
Criminal Appeals	41	21	44	17
Criminal Motions and References before the Court of Appeal	30	51	36	41
TOTAL	12,668	12,363	12,059	12,266

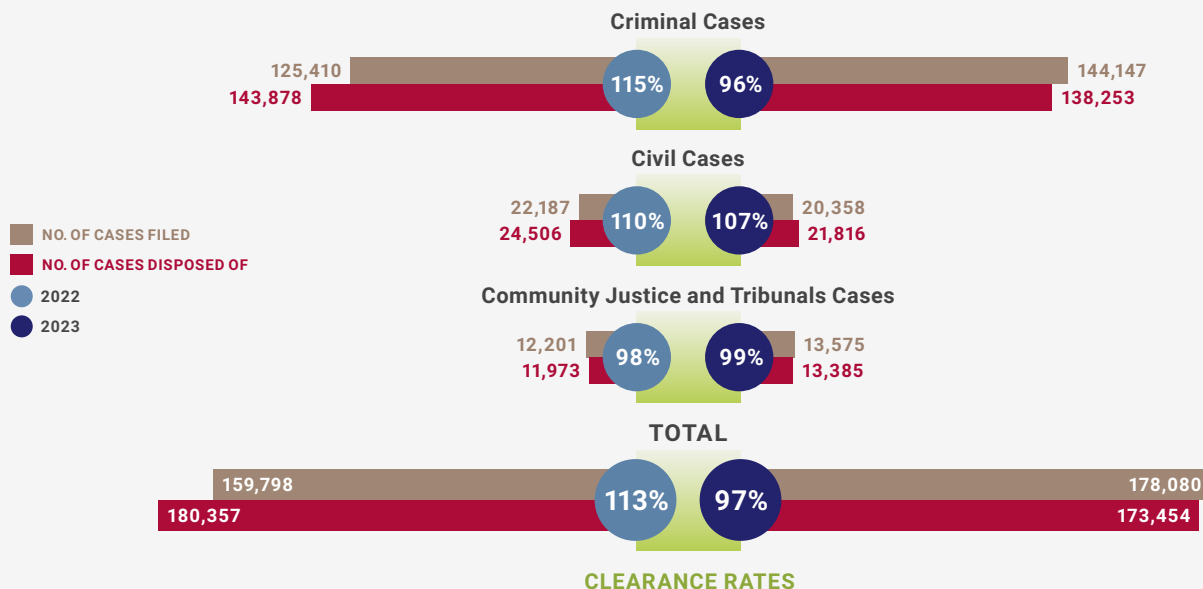
STATISTICS

STATE COURTS' WORKLOAD



The State Courts received a total of 178,080 new cases in 2023. A total of 173,454 cases were disposed of in the same period. The clearance rate in 2023 for all criminal, civil and Community Justice and Tribunals matters was 97%, down by 16% from 2022.

The following shows a comparison of the filing and disposal numbers and clearance rates for criminal, civil and Community Justice and Tribunals proceedings between 2022 and 2023.



	NO. OF CASES FILED		NO. OF CASES DISPOSED OF	
	2022	2023	2022	2023
Criminal Cases	125,410	144,147	143,878	138,253
Criminal Charges ²	27,843	29,559		
Departmental or Statutory Board Charges and Summonses	60,411	70,693		
Traffic Charges and Summonses	31,875	38,821		
Coroner's Court Cases	5,281	5,066		
Magistrate's Complaints ³	0	8		
Civil Cases	22,187	20,358	24,506	21,816
Originating Processes	12,086	11,740		
Writs of Summons/Originating Claims ⁴	11,638	11,311		
Originating Summonses/Originating Applications ⁵	448	429		
Interlocutory Applications	8,603	7,222		
Others	1,498	1,396		
Taxation	85	72		
Assessment of Damages	1,413	1,324		
Community Justice and Tribunals Cases	12,201	13,575	11,973	13,385
Community Disputes Resolution Tribunals (CDRT) Claims	189	182		
Employment Claims Tribunals (ECT) Claims	999	1,216		
Magistrate's Complaints	1,348	1,327		
Protection from Harassment Court (PHC) Cases	552	562		
Small Claims Tribunals (SCT) Claims	9,113	10,288		
TOTAL	159,798	178,080	180,357	173,454

OTHER CASELOAD PROFILE

Court Dispute Resolution⁶	3,972	3,391
(Civil) Writs of Summons, Originating Summonses	3,508	3,070
(Community) PHC Cases, CDRT Claims, Magistrate's Complaints	464	321

² Includes District arrest charges, Magistrates' arrest charges and other types of charges.

³ Non-relational Magistrate's Complaints are counted as criminal cases. Relational Magistrate's Complaints are counted as Community Justice and Tribunals cases.

⁴ Writ of Summons is called Originating Claim under the Rules of Court (ROC) 2021. The change in terminology took effect on 1 April 2022.

⁵ Originating Summons is called Originating Application under ROC 2021. The change in terminology took effect on 1 April 2022.

⁶ Refers to fresh cases handled by the Court Dispute Resolution cluster.

STATISTICS

FAMILY JUSTICE COURTS' WORKLOAD



CASES FILED
28,203



CASES DISPOSED
27,585



CLEARANCE RATE
98%

The Family Justice Courts handled 28,203 cases in 2023, up by 1.4% from 2022. Divorce, maintenance and probate cases made up more than half of the total caseload.

The following shows a comparison of the filing and disposal numbers and clearance rates for family proceedings between 2022⁷ and 2023.

Maintenance and Protection Cases



Divorce Cases, Originating Summons, Probate Cases and Summons



Youth Court Cases



TOTAL



CLEARANCE RATES

■ NO. OF CASES FILED
■ NO. OF CASES DISPOSED OF
● 2022
● 2023

	NO. OF CASES FILED		NO. OF CASES DISPOSED OF	
	2022	2023	2022	2023
Maintenance and Protection Cases	4,998	5,315	4,999	5,229
Divorce Cases, Originating Summons, Probate Cases and Summons	21,809	22,071	21,350	21,572
Youth Court Cases	1,016	817	1,025	784
TOTAL	27,823	28,203	27,374	27,585

⁷ 2022 figures are revised to include the following:
a. Mental Capacity Act (Simplified) cases
b. Vulnerable Adults Act cases
c. Enhanced Care and Protection Order cases
d. Family Guidance Order cases

SINGAPORE JUDICIAL COLLEGE'S PROGRAMMES AND TRAINING PLACEMENTS

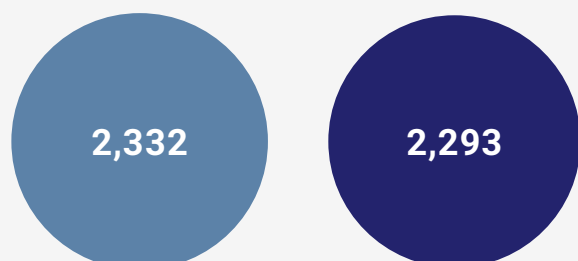
PROGRAMMES

● 2022
● 2023



The Singapore Judicial College fulfilled its learning and development mandate in 2023 through 61 programmes that translated to 2,293 training placements for local judges and international participants.

TRAINING PLACEMENTS



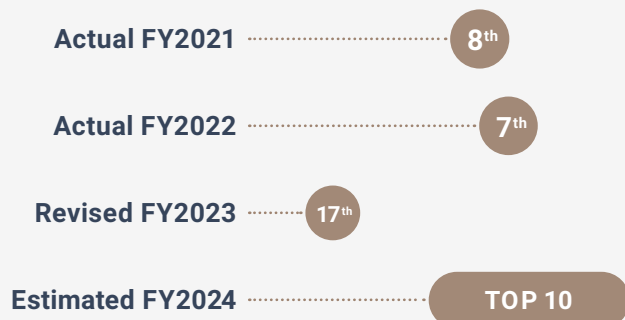
INTERNATIONAL RANKINGS

The SG Courts endeavour to treat everyone and every case with fairness, as a way of cultivating public trust and confidence in the Judiciary. One of the global rankings used to measure Singapore's performance in this area is the International Institute for Management Development (IMD) World Competitiveness Yearbook, which provides data on a variety of factors shaping the competitiveness of countries.

Below is the world ranking of Singapore's fairness in administration of justice reported by the IMD World Competitiveness Yearbook. While Singapore dropped to 17th place in 2023, the Republic eyes a top 10 return in 2024.



WORLD RANKING OF SINGAPORE'S FAIRNESS IN ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE IN IMD'S WORLD COMPETITIVENESS YEARBOOK



CONTINUOUS OVERSIGHT ASSURANCE

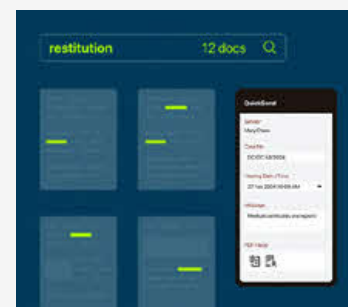
Key oversight activities led by the Audit Committee (AC) in 2023 enhanced risk management and internal control practices across various processes of the Judiciary. For instance, the implementation of the One Judiciary data governance policy is one of many audit initiatives which the review has added value and better support, enabling an integrated approach to data management oversight controls and governance across the Judiciary.

The human factor is a critical success factor for any effective implementation of sound internal control systems. In ensuring the presence of a good internal control ecosystem, eight internal control system briefings were conducted to refresh, remind and retrain officers to adhere to the requirements for good internal controls in the workplace. Topics included work ethics, information governance and artificial intelligence. These briefings aimed to reinforce the right tone on good internal controls and drive officers to exhibit the desired corporate governance practices at work.

The combination of the AC oversight structure, internal audit setup and other government-related audits, as well as empowering users through mindset and culture change, all come together to promote a good corporate governance culture.

SMART(ER) BUNDLES

The Smart(er) Bundles initiative seeks to modernise the creation and use of document bundles in court. It simplifies the current paper-centric process, which is labour-intensive and prone to errors, by automating the collation and assembly of resources like case law and legislation.



This initiative is being launched progressively. From February 2024, modules such as a unique identifier for all court documents, an easy 'guessable' locator for any court case file, and an ability to retrieve documents in court quickly have been launched.

INCREASE IN WRITTEN JUDICIAL DECISIONS EVEN WHEN NO APPEAL WAS FILED

Judges are encouraged to provide reasons for their decisions even when they are not appealed against. This enables parties to understand the reasoning behind the judge's decision, and that their submissions have been properly considered.

From January to November 2023, there were 66 written judicial decisions for criminal cases where no appeal was filed, up by about 80% from the same period in 2022.



Internal control system briefings were conducted to refresh, remind and retrain officers to adhere to the requirements for good internal controls in the workplace.

SIGNIFICANT CASES FROM THE SUPREME COURT

Several significant judgments were released by the Singapore International Commercial Court (SICC), and by the Court of Appeal (in appeals against decisions of the SICC), in 2023. These include the following.



CFJ and another v CFL and another [2023] SGHC(I) 1

This case involved three Originating Summonses. Two of the Originating Summonses were challenges to two Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC) arbitral awards on multiple grounds, including allegations of apparent bias made against the presiding arbitrator of the arbitral tribunal. One Originating Summons was an application to remove the presiding arbitrator on the grounds of apparent bias.

In dismissing the application to remove the presiding arbitrator from the arbitral tribunal, the Court applied the objective “fair-minded and informed observer” test and found that there was no basis for the allegations. The Court also dismissed the two challenges to the arbitral awards. Two appeals (CA/CAS 2 and 3/2023) were filed, but both were subsequently withdrawn.

Ivanishvili, Bidzina and others v Credit Suisse Trust Ltd [2023] SGHC(I) 19

The SICC ordered a stay of execution of judgments in this suit pending the defendant’s appeal to the Court of Appeal. This stay was conditional on the defendant paying into Court the full judgment sum, costs and interest. The defendant had suggested that, instead of payment into Court, an on-demand bank guarantee or payment into an escrow account would provide adequate security for the plaintiffs.

