

# Court to gradually resume operations with reduced capacity

The following is issued on behalf of the Judiciary:

The Judiciary announced today (March 31) that in light of the latest public health situation and related developments, the current General Adjournment of Proceedings (GAP) period will end on April 11, 2022. The Judiciary will carry out more court business during the last week of the GAP period from April 4 to 11, 2022, and then gradually resume court business under reduced capacity from April 12, 2022.

## Enhanced court business during the remaining GAP period

Court service is an essential public service. It enables the effective and efficient administration of justice. The Judiciary has been monitoring the public health situation since the outbreak of the fifth wave of the COVID-19 epidemic as from January 2022 and adjusting the scope of business that can be handled with a view to ensuring that the courts can continue to carry on business as safely as circumstances permit.

Taking into account the latest public health situation; impacts of the pandemic on parties, court users, stakeholders and manpower support of the Judiciary; and the Government's recent announcement on resumption of public services, the Judiciary will expand the scope of registry business that will be handled during the remaining GAP period from April 4 to 11, 2022. Details are set out in the attached Notification for Stakeholders.

## Gradual resumption of court business at reduced capacity

After the cessation