The SICC decided that in the circumstances of this case, the forms of security proposed by the defendant were not adequate. The Court considered that it was important to refer to the characteristics of the security and how they apply to the facts of the case. The proposed bank guarantee contained a dispute resolution mechanism that required the parties to submit to arbitration if there was a dispute over the plaintiffs’ entitlement to payment. The risk of arbitration was unsatisfactory. There was also no evidence of the nature of the escrow account, or that any escrow agent had been approached.

Tamar Perry and another v Jacques Henri Georges Esculier and another [2023] SGCA(I) 2

The appellants and the respondents were investors in a Ponzi scheme administered by a group of companies. The appellants sought to recover from the respondents money that was paid into the scheme by the appellants and received by the respondents.

The Court of Appeal held that even though the company that the appellants had transferred funds to was not a party to the asset management agreements (AMAs) under which the appellants transferred the funds, Swiss law (which was the express choice of law of the AMAs in question) was the governing law under the AMAs. The appellants’ claim could not succeed because under Swiss law, whether there was a Ponzi scheme or not was irrelevant, and the issue was whether the respondents had acted in bad faith.

SIGNIFICANT CASES FROM THE SUPREME COURT

The Republic of India v Deutsche Telekom AG [2023] SGCA(I) 4

The Court of Appeal clarified that the purpose of Sections 22 and 23 of the International Arbitration Act 1994 (IAA) is to protect the confidentiality of the arbitration itself. The interest in keeping any enforcement proceedings confidential under the IAA is essentially a derivative interest designed ultimately to protect the confidentiality of the underlying arbitration. The enforcement proceedings in Singapore did not merit continued protection under Sections 22 and 23 of the IAA as the confidentiality of the arbitration had substantially been lost.

Credit Agricole Corporate & Investment Bank, Singapore Branch v PPT Energy Trading Co Ltd and another appeal [2023] SGCA(I) 7

The Court of Appeal allowed the appellant's appeals in part. The appellant bank was not entitled to rely on its customer's fraud to set aside and avoid liability to pay under a letter of credit issued in favour of the respondent. However, the Court of Appeal found that the respondent had breached the warranty of marketable title given in a letter of indemnity to the appellant, and gave judgment in favour of the appellant in the sum of US\$10,319,470.81.

BCBC Singapore Pte Ltd and another v PT Bayan Resources TBK and another [2023] SGCA(I) 8

The Court of Appeal allowed the appeal against the decision of the SICC on costs. It increased the discount applied to the post-transfer costs that were awarded to the respondents, and decided that the second appellant was not to be jointly and severally liable with the first appellant for the respondents' costs. Where a party introduces a late amendment that substantially alters the case the opposing party has to meet, and that amendment has a decisive impact on the outcome of the case, this may attract costs consequences, such as a discount on the quantum of costs that such a party may be entitled to.

The Court also held that the SICC's discretion as to costs under Order 110 Rule 46(1) of the Rules of Court (Cap 322, R 5, 2014 Ed) is wide enough for it to award issue-based costs in an appropriate case.

The Republic of India v Deutsche Telekom AG [2023] SGCA(I) 10

The Court of Appeal dismissed the appeal concerning resisting enforcement of an arbitral award. It held that the appellant was precluded by transnational issue estoppel from re-litigating points relating to the validity of the award, which had already been determined by the seat court.



SIGNIFICANT CASES FROM THE STATE COURTS



Criminal Cases

***Tan Siew Chye Nicholas v Public Prosecutor* [2023] 4 SLR 1223; [2023] SGHC 35**

The High Court established a sentencing framework for voyeurism under Section 377BB(4) punishable under Section 377BB(7) of the Penal Code (Cap 224, 2008 Rev Ed).

Mr Nicholas Tan pleaded guilty to two charges of voyeurism and consented for one charge of criminal trespass under Section 447 of the Penal Code to be taken into consideration for the purposes of sentencing. The accused was a 24-year-old Nanyang Technological University undergraduate. He had followed the first victim (V1), a 20-year-old female student, when she was returning to her room in a student residential hall. While V1 was waiting for the lift, he squatted down and used his mobile phone to record an upskirt video. For the second victim (V2), a 17-year-old schoolgirl, the accused had followed her into a lift. When V2 was about to exit, he squatted down and used his phone camera to take an upskirt photo.

The High Court laid down a new two-stage, five-step sentencing framework applicable to the voyeurism offence, following the framework in *Logachev Vladislav v Public Prosecutor* [2018] 4 SLR 609. The sentencing framework is applicable to adult offenders without mental disorders and on the basis of a first offender who is convicted after trial. Based on the new sentencing framework, the High Court assessed the case to be in the low-harm, low-culpability category and ordered for one week's imprisonment for the offence against V1 and three weeks' imprisonment for the offence against V2. The High Court ordered for both sentences to run consecutively, for a global sentence of four weeks' imprisonment.

***Lee Shin Nan v Public Prosecutor* [2024] 3 SLR 1730; [2023] SGHC 354**

The Chief Justice established a sentencing framework for repeat drink driving (Repeat Offences Framework) under Section 67(1)(b) punishable under Section 67(1) read with Section 67(2A) of the Road Traffic Act 1961 (RTA). The position for a repeat drink-driving offence was not yet settled, and the Repeat Offences Framework provided a "principled and consistent approach" in sentencing for such offences (at [2]).

Mr Lee Shin Nan pleaded guilty to his third conviction under Section 67(1)(b) of the RTA. The District Judge sentenced him to eight weeks' imprisonment, a fine of S\$10,000 (in default, one month's imprisonment) and disqualification from holding or obtaining all classes of driving licences for life (lifetime disqualification order). He appealed against his imprisonment term and the lifetime disqualification order.

The Chief Justice established a four-step process for the Repeat Offences Framework. The framework (at [51]) is applicable to cases where no harm is caused, with adjustments to the circumstances of the case. At the first stage, the Court should determine the sentencing range based on the offender's category of alcohol level as if the offender was a first-time offender under the sentencing framework in *Rafael Voltaire Alzate v Public Prosecutor* [2022] 3 SLR 993, and then apply an uplift to the range of the fine and the disqualification period by only taking into account the alcohol level for the present offence. At the second stage, the Court (at [57(b)]) should "pay particular attention" to its consideration of those factors that pertained to the repetition of the offending behaviour, and ascertain a provisional assessment of the fine and disqualification within the applicable range. At the

SIGNIFICANT CASES FROM THE STATE COURTS

third stage, the Court should consider the aggravating and mitigating circumstances of the offence and the offender, and make any further adjustments to the provisional assessment. At the fourth stage, the Court should calibrate the appropriate term of imprisonment, having regard especially to the need for deterrence, and then review the sentence as a whole.

The Chief Justice (at [84]) also commented that the issue of whether it was necessary to impose the enhanced penalty under Section 67A of the RTA was “a separate inquiry *after* the Court has considered the punishment” for the offender without regard to Section 67A. When assessing this issue, the Court might consider several factors such as whether the offender’s antecedents reflected “a cavalier disregard of the law” (at [89(a)]). Only if the sentence without regard to Section 67A was insufficient for the purposes of deterrence and prevention should consideration of Section 67A be applicable.

Applying the Repeat Offences Framework, the Chief Justice found that the sentence imposed by the District Judge was fair and upheld the sentence.

***Public Prosecutor v Soo Cheow Wee and another appeal* [2024] 3 SLR 972; [2023] SGHC 204**

The Chief Justice made several important observations and clarified the legal principles governing the sentencing of an offender who suffers from multiple mental conditions.

Mr Soo Cheow Wee was a 50-year-old Singaporean male who suffered from multiple mental conditions such as schizophrenia, polysubstance dependence and substance-induced psychosis, which cause symptoms of auditory hallucinations and persecutory delusions. He pleaded guilty to four charges and consented for four charges to be taken into consideration for the purposes of sentencing. Both the prosecution and the offender appealed the District Judge’s sentence of a total imprisonment term of 33 months. For the purposes of the appeal, three charges were relevant: (i) the First Charge under Section 324 of the Penal Code 1871 for voluntarily causing hurt by dangerous weapons or means; and (ii) the Second Charge and Third Charge, both under Section 506 of the Penal Code for criminal intimidation.

The Chief Justice observed that the sentencing of a mentally disordered offender may require the Court to grapple with sentencing objectives that “pull in opposite directions”, such as protecting society or rehabilitating the offender where practicable (at [50]). In light of this “potentially paradoxical effect”, the Court must carefully consider specific facts (at [51]) before arriving at an appropriate sentence, such as (a) the existence, nature and severity of each mental condition; (b) the interaction between the mental conditions and the “synergistic” manner in which they come together and operate on the offender’s mind; (c) whether a causal link can be established between the conditions and the commission of the offence; (d) the extent to which the offender had insight into his mental conditions and their effects; and (e) whether the overall circumstances are such to diminish the culpability of the offender.

The Chief Justice highlighted that as a final step, the Court should consider the appropriate punishment after balancing the interests of the public and the offender. The Court should consider the relevant factors in determining whether

deterrence, prevention, retribution or rehabilitation should take greater weight. These factors include the offender’s attitude in seeking treatment and compliance with the treatment programme; whether the offender is recalcitrant; whether the offender poses a threat to the public; and whether the offender is guilty of a particularly serious crime (at [67]).

Based on the evidence before the Court, the Chief Justice accepted (at [96]) that the offender’s mental conditions “substantially impaired his responsibility” and that this was mitigating.

The Chief Justice considered (at [99] and [105]) that in this case where the offender suffered from mental disorders, there would be less significance for deterrence or retribution. The Chief Justice also noted (at [102]) that there was insufficient psychiatric evidence to support the prosecution’s submission that prevention should be the predominant sentencing consideration. The Chief Justice therefore gave some weight to each primary sentencing consideration without any being the predominant consideration.

The Chief Justice dismissed the prosecution’s appeal and allowed the offender’s appeal. As the District Judge did not consider the offender’s mental conditions as a mitigating factor, the sentences for the three proceeded charges were calibrated downwards to take into account the offender’s mental conditions. The offender’s total sentence was reduced to 27 months’ imprisonment.

Civil Cases

***Pun Kwan Lum (David) v AboutU Pte Ltd and another* [2023] SGDC 265**

This case concerned the failed launch of an initial coin offering (ICO). The plaintiff invested US\$100,000 in a blockchain project at the pre-ICO stage in exchange for bonus digital tokens. The blockchain network failed to launch. The first defendant, the company tasked to launch the network, was wound up. The second defendant, who had introduced and sold the project to the plaintiff, told the plaintiff that the monies could not be refunded as they had been spent preparing the network for launch.

The plaintiff pursued the claim against the second defendant to trial. The plaintiff alleged that the second defendant misrepresented the prospect of the project by, amongst others, falsely claiming that there was a flurry of investments from C-suites of various conglomerates and that the network was at the cusp of being launched. The plaintiff also claimed for a refund since the network launch did not proceed, on the grounds of breach of contract and unjust enrichment.

The plaintiff succeeded in establishing misrepresentation, breach of contract and unjust enrichment. The Court found after trial that:

- a. The second defendant misrepresented the status of the project. His claim that there were “committed investors” was not established on evidence. The evidence also showed that he did not honestly believe in his claim that the network was at the cusp of being launched. These statements were made fraudulently and induced the plaintiff into signing the contract. The Court also found that the actionable misrepresentations were not excluded by the contract, after analysing the various legal authorities governing exclusion clauses.

SIGNIFICANT CASES FROM THE STATE COURTS

- b. The second defendant breached the contract by failing to perform the obligation of bringing about the network launch on or about 15 March 2018. The contract also provided that the purchase monies were to be refunded if the network launch did not take place. In any event, the plaintiff was entitled to terminate the contract as the breach deprived the plaintiff of the substantial benefit under the contract.
- c. The second defendant was unjustly enriched by the receipt of the purchase monies. The consideration for the purchase monies, being the network launch and the issuance of digital tokens, failed to materialise.

Lim Chong Teck v Wendy Kwek [2023] SGDC 222

The defendant in this case upsold and misrepresented the investment potential of Tillington Hall Hotel in the United Kingdom. Through her investment seminars, property exhibitions and marketing activities, she portrayed herself to have conducted the necessary due diligence on the hotel, and that it was “an undervalued, profitable and hassle-free investment deal”. The defendant’s actions resulted in numerous people investing in the hotel in 2013. The hotel ultimately turned out to be a poor investment – the annual yield was below the 7% to 10% indicated, and the hotel was sold at a loss in 2021.

A total of 85 people commenced an action in the High Court against the defendant. Of these 85, the plaintiff was the only person who opted to pursue the proceedings and the claim was transferred to the District Court. He had invested GBP52,000 to purchase a unit in the hotel, received GBP9,418.70 in returns from 2013 to 2017, and received a mere GBP3,949 from the sale of the hotel in 2021.

The Court determined that the defendant breached her duty of care by failing to conduct adequate due diligence and provide adequate investment advice, and that the representations she made were false. The plaintiff was awarded S\$84,989.55 in damages, which included the purchase price of the unit and legal expenses and costs associated with the purchase.

Jasmin Nisban v Chan Boon Siang and 20 Ors [2023] SGDC 158

Mr Jasmin Nisban, a former honorary treasurer of the Singapore Chess Federation (SCF), sued 39 defendants for defamation. They were among 51 requisitioners who called for an extraordinary general meeting to pass a vote of no confidence against the then-SCF executive council members, and to elect a new executive council. Accompanying the requisition request was a letter alleging that a well-known female chess trainer, Ms Anjela Khegay, had resigned following an incident involving sexual misconduct of a verbal nature. Mr Nisban was named as one of the council members “implicated” in the incident.

The trial eventually proceeded against 21 defendants. A total of 27 witnesses were heard over 22 days of trial.

In a 427-page judgment, the Court found that the statements were defamatory. The element of publication was satisfied because by appending their signatures on the requisition request, the defendants were taken to have endorsed the contents of the letter, whether or not they had

read it. The Court also considered and rejected the defences of justification and fair comment. In relation to the defence of qualified privilege, the Court analysed the intentions of each defendant in signing the requisition, and ultimately found that they were motivated by malice.

The Court awarded Mr Nisban S\$80,000 in general damages and S\$40,000 in aggravated damages. This was in view of the grave nature of the accusations. The Court also found that aggravated damages were warranted due to the defendants’ conduct during the trial, and in raising defences that were bound to fail.

The case attracted considerable publicity. SCF is Singapore’s official chess authority, and Mr Nisban was well-known in the SCF community. Ms Khegay was also well-known in the SCF community, being a Woman International Master. Some of the defendants also held high-level positions in the public and private sectors. For example, Mr Kenneth Tan Yeow Hiang, a former SCF president and vice-president, had captained the national team. He was also a former brigade commander with the Singapore Armed Forces, and served as assistant managing director of UOB and director and chief of staff of Citibank. Another defendant, Mr Alphonsus Chia, a former SCF president and vice-president, had served as vice president of Singapore Airlines and CEO of SilkAir.

Coroner’s Inquiries

Coroner’s Inquiry No: CI-004775-2021-OR (*Yong Jing Yu*)

This was an inquiry into the death of a six-month-old infant, Yong Jing Yu, on 28 December 2021. The deceased was born healthy with no medical issues or known drug allergies. On 16 December 2021, the deceased was brought to a clinic as he had a fever for one day and was diagnosed to have a fever of 39°C. On 17 December 2021, he was seen at a polyclinic for fever and watery stools, and diagnosed with non-specific fever. His parents were advised to bring him for an early review if the fever persisted for more than three days, or if he was not eating well or had other concerning symptoms.

The deceased was in the care of a nanny. The nanny had been working full-time for about a year and did not receive any formal training. On 15 December 2021, the nanny observed that the deceased was coughing badly and messaged the deceased’s father to ask if she could give 1ml of Zenmolin to the deceased to help his cough. The deceased’s father informed her that she should not give the medication. On 26 December 2021, the nanny observed that the deceased was “coughing badly” (at [16]) and, despite the deceased’s father’s earlier instructions, she fed the deceased 1ml of Zenmolin.

On 28 December 2021, the deceased was not coughing and appeared to be well and normal. At about 6pm, the nanny discovered that the deceased was lying with his face facing the mattress at the corner of the playpen in a prone position. His head was positioned at the top of the replacement mattress close to the cot’s netted side. The nanny realised that the deceased was not moving when she picked him up, and she observed that his face was blue and unresponsive. She called for an ambulance and, under the direction of the call operator, performed cardiopulmonary resuscitation on the deceased.

Dr Audrey Yeo, who conducted the autopsy, certified that the final cause of death was unascertained. Histological analysis of the deceased’s post-mortem samples revealed

SIGNIFICANT CASES FROM THE STATE COURTS

acute bronchiolitis and bronchitis. Dr Yeo stated that the acute bronchiolitis and bronchitis would be insufficient in the ordinary course of nature to cause death in the absence of clinical symptoms. Cardiogenetic analysis of the deceased's blood sample revealed no pathogenic or likely pathogenic variants, but a variant of unknown significance in the KCNH2 gene was identified. This mutation could develop fatal arrhythmias, but as the deceased's variant was of unknown significance, it was difficult to ascertain if it had resulted in a fatal arrhythmia in the deceased. Dr Yeo also stated that in view of the position the deceased was found on the mattress, suffocation by being in a face-down position could not be completely excluded.

The post-mortem toxicological report did not reveal salbutamol, the active ingredient in Zenmolin. Dr Wu Jia Hao, the consultant forensic pathologist, opined that it was unlikely that salbutamol had any bearing in the death.

The State Coroner found that it was likely that the deceased had passed away by the time he was discovered by the nanny. There were no external or internal injuries present, and the State Coroner found that there was no evidence of foul play. Based on the autopsy and ancillary investigations where the cause of death could not be ascertained, the State Coroner returned an open verdict.

The State Coroner emphasised that babysitters or nannies who are engaged to care for infants and children should not give their charges medication without seeking the express consent of the child's parents.

Although there was no conclusive evidence to suggest that the deceased's death was brought about due to an unsafe sleeping arrangement, the State Coroner also emphasised the importance of safe sleeping arrangements for infants.

Coroner's Inquiry No: CI-001237-2021-OR (*Lee Eng Huat*)

This was an inquiry into the death of a 59-year-old man, Mr Lee Eng Huat, approximately nine days after he received a Pfizer COVID-19 vaccination. The deceased's next-of-kin were of the view that the vaccination was implicated in the death, but forensic evidence established that the cause of death was ischaemic heart disease, unconnected to the vaccination.

On 31 March 2021, the deceased received his first COVID-19 vaccination at a vaccination centre. He received the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and complained of mild fever after, but recovered within a day. About nine days later, on 9 April 2021, the deceased's wife found the deceased unresponsive on his bed. His family immediately called for an ambulance. Upon the paramedic's arrival, they found that the deceased had passed away. He was pronounced dead at the scene at 7.30pm.

Dr Paul Chui conducted the autopsy and certified the final cause of death to be ischaemic heart disease. Dr Chui opined that the deceased's death was due to a natural disease process. He also stated that the COVID-19 vaccination neither caused nor contributed to the deceased's death.

The State Coroner agreed with Dr Chui's opinion and found no evidence that the COVID-19 vaccination was implicated in the deceased's death. The vaccination did not cause the atherosclerosis that was seen in the deceased's coronary arteries, the focal myocardial scarring and subendocardial

fibrosis with chronic inflammatory infiltrate, or the subendocardial ischaemia. There was no evidence at autopsy that the deceased had any of the serious adverse effects that are suspected to be caused by the vaccination. Thus, the State Coroner found that the deceased had suffered a heart attack coincidentally nine days after he received the vaccination.

Coroner's Inquiry No: CI-000807-2021-OR (*Tay Choon Hwee @ Zheng Chunhui*)

This was an inquiry into the death of a 49-year-old woman, Mdm Tay Choon Hwee @ Zheng Chunhui. She passed away following a fire at her HDB flat, which likely originated from the lithium-ion battery packs of her son's personal mobility device (PMD) that was being charged.

A fire broke out at the deceased's unit on the morning of 5 March 2021. A day before the incident, the deceased's son had bought a PMD. He was informed by the seller that the PMD was not compliant with Land Transport Authority (LTA) regulations. On 5 March 2021, at about 2am, the deceased's son removed the battery packs from the PMD's top frame and placed them on top of the PMD's seat as he intended to charge the battery packs. As the PMD was not supplied with a charger, he used a charger from an earlier PMD he owned. As there were no issues with the charging during his two-hour monitoring, the deceased's son decided to go to sleep at 4am and left the battery packs charging.

At approximately 5am to 6am, the deceased woke the deceased's son up and informed him that she heard loud noises resembling explosions outside the bedroom. They opened the bedroom door and saw a fire around the PMD, and that the lithium-ion battery cells were "popping" (at [28]). By the time the Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF) arrived, they found the deceased lying on the bedroom floor with some items on top of her. The bedroom was heavily smoke-logged and she was unconscious. The deceased could not be resuscitated, and she was pronounced dead at the hospital on 5 March 2021 at 7.57pm.

SCDF investigated the fire and concluded that the fire damage and mass loss on parts and components of the PMD were consistent with those of a fire that originated from the battery packs placed on the PMD's seat whilst they were charging. SCDF opined that an electrical anomaly occurred within the battery packs while they were charging and led to thermal runaway, which most likely caused the lithium-ion battery cells to ignite. Some of the ignition may have dispersed onto the combustible items that were stored and cluttered in the living room. This would contribute to the fire spreading.

The reasons for the thermal runaway and ignition could not be conclusively determined, but it was possible that the charger was incompatible with the newly-bought PMD and its battery packs. The charger was double the capacity of the battery packs and could lead to overcharging of the lithium-ion battery packs. The State Coroner found that it was likely that the power incompatibility between the charger and battery packs caused the thermal runaway, which led to some of the lithium-ion battery cells being ignited.

The State Coroner found that the fire originated from the failure of the lithium-ion cells in the battery packs and ruled it an accident. The State Coroner found that the deceased's cause of death was smoke inhalation. There was no foul

SIGNIFICANT CASES FROM THE STATE COURTS

play involved and her death was a misadventure. The State Coroner emphasised the inherent dangers posed by modified PMDs, and advised users not to purchase PMDs that have been modified or undertake modifications to PMDs. Users should only charge PMDs using chargers that were supplied with the PMDs.

Community Courts and Tribunals Cases

Yonekura Chie v Leow Chin San David [2023] SGCDT 30

This case dealt with the issue of whether co-tenants who live in a subdivided unit are “neighbours” within the meaning of Section 4(4) of the Community Disputes Resolution Act 2015 (CDRA).

The claimant and respondent both rented a unit from a landlord that was partitioned in a dual-key arrangement. While they shared the same registered and postal address, they used different entrances and did not ordinarily interact with each other. The claimant’s stay was uneventful until the respondent engaged a full-time live-in domestic worker to care for him. The claimant alleged that she had become sleep-deprived due to the domestic worker’s night-time activities which gave rise to excessive noise and smell.

Arising from this unique situation, the tribunal had to consider the question of whether the claim fell within the tribunal’s jurisdiction. The respondent relied on the definition of “neighbour” in Section 4(4) of the CDRA. However, the claimant argued that both parties had “exclusive possession” of their respective premises; had separate bathrooms, kitchens and living spaces; and did not share a common space.

The tribunal agreed with the respondent that the tribunal had no jurisdiction as the parties were not neighbours within the meaning of Section 4(4) of the CDRA. They found that this case fell squarely within the illustration to Section 4(4), which provided that parties who live in the same apartment but in different rooms occupy the same place of residence. The tribunal rejected the claimant’s arguments as the test could not be based on exclusive possession, since co-tenants who rent separate rooms in a unit that is not subdivided also have exclusive possession of their rooms but are nevertheless not regarded as neighbours under Section 4(4). Insofar as the claimant argued that the applicable test should be based on whether the unit was subdivided or not, this was not supported by the present wording of the CDRA or any parliamentary guidance to this effect.

Accordingly, the tribunal dismissed the claim on the grounds that it did not fall within the tribunal’s jurisdiction.

Koh Hong Wah Jonny v Lau Chin Tiong [2023] SGCDT 20

This case is noteworthy for the Community Disputes Resolution Tribunals (CDRT) as it is the third case in which an exclusion order was made since the establishment of the CDRT in 2015.

The claimant filed an application for an exclusion order in August 2022, alleging that the respondent had breached a special direction made with the consent of both parties which required the respondent to comply with a consent order under Section 5 of the CDRA. The consent order required the respondent not to “commit any act of misdemeanour such as shouting, screaming and yelling, that would cause inconvenience to the neighbours” and not to “randomly throw objects out of his window”.

The claimant tendered multiple video recordings and called fellow neighbours as witnesses to testify that they were also victims of the respondent’s actions. The respondent admitted that it was his voice in the recordings, which the tribunal found “rang out clearly in the still of the night”. He also admitted to throwing dirty water out of his window as the toilet “was 10 metres away”.

The respondent explained that he had breached the special direction because he had psychological issues and was upset with the claimant for scolding and shouting at him, and for hanging wet undergarments that caused water to drip onto the respondent’s kitchen floor. However, the tribunal was not persuaded as no proof was provided by the respondent of the claimant’s alleged actions, nor was there any evidence to conclude that the respondent’s psychological issues caused him to become unable to control his actions.

In assessing whether it was just and equitable to make the exclusion order, the tribunal considered the effect of an exclusion order on the respondent and found that the respondent would be able to approach his relatives or friends to provide temporary accommodation. The tribunal also considered and found that an exclusion order would not have any adverse impact on the respondent’s family members.

All things considered, the tribunal made an exclusion order against the respondent for a period of one week and deferred commencement by two weeks to allow the respondent to make the necessary arrangements and sort out his personal affairs. The tribunal also warned the respondent that should a future exclusion order be granted due to his persistent behaviour, an uplift on the period of exclusion would be likely.

Nina Lim Yan Tong v Wearnes Automotive Pte Ltd [2023] SGECT 93

This case is noteworthy for the Employment Claims Tribunals (ECT) as it dealt with the issue of whether an employer was entitled to unilaterally deduct monies from an employee’s salary after consent that was initially given was subsequently withdrawn.

Whilst serving her one-month notice period, the claimant was found to have parked her car in a parking lot designated for the respondent’s customers, which was in contravention of the respondent’s employee handbook. When the claimant was told later that day that S\$500 would be deducted from her salary pursuant to the stipulation in the handbook, she said that she would “take it as a contribution...”. Towards the end of her notice period, the claimant questioned the basis of the deduction and said that she was withdrawing her consent for the deduction. Despite this, the respondent deducted the sum of S\$500 from the claimant’s last salary payment.

The tribunal found that Sections 26 and 27 of the Employment Act clearly provide that an employee’s consent is required for a deduction to be legally permissible, and that such consent may be withdrawn before the salary deduction. As there was no dispute that the claimant had withdrawn her consent prior to the deduction, the respondent did not have a basis to unilaterally make a S\$500 deduction. The tribunal therefore allowed the claimant’s claim for S\$500 plus disbursements.

SIGNIFICANT CASES FROM THE FAMILY JUSTICE COURTS



Therapeutic Justice

The Court has continued to develop and expand on the concept of therapeutic justice (TJ). One example can be found in the decision of the General Division of the High Court in *WSY v WSX and another appeal* [2024] SGHCF 21. The Court noted that the spirit of TJ did not militate against the judge addressing what would be the reasonable expenses of the spouse to whom it is awarding maintenance.

It is also clear that the Court has tools in its arsenal to promote TJ. One such tool is that of costs orders. In *WLR and another v WLT and another and other matters* [2024] SGHCF 20, the Court echoed the view made in *VVB v VVA* [2022] 4 SLR 1181 that awarding costs signals that adversarial stances are unacceptable in a family justice system that adopts TJ.

Finally, in *CSW v CSX* [2023] SGHC(A) 23, the Appellate Division of the High Court rejected the argument made by the wife that the failure to administer TJ measures in the case warranted quashing her conviction for contempt and setting aside the sentence. The Court noted that the wife had proceeded in a manner which clearly reflected a disregard for any notion of TJ. Given the wife's blatant and persistent disregard for Court orders, it was not open to her to brandish the notion of TJ as an excuse or justification for her breaches. Doing so was inimical to the notion of TJ as well as an obstruction to the administration of justice.

Judicial Interviews and Child Welfare Reports

When it comes to matters of custody or care and control, the welfare of the child takes centre stage. Section 125(2) of the Women's Charter sets out a list of factors that the Court must consider in deciding matters of custody or care and control. One factor to be considered is the wishes of the child – and in this vein, judicial interviews as well as child welfare reports play an important part in ascertaining the child's wishes. The Court of Appeal, in the case of *WKM v WKN* [2024] 1 SLR 158, recently set out some guidelines as to the conduct of such judicial interviews and the use of child welfare reports.

In that case, orders on ancillary matters had been granted by consent. Parties were granted joint custody of the only child of the marriage, with sole care and control to the father and liberal access to the mother. The access arrangements broke down when the mother lodged a police report against the father and his helper for child abuse. The father applied to compel the mother to return the child, and to vary the orders to replace the mother's liberal access with supervised access. The mother applied for care and control and sole custody of the child.

The District Judge declined to interview the child and relied on three child welfare reports to conclude that there had not been any material change that would warrant a change in custody arrangements and a reversal of care and control. The District Judge ordered that the father was to have care and control of the child, and that the mother was to have dinner access on certain days and weekly overnight access from Friday to Saturday.

The mother appealed against the District Judge's decision and sought care and control of the child. The father asked that further child welfare reports be submitted. Both parties asked for the Court to conduct a judicial interview of the child to ascertain her wishes. The High Court Judge conducted a judicial interview of the child. He allowed the mother's appeal, and reversed the order on care and control from the father to the mother.

Leave was granted for the case to be heard on appeal by the Court of Appeal. The Court of Appeal laid down two guiding principles in relation to judicial interviews. First, the assessment of whether a judicial interview should be conducted has to be made with utmost sensitivity to the facts of each case. The Court should consider facts such as the child's age, emotional and intellectual maturity, and general well-being, as well as the consequences for the child should such an interview be conducted. In addition, factors such as the nature of the dispute, the stage of the proceedings (including the specific matters in issue), as well as the availability of other relevant material such as reports by social workers and mental health professionals are all relevant considerations.

SIGNIFICANT CASES FROM THE FAMILY JUSTICE COURTS

The second guiding principle relates to the conduct of judicial interviews. Such interviews are usually conducted either solely by the judge, or jointly by the judge and a Court family specialist from the Family Justice Courts' Counselling and Psychological Services. The latter option is typically used in situations where there are suspicions of excessive gatekeeping and possible alienating conduct. In conducting the interview, the judge should convey clearly to the child that it is the judge who will decide the case based on the judge's assessment of what is in the child's welfare.

The judge should explain to the child that while the child's views as expressed during the interview will be considered by the judge, they are not determinative of the outcome. This is to encourage a more honest sharing of views from the child and to also alleviate the stress placed on the child. Further, open-ended questions that allow the child to freely respond should be used. The judge should also explore the underlying reasons where the child has expressed their preferences. Finally, the judge should record confidential notes of the interview which serve as crucial records, not only for the judge, but for the appellate Court reviewing the matter.

As for the use of child welfare reports, the Court of Appeal noted that while reports by child representatives, Court expert reports and certain Child Protective Service (CPS) reports tendered in Youth Court proceedings are disclosed and available to the parties, there is no disclosure of other categories of child welfare reports to the parties (including CPS reports tendered in divorce proceedings). The Court of Appeal ruled that such reports should be kept confidential and accessible only by the Court. Ensuring the confidentiality of such reports is vital to providing a safe environment for the child to express their views honestly, and to prevent either parent's relationship with the child from being negatively impacted. Such reports could also contain sensitive information which could impact ongoing investigations (e.g. allegations of child abuse). Finally, preserving the confidentiality of these reports encourages candid reporting and prevents parties from turning child proceedings into a destructive battlefield.

In using a child welfare report, the Court of Appeal cautioned that its contents have to be carefully considered given that the information provided has yet to be tested by cross-examination. The Court has to carefully consider whether the observations in the report are clearly explained, as well as the factual bases for the observations and assessments made. Where necessary, clarification should be sought from the professionals who made the report. And where the judge has relied on a child welfare report, that must be included in the Court's grounds of decision, though references to the report must not compromise its confidential nature.

Issues Relating to Access Orders

The Court may, upon the conclusion of ancillary matters, make orders concerning access to the children. There may be cases, further down the road, where parties see a need to file an application to vary the access orders which had been made. In such cases, the Court's power to vary access orders lies in Section 128 of the Women's Charter, which stipulates that such orders may be varied where there is a material change in circumstances.

In *DDN v DDO* [2024] SGHC(A) 2, the Appellate Division of the High Court ruled that the determination of whether there has been a material change in circumstances requires the

Court to balance several interests. These include the need for stability in carrying out the orders and establishing the post-divorce routine for the child over a reasonable period of time, as well as the need to be responsive to new developments given that the parent-child relationship is dynamic and children's preferences change as they grow older. Although the Court would take a wider and more holistic approach in assessing what constitutes a material change in circumstances, parties should not pursue a variation of orders at the earliest opportunity. They must do their utmost to make the ordered arrangements work. Parents should, in considering their children's changing needs, exercise grace and flexibility in co-parenting and endeavour to make arrangements in their children's best interests.

Insofar as access orders are concerned, it is also important to recognise that it takes time to develop and build the parent-child relationship. That point was made by the General Division of the High Court in *WOZ v WOY* [2024] SGHCF 11. The husband in that case had appealed against the decision of the District Judge which allowed him access to the child. The husband argued that the access order was unworkable because the child was unresponsive, chose to do her homework quietly and would return to the mother after a few minutes. The Court allowed the current access arrangements to remain, but granted the husband liberty to apply after three months to see if there was room for change in the access conditions. The Court pointed out that the child was sufficiently mature to evaluate how the parent-child relationship should develop. Further, it would take time, effort and patience from both sides to develop the relationship, and the Court must leave it to the parents to develop their own bond with their children in their own way.

Division of Matrimonial Assets

When it comes to the division of matrimonial assets, one important point to consider is whether the marriage is a single-income or dual-income marriage. In the former, it is the approach set out in *TNK v TNL* [2017] 1 SLR 609 which applies. As for the latter, it is the approach set out in *ANJ v ANJ* [2015] 4 SLR 1043 which applies.

The Appellate Division of the High Court in *DBA v DBB* [2024] SGHC(A) 12 ruled that in assessing whether the marriage was a single- or dual-income marriage, the focus of the Court's analysis should be on the primary roles carried out by parties during the marriage. In that case, the Court ruled that the wife was primarily the homemaker, as she had taken on more flexible but less well-remunerated work in order to have time to care for the children. The husband, on the other hand, was the primary breadwinner. He had been in full-time employment for 26 years and even after leaving his employment, had continued to be engaged in contract work and continued to draw an income.

In the exercise of dividing matrimonial assets, it is also important to first ascertain the pool of matrimonial assets. In that vein, it is important to identify the operative date for the identification of matrimonial assets. The Appellate Division of the High Court reiterated in *WOS v WOT* [2024] SGHC(A) 11 that the date of interim judgment is the operative date for identifying parties' matrimonial assets, though the Court retains the discretion to depart from this default operative date. The Court also emphasised that the operative date for the identification of matrimonial assets also serves as the cut-off date for the assessment of the parties' direct and indirect contributions to the marriage.

STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS



By forging relationships with judiciaries and other stakeholders near and far, we expand our reach to further enhance the administration and delivery of justice.

STATE COURTS' SHARING SESSIONS WITH STAKEHOLDERS

The State Courts conducted several sharing sessions and court tours in 2023:

- On 15 and 20 March 2023, the State Courts' Centre for Specialist Services (CSS), in collaboration with the Community Courts and Tribunals Cluster (CCTC), conducted sharing sessions with PAVE, a family violence specialist centre. These sessions included a tour of the State Courts as well as briefings on the Protection from Harassment Court (PHC), CSS' role in harassment cases, and how to navigate the Community Justice and Tribunals case filing system.
- On 28 April 2023, CSS conducted a networking tour for 20 staff members from the Singapore Prison Service who oversee the aftercare needs of inmates, including inmates on community programmes.
- On 18 July and 2 August 2023, CSS conducted a networking tour for 40 staff members from the Agency for Integrated Care.
- From 22 to 24 August 2023, the Community Criminal Court conducted a court tour for 45 Prison Officers (ranging from psychologists to correctional officers). The tour included an overview of the mentions court, bail centre and community court, as well as a dialogue session with Deputy Principal District Judge Kessler Soh.

PARTNERSHIP WITH PAVE: WIDENING SUPPORT TO COURT USERS IN CASES INVOLVING INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE

In 2023, CCTC partnered with PAVE, an integrated service for family violence and child protection, to provide targeted support to victims of intimate partner violence in PHC proceedings.

CCTC and CSS briefed PAVE counsellors and social workers on the remedies available in the PHC and the support available to these victims in the State Courts. CCTC also provided PAVE officers with hands-on training to enable them to assist these victims to file Protection from Harassment Act (POHA) claims through the Community Justice and Tribunals System (CJTS).

Separately, CCTC also collaborated with PAVE and CSS to provide general information to staff from the Singapore Management University (SMU). SMU staff were briefed on remedies that may be sought in the PHC and the support services available within and outside the courts to victims of harassment, including SMU students.

STREAMLINED PROCESS FOR ADMISSION OF ADVOCATES AND SOLICITORS

The Admission of Advocates and Solicitors (AAS) process, which involves multiple stakeholders (namely the Law Society of Singapore, the Attorney-General's Chambers and the Singapore Institute of Legal Education), has been streamlined.

An enhancement to the eLitigation system has enabled the transition from manual to automated workflows when stakeholders have no objections to any application for admission as an Advocate and Solicitor of the Supreme Court of Singapore. An auto-generated email notification with the Letter of No Objection (LONO) attached will be triggered for the respective agency to send out to the applicant, and a copy of the LONO is also directly uploaded to the AAS case files. This new initiative reduces repetitive and manual work for stakeholders as well as Registry.



Staff from PAVE (above and below) and SMU (below left) visited the State Courts on separate occasions in 2023 for briefing sessions on POHA-related matters.



DEVELOPMENTS AT THE SINGAPORE INTERNATIONAL COMMERCIAL COURT (SICC)

Joint Case Management with United States Bankruptcy Court of Southern District of New York in *Re PT Garuda Indonesia (Persero) Tbk and another matter* [2024] SGHC(I) 1

This case involved an application in the SICC for the recognition of a foreign proceeding commenced in the Commercial Court division of the Central Jakarta District Court, Indonesia, in respect of the restructuring of PT Garuda Indonesia (Persero) Tbk, under Part 11 of, and the Third Schedule to, the Insolvency, Restructuring and Dissolution Act 2018, which adopts the UNCITRAL Model Law on Cross-Border Insolvency. A similar application (Case No. 22-11274) was filed in the United States Bankruptcy Court of Southern District of New York (SDNY Court).

The SICC and the SDNY Court approved a protocol for court-to-court communication between the two Courts that was based on the Judicial Insolvency Network Guidelines and Modalities. The Protocol facilitated the making of arrangements between the SICC and the SDNY Court for the joint management of both applications. Joint Case Management Conferences of the SICC and the SDNY Court were held on 11 and 25 May 2023. The application before the SDNY Court was eventually withdrawn, and the application was heard by the SICC on 25 and 26 September 2023.

Model Jurisdiction Clause for Proceedings Under International Arbitration Act 1994

On 12 January 2023, the SICC introduced a model jurisdiction clause to aid parties in designating the SICC as the supervisory court for International Arbitration Act 1994 (IAA)-related applications. In support, the Singapore International Arbitration Centre (SIAC) included the model jurisdiction clause as an optional addition to the SIAC Model Clause.



Litigation-Mediation-Litigation Protocol

On 12 January 2023, the SICC and the Singapore International Mediation Centre (SIMC) jointly introduced a Litigation-Mediation-Litigation (LML) Protocol to promote the amicable resolution of international commercial disputes.

The LML Protocol sets out the procedure under which disputes before the SICC may be referred to the SIMC for mediation, as well as the procedure for the continuation or termination of proceedings before the SICC after the conclusion of the mediation. The LML Protocol provides for a case management stay of the SICC proceedings for up to eight weeks after the commencement of mediation, subject to any extension by the Court for good reasons. It also recognises that the Court may grant interim relief to preserve a party's rights despite the case management stay. A settlement agreement reached through the mediation may be recorded as an Order of Court.

Strengthening Cooperation with China on Management of International Commercial Disputes

On 1 April 2023, the Supreme Court of Singapore and the Supreme People's Court of the People's Republic of China signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) on cooperation in the management of international commercial disputes in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) through an LML framework. The signing took place during a high-level visit by Singapore's then-Prime Minister (PM) Lee Hsien Loong to Beijing and was witnessed by then-PM Lee and Chinese Premier Li Qiang.

Under this MOU, each Court will develop and implement the LML framework to manage disputes arising from BRI projects, facilitated by a domestic or foreign mediation expert, and a domestic, foreign or international mediation institution.

Both Courts also agree to share information on its LML framework and other dispute management practices relating to the SICC and the China International Commercial Court – including information on procedural rules, case management protocols and practices, and enforcement processes – as well as promote the LML framework by recommending the appropriate adoption of the LML Model Clauses.

Reporting of Significant SICC and Court of Appeal Arbitration Decisions in the International Council for Commercial Arbitration Yearbook

The International Council for Commercial Arbitration (ICCA) published a Compendium of significant SICC and Court of Appeal arbitration decisions in the online version of the 2023 ICCA Yearbook on the Kluwer Arbitration database. The Compendium sets out, for each case, the significant and/or novel points of law in the case, a brief summary of the case, and the decision in the case.

The Supreme Court held an event on 12 January 2023 to launch the LML Protocol and the SICC model jurisdiction clause for international arbitration matters, where Justice Philip Jeyaretnam (far right), President of the SICC, took part in a fireside chat.



Justice Jeyaretnam gave the keynote address at the 12 January 2023 event, titled 'Appropriate Dispute Resolution – The Singapore Way'.

SICC CONFERENCE 2023

Themed 'Forging Ahead in International Commercial Dispute Management', the SICC Conference 2023 brought together the Singapore Judges and International Judges of the SICC. They discussed and assessed legal developments in international commercial dispute resolution, as well as charted the course for the SICC in the year ahead.



The Supreme Court Bench and International Judges came together for the annual SICC Conference at the beginning of 2023.

SICC'S DEEPENING TIES WITH CHINA AND INDIA

In 2023, the SICC maintained its unwavering focus on Tier 1 countries, particularly China and India, where it has consistently attracted significant interest and demand for the expertise of the President of the SICC, Justice Philip Jeyaretnam, and International Judges as speakers. The year 2023 saw the SICC intensify its outreach and promotional efforts to elevate its global presence and highlight its capabilities as a nodal jurisdiction for international commercial dispute resolution.

One significant milestone was Justice Jeyaretnam's keynote address at the third Singapore-China International Commercial Dispute Resolution Conference 2023, held on 20 October 2023 in Singapore. This conference, co-organised by Singapore's Ministry of Law, the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, and the International Commercial Dispute Prevention and Settlement Organization, brought together approximately 300 delegates, with about half travelling from China. Justice Jeyaretnam's address, titled 'Appropriate Dispute Resolution for Transnational Projects in the Asian Context,' underscored the close cooperation between Singapore and China in seeking optimal solutions for international commercial dispute resolution. He also highlighted the MOU signed between China's Supreme Court and the Singapore Supreme Court, providing a framework for collaboration and information sharing between the SICC and the China International Commercial Court.

Furthermore, the SICC's impact extended to China through visits by delegations of lawyers from Beijing and Shanghai, who sought insights into the SICC's potential as a neutral venue to resolve cross-border commercial disputes. These visits, which took place on 24 and 27 October 2023, provided the delegations with valuable information on unique features of the SICC, including foreign representation, and the recognition and enforcement of SICC judgments in China.

In addition to its efforts in China, the SICC organised a highly successful roadshow in New Delhi, India, from 7 to 9 December 2023. The roadshow featured Justice Jeyaretnam delivering engaging and informative talks at three distinguished institutions. At the PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Justice Jeyaretnam and Justice Arjan Sikri, International Judge, elucidated the key principles and advantages of the SICC in resolving international commercial disputes. The Indian Arbitration Forum also benefited from the SICC roadshow, where Justice Jeyaretnam shared valuable insights on the SICC's role in promoting arbitration and its significance in the global business landscape. Finally, the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry was privileged to host Justice Jeyaretnam, who provided a comprehensive overview of the SICC's offerings and its commitment to facilitating efficient and effective dispute resolution for international businesses.

The roadshow garnered significant attention and positive feedback from attendees, who expressed their appreciation for the valuable knowledge and insights gained from the sessions. Participants left the event equipped with a deeper understanding of the SICC's capabilities and its commitment to providing a world-class platform for resolving international commercial disputes. This successful roadshow not only served as a platform for knowledge exchange but also strengthened ties between the legal communities of Singapore and India, fostering greater collaboration and understanding between the two nations in the realm of international commercial law.

These initiatives underscore the SICC's dedication to engaging with international stakeholders and promoting a deeper understanding of its role in the global legal landscape. The SICC's commitment to fostering strong partnerships with key stakeholders in China and India, as well as its ongoing efforts to expand its outreach and influence, play a crucial role in promoting the Court's reputation and capabilities on the global stage.

MEMORANDA OF UNDERSTANDING AND ROUNDTABLES

6th and 7th Singapore-China Legal and Judicial Roundtable

The sixth Singapore-China Legal and Judicial Roundtable was held on 7 February 2023, co-chaired by Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon and then-President and Chief Justice of the Supreme People's Court (SPC), His Excellency Zhou Qiang.

One key deliverable of the Roundtable was the Strategic Roadmap on Singapore-China Judicial Cooperation, anchored on five key strategic areas of mutual interest with five pillars of partnership. Each pillar features previously-discussed workstreams at past editions of the Roundtable and Working Group meeting, encapsulating the years of hard work and collective efforts by both courts.

The Roadmap serves a twofold purpose – to take stock of, and record, the milestones achieved at each successive Roundtable and Working Group meeting; and to provide planning guidance for future Roundtables and Working Group meetings.

In looking ahead, Chief Justice Menon and then-Chief Justice Zhou emphasised the continued importance of bilateral judicial cooperation in the context of today's society. They also reaffirmed the strong bilateral ties and longstanding friendship between the two countries and renewed their commitment to enhance access to justice in their respective jurisdictions.

On 28 November 2023, both countries convened again for the seventh Singapore-China Legal and Judicial Roundtable. It took place during a four-day visit to Beijing by Chief Justice Menon together with a delegation of judges and senior officers from the Supreme Court of Singapore.

This edition of the Roundtable was the first co-chaired by the current President and Chief Justice of the SPC, His Excellency Zhang Jun, following his appointment in March 2023. It also marked the Roundtable's return to an in-person setting after three years of virtual meetings due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The two Chief Justices took the opportunity to deepen the strong bilateral ties between the two judiciaries and expand the scope of judicial cooperation.

In his opening remarks at the seventh Roundtable, Chief Justice Zhang reiterated that relations between the two countries were forward-looking, strategic and exemplary. Both countries had agreed to upgrade bilateral relations to an "All-Round, High-Quality, Future-Oriented Partnership" when then-Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong met with President Xi Jinping in March 2023. This was a significant milestone for the two countries as it charted the direction for the development of bilateral relations in a new era. Chief Justice Menon, in his opening remarks, emphasised the significance and status of the Roundtable in the strong relationship between the two judiciaries. Since its inception in 2017, the Roundtable has established itself as a valuable platform for judicial cooperation and the exchange of ideas and experiences between the two courts. Both judiciaries see the Roundtable as a mutually beneficial forum for judicial exchange on topics of considerable interest.

At the seventh Roundtable, both courts shared best practices and exchanged perspectives on four topics:

1. The role of judiciaries in building a transnational system of commercial justice.
2. Technical fact-finding mechanisms for intellectual property cases.
3. Recent developments in the recognition and enforcement of foreign judgments.
4. Effective and speedy resolution of cases concerning the judicial supervision of arbitration.

Since its inception in 2017, the Roundtable has established itself as a valuable platform for judicial cooperation and the exchange of ideas and experiences between the two courts.

Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon (left) met his Chinese counterpart, Chief Justice Zhang Jun, for the first time at the seventh Singapore-China Legal and Judicial Roundtable.



MEMORANDA OF UNDERSTANDING AND ROUNDTABLES

Singapore and France Sign Two MOUs to Promote Bilateral Judicial Cooperation

On 12 May 2023, the judiciaries of Singapore and France signed two memoranda of understanding (MOUs) to promote bilateral judicial cooperation. Both MOUs were signed during a visit by the Singapore delegation to Paris.

The MOU for Judicial Cooperation was signed by Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon and Mr Christophe Soulard, First President of the Court of Cassation of the French Republic. It affirms both courts' commitment to exchange experiences and information, promote regular consultations, and participate at conferences or seminars on matters of common interest.

The MOU on Advancing Cooperation in Judicial Education and Research was signed by Ms Juthika Ramanathan, Chief Executive (Office of the Chief Justice) for the Singapore Judicial College, and Ms Nathalie Roret, Director of the French National School for the Judiciary. This MOU aims to enhance cooperation in areas such as judicial training and programmes; the conduct of joint research; and the exchange of materials, information and experiences on topics of interest. It also aims to facilitate mutual study visits and attachments.

During the visit, Chief Justice Menon also addressed the third Annual France-Singapore Symposium on Law and Business, which was co-organised by the French Embassy in Singapore and the Singapore Academy of Law. This edition of the Symposium centred on legal technology, with policy and legal experts from France and Singapore discussing topics such as artificial intelligence, data protection, and policy coordination and cooperation between France and Singapore on technology more broadly.



Ms Nathalie Roret (above left), representing France, and Ms Juthika Ramanathan, representing Singapore, signed the MOU on Advancing Cooperation in Judicial Education and Research.

Chief Justice Menon spoke at the third France-Singapore Symposium on Law and Business.



Top and above: Singapore hosted the inaugural Singapore-India Judicial Roundtable on 9 September 2023.

Singapore Judiciary Signs MOUs with India and Hosts Inaugural Roundtable

On 7 September 2023, the judiciaries of Singapore and India signed two MOUs to promote bilateral judicial cooperation.

The two MOUs affirm the common cause of promoting access to justice and collaboration in judicial education and research between Singapore and India. The scope of collaboration covers judicial education and training, leveraging technology to enhance access to justice, as well as promoting multilateral fora for judicial engagement.

The signing of the two MOUs at the Supreme Court of Singapore was witnessed by Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon of Singapore and Chief Justice Dhananjaya Yashwant Chandrachud of India.

The Indian delegation comprising Chief Justice Chandrachud and judges was on an official visit to Singapore for the inaugural Singapore-India Judicial Roundtable, which was held following the signing of the MOUs. These annual meetings will serve as a platform to exchange knowledge, discuss mutual areas of interest, and advance collaboration and cooperation between the two judiciaries.

MEMORANDA OF UNDERSTANDING AND ROUNDTABLES

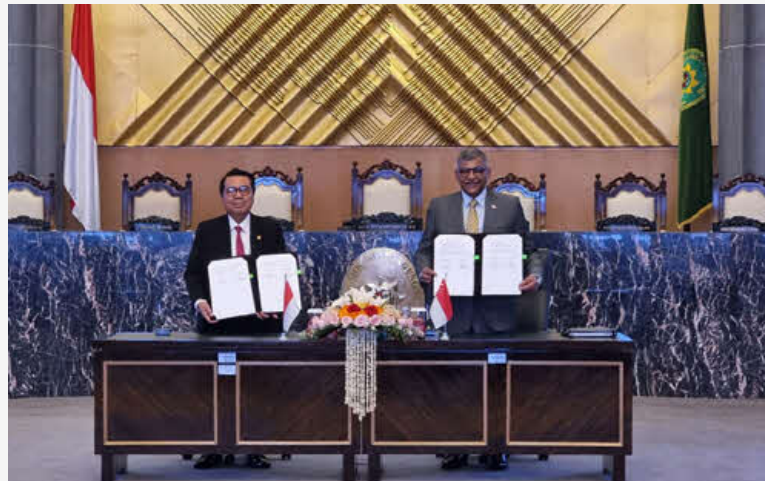
Singapore and Indonesia Sign MOU to Promote Bilateral Judicial Cooperation

The Supreme Court of Singapore and the Supreme Court of Indonesia signed an MOU for judicial cooperation on 7 November 2023. The MOU was signed during a visit by Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon and a delegation from the Supreme Court of Singapore to the Supreme Court of Indonesia from 6 to 8 November 2023.

The MOU, signed by Chief Justice Menon and Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Indonesia, Professor Dr Muhammad Syarifuddin, marks a milestone in bilateral collaboration between the two judiciaries and is a testament to the strong ties between Singapore and Indonesia. The MOU identifies four specific areas for collaboration: cross-border commercial law, international commercial courts and international commercial dispute resolution, the International Consortium for Court Excellence and International Framework for Court Excellence, and judicial education and training.

During the visit, Chief Justice Menon held a bilateral meeting with Chief Justice Prof Dr Muhammad Syarifuddin. The two Chief Justices discussed the different avenues of strategic interest for collaboration between the two judiciaries, such as cooperation in cross-border insolvency and restructuring, matters relating to international commercial courts, and judicial training and exchanges.

Chief Justice Menon also paid a visit to the Judicial Training Centre in Bogor and engaged in a fireside chat with Indonesian judges and judicial training participants, along with Justice Lee Sei Kin, Justice Pang Khang Chau and Justice Syamsul Maarif of the Supreme Court of Indonesia.



Chief Justice Menon's trip to Indonesia included an MOU signing ceremony (above) and a bilateral meeting (below), both with Chief Justice Prof Dr Muhammad Syarifuddin.



MOU for Judicial Cooperation Between the Family Justice Courts of Singapore and Hong Kong

On 15 March 2024, the Singapore Family Justice Courts (FJC) and the Court of First Instance (High Court) and the District Court of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) signed an MOU to enhance cooperation and promote the efficient administration of family justice in their respective jurisdictions. The ceremony was held at the Hong Kong Court of Final Appeal Building.

This MOU is the first signed between the Singapore and Hong Kong judiciaries. It aims to further judicial exchanges on matters of mutual concern, including the effective and efficient management of family cases, implementation of technology in the administration and management of family cases, training of family judges and officers, development of family law, rules and practice directions, and the role of mediation in achieving resolution in family cases.

The MOU also establishes a foundation for the two judiciaries to explore possible bilateral initiatives to deepen mutual learning between both parties, and to facilitate access to justice for families in Singapore and Hong Kong.

This MOU is the first signed between the Singapore and Hong Kong judiciaries.



The MOU was signed by FJC's Presiding Judge, Justice Teh Hwee Hwee (second from left), and Judge of the Court of First Instance of the High Court of Hong Kong SAR, Madam Justice Bebe Chu (second from right). The Honourable the Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon of Singapore (far left) and The Honourable Chief Justice Andrew Cheung of the Court of Final Appeal of Hong Kong SAR (far right) witnessed the signing of the MOU.

VISITS AND COURTESY CALLS

Visit by Supreme Court of Japan

On 19 and 20 January 2023, a delegation from the Digital Transformation Office of the Supreme Court of Japan visited the Supreme Court and State Courts of Singapore as part of a survey study on digitalisation efforts of various judiciaries. The delegation was led by Staff Attorney for the Digital Transformation Office, General Secretariat, Judge Keisuke Ono.

They were briefed by SG Courts' Chief Transformation and Innovation Officer, Mr Tan Ken Hwee, and Principal District Judge Toh Yung Cheong from the State Courts. They learned about the digital transformation of SG Courts as well as the various integrated court systems which have facilitated access to justice, including learning points gained from the pandemic.



Flanked by judges of the Supreme Court of India, Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud (centre) presented a gift to Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon (second from left).

Visit to Supreme Court of India by Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon

Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon visited the Supreme Court of India from 2 to 5 February 2023 at the invitation of the Honourable Dr Justice D Y Chandrachud, Chief Justice of India. In connection with the commemoration of the 73rd anniversary of the establishment of the Indian Supreme Court, Chief Justice Menon was invited to deliver the inaugural Supreme Court of India Day Annual Lecture.

In his lecture, Chief Justice Menon spoke on the role of the judiciary in a changing world. The Chief Justice spoke about the "perfect long storm" of challenges facing judiciaries around the world, such as the increasing complexity of disputes, obstacles against access to justice, and the polarisation of societies. He said that judiciaries have a duty to respond to these challenges by refining the judicial role to include the tasks of building user-centric court systems, enhancing judicial competencies and promoting international judicial engagement.

Chief Justice Menon and Chief Justice Chandrachud also had fruitful discussions on institutionalising exchanges between the Supreme Courts of India and Singapore. They agreed to work towards the establishment of an annual exchange where issues such as securing access to justice, technology and the law, judicial and legal education in a changing world, and securing the rule of law could be jointly studied and addressed.

During his visit, Chief Justice Menon also called on the President of India, Her Excellency Droupadi Murmu, and on the Judges of the Delhi High Court.

Visit by Supreme People's Prosecutor of Lao People's Democratic Republic

A delegation led by the Supreme People's Prosecutor (SPP) of Lao People's Democratic Republic, His Excellency Xaysana Khotphouthone, visited the Supreme Court of Singapore on 8 February 2023 to learn more on the digital transformation of SG Courts. SPP Khotphouthone also had a lively discussion with Chief Transformation and Innovation Officer, Mr Tan Ken Hwee, on Singapore's experience with the infrastructure and funding needed to digitalise the courts.

Enhancing Singapore-Indonesia Bilateral Relations and Strengthening Partnership Within ASEAN

On 13 and 14 March 2023, Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon led a delegation to Jakarta, Indonesia. Chief Justice Menon called on the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Indonesia, Prof Dr Muhammad Syarifuddin, where they spoke about the development of frameworks for international commercial dispute resolution and the deepening of bilateral judicial cooperation, especially in the areas of court-to-court communications, cross-border insolvency and commercial courts.

Following the courtesy call, Chief Justice Menon addressed the Justices and Judges of the Supreme Court of Indonesia's Civil Chamber, its Working Group on the Ease of Doing Business, and its Working Group on Insolvency. He talked about the important role that commercial courts play in developing a system of international commercial dispute resolution, and how they should work harmoniously with their counterparts in other jurisdictions to resolve conflicts in an orderly and systematic manner.

In his capacity as then-President of the ASEAN Law Association, Chief Justice Menon also met with ASEAN Secretary-General Dr Kao Kim Hourn to discuss existing proposals for collaboration between the ASEAN Secretariat and the ASEAN Law Association, as well as capacity building within the ASEAN region.



Chief Justice Menon spent time in Jakarta meeting with ASEAN Secretary-General Dr Kao Kim Hourn.

VISITS AND COURTESY CALLS



HRH Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa received Chief Justice Menon at Gudaibiya Palace in Bahrain.

Bahrain and Singapore Courts Strengthen Bilateral Ties

The Supreme Judicial Council of the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Supreme Court of Singapore are exploring a collaboration framework to support Bahrain in establishing an international commercial court for the resolution of transnational commercial disputes. Termed the Bahrain International Commercial Court (BICC), it will be based principally on the model of the Singapore International Commercial Court (SICC).

The collaboration arose from an October 2022 visit led by the Chief Justice of Bahrain, His Excellency Shaikh Khaled bin Ali Al Khalifa, to the Supreme Court of Singapore to better understand Singapore's experience in building an international dispute resolution hub. The two Chief Justices exchanged views on the growing importance of international dispute resolution centres and cross-jurisdictional coordination, as well as on the establishment of the BICC.

During a visit to Bahrain on 8 and 9 May 2023, Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon called on His Royal Highness (HRH) Crown Prince Shaikh Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, Chief Justice Khaled bin Ali, and His Excellency Nawaf bin Mohamed Al-Moawda, Minister of Justice, Islamic Affairs and Endowments.

Chief Justice Khaled bin Ali and Chief Justice Menon signed an MOU on Cooperation and a Memorandum of Guidance (MOG) on the Enforcement of Money Judgments. The MOU and MOG are the first signed between the Supreme Judicial Council of Bahrain and the Supreme Court of Singapore.

Chief Justice Khaled bin Ali affirmed that this unprecedented collaboration between Bahrain and Singapore to support the establishment of the BICC reflects the Bahrain judiciary's excellent relationship with the Singapore judiciary and advances a common aspiration of both judiciaries to develop and promote efficient dispute resolution mechanisms for transnational disputes.

On the second day of his visit, Chief Justice Menon delivered a lecture, addressing the rise, role and features of the transnational system of commercial justice and explaining the central place of international commercial courts within the system.

The Supreme Judicial Council of the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Supreme Court of Singapore are exploring a collaboration framework to support Bahrain in establishing an international commercial court for the resolution of transnational commercial disputes.

Visit by Chief Justice of Brunei Darussalam

Chief Justice Dato Seri Paduka Steven Chong led a delegation from the Supreme Court of Brunei Darussalam to the Singapore Courts on 17 and 18 July 2023 for the first in-person bilateral meeting between the Chief Justices.

Highlights of this high-level visit included the signing of an MOU to promote bilateral judicial cooperation between the Singapore and Brunei judiciaries, including in areas of dispute avoidance and resolution.

Visit by Chief Justice of Rwanda

The Supreme Court of Singapore and Rwanda Supreme Court held their first in-person bilateral meeting between the Chief Justices in August 2023. The Chief Justice of Rwanda, Dr Faustin Ntezilyayo, led a delegation to the Singapore Courts and other agencies from 16 to 18 August 2023.

In 2021, the Singapore and Rwanda Supreme Courts signed agreements to enhance judicial cooperation and enforce money judgments. Throughout the pandemic, the two judiciaries actively pursued collaborations in judicial cooperation, towards the common cause of access to justice and judicial excellence.



While in Singapore, Chief Justice Dr Faustin Ntezilyayo of Rwanda presented a souvenir to Chief Justice Menon.

EVENTS WITH PARTNERS

2nd International Judicial Dispute Resolution Network Meeting

On 22 and 23 May 2023, the International Judicial Dispute Resolution Network (JDRN) convened in New York City for its second meeting. The two-day meeting, hosted by the United States District Court for the Southern District of New York, was a platform for member judiciaries to share their common experiences; exchange ideas and expertise on leveraging the judicial dispute resolution (JDR) process to break down barriers to justice; promote the delivery of fair, proportionate and timely justice; and achieve better outcomes for parties.

In his opening remarks, The Honourable the Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon said that recognising the importance of developing a user-centric court system is a central feature of the shift in the judiciary's perspective of its role from one that is strictly limited to adjudication, to a broader one that encompasses the aspiration to become an institution that excels in the administration of justice. One aspect of promoting user centricity is making court processes easier to navigate, and providing more information and practical assistance to lay court users, who are a growing proportion of all our court systems. Another key aspect of this endeavour involves implementing mechanisms that are attuned to the interests of court users to help smoothen their pathways to justice, and this is where judge-led case management strategies and court alternative dispute resolution (ADR) modalities – which form the bedrock of the JDR process – can play an essential and vital role.

Since the inaugural meeting in Singapore in May 2022, the Judiciary of Jamaica and the Judiciary of Rwanda have successfully applied to join the JDRN and were officially brought on board as Observers at this meeting in New York City. The JDRN has also published the *Best Practice Guide for the Establishment, Implementation and Promotion of the Judicial Dispute Resolution Process*, which serves as the benchmark for the development and practice of the JDR process in jurisdictions which are keen to institutionalise it in their judicial systems.

The JDRN is now working on developing practice guides on early neutral evaluation and mediation. These two key ADR modalities have been widely and successfully employed in judicial systems such as the State Courts of Singapore, where about 30% of the civil cases filed fall under the rubric of the JDR process, with more than 80% of cases settled without trial, saving legal costs, time and judicial resources.

Justice Abdullah Speaks at 14th Lujiazui Forum's Pujiang Night Talk International Symposium

The Supreme Court of Singapore was invited to speak at the 14th Lujiazui Forum's *Pujiang Night Talk* International Symposium held on 9 June 2023. The theme of the symposium was 'Financial Openness and Cooperation and the Rule of Law Guarantee'.

Justice Aedit Abdullah represented the Supreme Court of Singapore as a speaker. He spoke about the need to uphold the rule of law vis-à-vis the liberalisation of financial markets, as well as the role of the courts in fostering a stable financial system underpinning the broader economy.

The symposium was held in conjunction with the annual Lujiazui Forum, a high-level global discussion platform for the development of international financial cooperation.



Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon (third from left) and Presiding Judge of the State Courts, Justice Vincent Hoong (third from right), led the Singapore delegation at the JDRN meeting in New York City.

The JDRN has also published the *Best Practice Guide for the Establishment, Implementation and Promotion of the Judicial Dispute Resolution Process*.

Supreme Court of Singapore and Administrative Court of Thailand Workshop on Digital Transformation and Organisation Management

Under the auspices of the Singapore-Thailand Civil Service Exchange Programme, the Supreme Court of Singapore and the Administrative Court of Thailand held their annual joint workshop on 24 July 2023.

After welcome remarks by then-Deputy Presiding Judge of the State Courts, Christopher Tan, Chief Transformation and Innovation Officer Mr Tan Ken Hwee conducted the workshop along the theme of 'Digital Transformation and the Future of Organisation Management'. Ms Radaphat Chongthammakun, then-Director of the Strategic Management Bureau, Office of the Administrative Courts of Thailand, facilitated the session.

DEVELOPING OUR CAPABILITIES

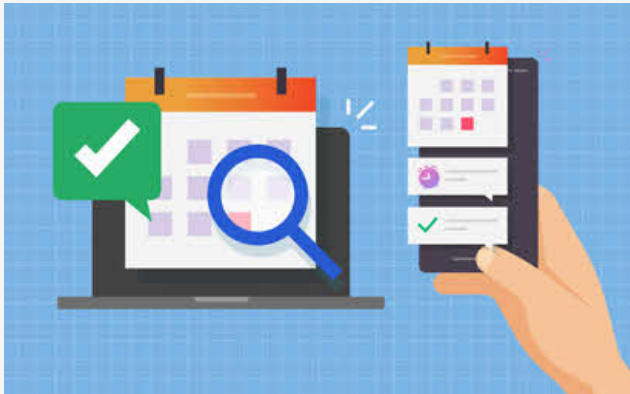


An organisational culture that values continuous workplace learning and improvement enables our people to serve court users better.

LAUNCH OF ELECTRONIC DIARY

eDiary, a new module built upon the web version of eLitigation to manage diary scheduling and reservation of hearings, was progressively rolled out in phases from January 2023.

This online module replaces the previous Word document of the Judges' Master Diary and the manual workflow for updating changes. It synchronises hearing information from eLitigation to eDiary. With pre-set fixing logic, Case Management Officers and Judicial Officers are able to manage reservations of hearing dates for their cases more independently and filter out available hearing dates more efficiently.



WORKSHOPS ON GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

As new technologies become mature and promise productivity and quality improvements, training and support for all court staff to harness such technologies are important. Together with the Government Technology Agency (GovTech), SG Courts have organised training in generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools so that all officers are able to make productive use of these new technologies.

Between July and December 2023, eight officers from the Criminal Courts cluster attended workshops on generative AI, large language models and ChatGPT. They explored how these novel tools could be used for day-to-day work and research.



ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVES

The SG Courts were conferred environmental certification in 2023 in recognition of their efforts to become environmental champions.

State Courts Accorded ISO 46001 Water Efficiency Management Systems Certificate

ISO 46001 certification for Water Efficiency Management Systems provides a framework for the State Courts to manage and improve their water efficiency. By achieving this certification, the State Courts demonstrated their commitment to responsible water usage, encouraging a culture of water conservation. It establishes guidelines, processes and performance indicators, fostering a systematic approach to water management, which ultimately promotes water savings and environmental sustainability.

This certification instils confidence in the system's efficiency. Court users will be more inclined to adopt water-saving practices, knowing that the certified systems meet established international standards and contribute to sustainable water use.

Family Justice Courts (Havelock) Accorded Eco Office Certification

The Family Justice Courts (FJC) @ Havelock Square were recertified as an Eco Office by the Singapore Environment Council. This reinforced the organisation's sustainability efforts in the following ways:

- **Environmental impact.** Eco Office recertification involves implementing environmentally-friendly practices within the office environment, such as bringing one's own mug to work and ceasing the use of plastic bottles or disposable cups in meeting rooms. FJC displayed its commitment through such measures, aligning with the Judiciary's commitment to promote sustainability and reduce its carbon footprint.
- **Employee engagement and resource efficiency.** Eco Office recertification provides opportunities to engage employees in sustainability initiatives by involving staff in the implementation of environmentally-friendly practices. It raises staff awareness to be prudent about the use of resources such as energy and water.
- **Public perception and alignment with our environmental sustainability policy.** This recertification demonstrates the organisation's commitment to environmental stewardship and corporate social responsibility. It reinforces the Judiciary's commitment to promote sustainability in all aspects of its operations.

SETTING UP OF THREE SPECIALIST DIVISIONS AT THE FAMILY JUSTICE COURTS

On 1 September 2023, the Family Justice Courts (FJC) set up three Specialist Courts for family violence, maintenance and Youth Court proceedings. The establishment of these Specialist Courts allows for more targeted and effective management of cases and helps to build up greater expertise in these areas of work.

Court of Protection

With the passing of the Family Violence Amendment Bill, the definition of family violence has been significantly expanded. The courts are now granted additional powers to impose orders such as Stay Away Orders and Mandatory Treatment Orders. These changes benefit from a fixed team of judges handling all case management hearings at mentions, as well as the hearings of complicated cases.

Maintenance and Enforcement Court

In preparation for the implementation of the Family Justice Reform Bill, a new Maintenance Enforcement Process (MEP) was established to make the enforcement of maintenance orders more efficient and effective, as well as facilitate



more sustainable maintenance outcomes. The setting up of this Specialist Court with a fixed team of judges handling all mentions and hearings of complicated cases would complement the MEP and further its objectives.

Youth Court

A fixed team of judges dedicated to hearing Youth Court proceedings has also been formed to drive process changes, improve the current model of rehabilitative justice, and explore ways to improve access to justice for both youths and parents.



The FJC set up three Specialist Courts for family violence, maintenance and Youth Court proceedings to allow for more targeted and effective management of cases and to build more expertise in these areas of work.

JUSTICE SYSTEM REFORMS SERIES

The Singapore Judicial College (SJC) organised a series on Justice System Reforms in 2023, as part of the Judiciary's ongoing review and refinement of the justice system to ensure that it remains responsive to the needs of those we serve.

Three sessions were organised focusing on:

- Why we undertake justice system reforms and broad management perspectives on how we do this.
- How service delivery and tech reforms have been done in the civil service.
- The impact of technology on the Judiciary's role as a trusted institution.

The sessions culminated in a learning journey to the Central Provident Fund (CPF) Board's PlayLab space to see innovation in action.



Participants of SJC's Justice System Reforms Series visited the CPF Board's innovation hub, called the PlayLab.

CONNECTING WITH THE COMMUNITY



The Singapore Judiciary advocates for inclusive justice by giving back to the community, and addressing residents' legal and broader societal needs.



INTERVIEW WITH STATE CORONER ADAM NAKHODA

SG Courts' Communications and Service Excellence Division facilitated a CNA media interview with State Coroner Adam Nakhoda on the challenges and satisfaction that come with his job. This gave the public a valuable opportunity to gain a better understanding of the purpose of Coroner's Inquiries in Singapore and put a humane perspective on court processes. The interview article was published on CNA's website in November 2023 and included a video.

State Coroner Adam Nakhoda shared what his role entails in an exclusive interview with CNA.



Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon (left) and Justice Debbie Ong were the keynote speakers at the first two sessions of *Conversations with the Community*.

CONVERSATIONS WITH THE COMMUNITY

Conversations with the Community is a series of seven conversations in 2023 and 2024 that brings together leaders from the judiciary, academia, legal and other sectors to engage on issues of topical interest that involve the community. Jointly hosted by SG Courts and law faculties of the National University of Singapore (NUS), Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) and Singapore Management University (SMU), these conversations set out to convey judicial perspectives, raise awareness and encourage dialogue on prevailing issues at the intersection of law, community and society. The Judiciary seeks to connect more closely with the community by convening these sessions at the law schools.

On 21 September 2023, SG Courts launched the inaugural session of this series at SMU. Over 200 guests attended the event. The keynote speaker was The Honourable the Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon. His opening address, titled 'The Role of the Courts in Our Society – Safeguarding Society', raised awareness about the Courts as independent and impartial organs of state that interpret laws, apply them and adjudicate cases. In his speech, Chief Justice Menon highlighted two core principles – judicial courage and judicial modesty – that guide the Courts in discharging their adjudicative role. He also recognised that the Courts do not work alone in safeguarding society; instead, the different branches of

government are co-equal partners in the shared endeavour to advance society's best interests. Beyond the Courts' traditional adjudicative role, Chief Justice Menon outlined the second role that the Courts play in safeguarding society – that is, their increasingly important systemic role as institutions charged with ensuring the fair and efficient administration of justice. He added that SG Courts are working to discharge this systemic role by building a user-centric court system that meets the needs of the public and advances access to justice.

The second session was held on 16 November 2023 at SUSS, with over 100 participants including members of the Judiciary and stakeholders of the family justice system. Justice Debbie Ong, the keynote speaker, focused on the resolution of family disputes through Therapeutic Justice (TJ). The session emphasised how a TJ system puts in place the essential legal structure and resources to ensure therapeutic, helpful effects for the family, and how the Family Courts should be a place for problem-solving and resolution rather than a battlefield. Deputy Presiding Judge of the Family Justice Courts, Chia Wee Kiat, led the panel discussion comprising Justice Ong, Professor Leong Wai Kum (SUSS), Dr Sudha Nair (Executive Director, PAVE) and Ms Wong Kai Yun (Co-Chair, Family Law Practice Committee, Law Society of Singapore). They provided deeper insights into TJ through their experiences and practices.



Chief Justice Menon (centre) with recipients of the Long Service Awards.

JUDICIARY VOLUNTEERS RECEIVE APPRECIATION AWARDS

On 17 November 2023, SG Courts recognised the sterling contributions of court volunteers in enhancing access to justice at the Judiciary Volunteers Appreciation Lunch held at Raffles Town Club.

The Legal Assistance Scheme for Capital Offences (LASCO) Long Service Award was presented to Mr Jason Dendroff. This award honours lawyers who have volunteered their service to LASCO for 25 years or more, representing accused persons charged with capital offences at trial and on appeal. Mr Dendroff was emplaced on the LASCO panel as an Assistant Counsel in 1997 after being called to the Bar in 1995. In 2017, he was appointed as a Lead Counsel.

Three volunteers from the State Courts received Outstanding Court Volunteer Awards for their significant commitment to pro bono work. They are Mr Melvin Loh Guo Wei (Advocate and Solicitor Category), who started volunteering as an undergraduate and continues to do so today as a law lecturer; Mr Ram Narain Dubey (Open Category), a certified e-mediator and lifelong learning advocate for whom age is no barrier; and Mr Ivan Tang Wu Hwan (Student Category), a law undergraduate who actively volunteers with the Aid-in-Person Project. Twelve volunteers also received Long Service Awards for their dedicated service to the Courts.

The awards were conferred by Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon. In the Chief Justice's welcome address to the court volunteers, he said: "I thank each and every one of you for so generously dedicating your time, energies and expertise to supporting this aspect of the work of the Judiciary. It is especially gratifying that you do so not in pursuit of any material reward or publicity, but just because of your desire to do the right thing. There is no purer motive than this and we are deeply grateful. Your contributions make a real impact on the lives of our court users and you play a critical role in enhancing the delivery of justice in our legal system."

"Your contributions make a real impact on the lives of our court users and you play a critical role in enhancing the delivery of justice in our legal system."

Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon



Mr Jason Dendroff (right) receiving the LASCO Long Service Award from Chief Justice Menon.



Chief Justice Menon (second with right) with recipients of the Outstanding Court Volunteer Awards (from left): Mr Melvin Loh Guo Wei, Mr Ram Narain Dubey and Mr Ivan Tang Wu Hwan.

A DAY IN COURT 2023

The State Courts held their *A Day in Court* (ADIC) student seminar for secondary school student leaders on 4 July 2023. A total of 125 students from 32 secondary schools attended the half-day seminar. It included a briefing by a court counsellor from the Centre for Specialist Services (CSS), group activities, and an exclusive fireside chat and Q&A session with district judges.

An annual outreach programme, ADIC provides participating students with a brief overview of Singapore's criminal justice system to give them a better understanding of the Singapore Judiciary and the work undertaken by the State Courts. Since its inception in 2014, ADIC has traditionally been a full-day physical event. After a two-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it returned as a half-day virtual event in 2022. New content was also introduced to better align with the evolving consumption habits and social environment of youths.

ADIC 2023 was conducted in person, with a focus on harassment and cyberbullying matters to help student leaders become champions against such unreasonable and intimidating behaviour.



Scenes from ADIC 2023: Students (below) enthusiastically participating in the programme; Senior Court Counsellor Samantha Sim (left) presenting on harassment and what students can do to prevent it.



OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT WITH TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

The State Courts conducted several outreach and engagement programmes with tertiary institutions in 2023.

There were two CSS learning journeys. The first was conducted for eight counsellors from the National Institute of Education (NIE) Wellness Centre on 17 March 2023. It focused on the judiciary systems, processes and unique operations of court counsellors within the system. The second was conducted for a group of 13 counsellors and coaches from the Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) C-Three Centre on 11 October 2023.

From 10 May to 20 July 2023, CSS provided field placements for four National University of Singapore (NUS) social work students. They gained practical real-world experience with court users at the State Courts, as well as more in depth knowledge of the workings of the Judiciary and the criminal justice system.

ANNUAL TRAINING FOR COURT VOLUNTEER MEDIATORS

Two training sessions were organised via Zoom for court volunteer mediators in 2023.

Mediating Neighbour Disputes – What You Need to Know about the Community Disputes Resolution Act 2015

Held on 9 June 2023, this session featured a presentation by District Judge Winston Man on the Community Disputes Resolution Act 2015 (CDRA). He shared how CDRA provides an avenue for disputes between neighbours to be resolved and emphasises the importance of communication, key issues that are frequently encountered when claims are brought under this Act, and how filing a claim in court should be a measure of last resort in such disputes. He also spoke about what constitutes unreasonable interference and evidential challenges, among other topics.

There was also a panel discussion moderated by District Judge Koh Juay Kherng. The panellists included District Judge Sheik Umar, District Judge Soh Weiqi, District Judge Winston Man and court volunteer mediator Mr David Hoicka.

Close to 100 participants attended the session. Out of them:

- **100%** indicated that the training session met their expectations and objectives.
- **98%** felt that they would be able to apply what they had learnt from the session.

Navigating Disputes: Uncovering Perspectives and Crafting Amicable Resolutions

Held on 1 December 2023, this session featured a presentation by Mr Bala Reddy (a former Principal District Judge) on how to effectively manage, understand and resolve disputes. His presentation covered various types of orders that are available to the courts, and how knowledge of these orders can assist the mediator in working with parties to come to an amicable agreement.

There was also a panel discussion moderated by District Judge Koh Juay Kherng, with panellists District Judge Marvin Bay and District Judge Bryan Ong. They shared real case studies, allowing participants to acquire a deeper comprehension of these cases and the process of amicably resolving disputes.

Close to 130 participants attended the session. Out of them:

- **90%** indicated that the training session met their expectations and objectives.
- **94%** felt that they would be able to apply what they had learnt from the session.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

The SG Courts continued to strengthen their corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts and reach out to the community in 2023. Here are some key CSR events that took place:

Beach Cleaning

The annual beach clean-up was organised on 9 June 2023 in support of World Environment Day. A total of 40 staff volunteers picked up trash strewn in and around Area C of Changi Beach Park. The volunteers also shared their thoughts on how everyone can play a part to help preserve the environment through more mindful daily activities.

Read for Books

SG Courts supported the National Library Board (NLB)'s annual *Read for Books* charity book drive in July 2023 to share the gift of reading with the less privileged. A total of 405 staff participated in this initiative. By organising group reading sessions and collectively logging their reading hours, they raised 40 books for the beneficiaries – WondeRead, kidsREAD and Ready to READ @ NLB. A mass reading session was also held via Zoom on 28 July.

National Day Charity Carnival

The National Day Charity Carnival (NDCC) was held over two weeks, beginning with online sales and culminating in a physical carnival at each Court over three consecutive days from 1 to 3 August 2023.

Funds raised at the NDCC were funnelled to SG Courts' adopted charity – SHINE Children and Youth Services (SHINE), a charity that empowers children, youth and their families to reach their potential. In the lead-up to NDCC, information about SHINE was shared with staff to raise awareness about its beneficiaries. SHINE was also invited to set up a booth at the carnivals for staff to learn more about its work.

A highlight was the charity concert held on 3 August at the State Courts, which gave staff the opportunity to showcase their talents through song and dance performances. There was also a special guitar solo performance by Mr Damian Chan, a beneficiary from SHINE.

More than S\$56,000 was raised through sales of items at the carnivals, charity concert tickets and direct donations.



About 90 people, including staff volunteers and beneficiaries from SHINE, went on the family day outing to Bird Paradise.

SG Cares Giving Week

As part of SG Cares Giving Week (SCGW), 30 staff volunteers organised and joined in an educational, engaging and fun-filled outing to Bird Paradise for student beneficiaries from SHINE and their families on 7 December 2023. There were about 90 participants on the family day outing. They visited the various aviaries, led by guides who provided insights into the design of the aviaries, helped to spot the animal inhabitants and shared more about animal behaviours.

In addition, SG Courts made a donation to SHINE and Community Chest in support of critical and underserved programmes catering to mental health, chronic school absenteeism, adults with disabilities, children with special needs, youth-at-risk, as well as families and seniors in need of assistance. Throughout the SCGW period, other volunteer opportunities were also shared and highlighted via internal channels to further amplify and raise awareness of the movement's message.



The National Day Charity Carnival saw SG Courts staff perform on stage and interact with beneficiaries from SHINE.

ANNUAL REPORT 2023

SG
Courts

SUPREMECOURT
SINGAPORE

STATE
COURTS
SINGAPORE

FAMILY JUSTICE COURTS
SINGAPORE



STRENGTHENING JUSTICE, SAFEGUARDING SOCIETY

A trusted Judiciary • Ready for tomorrow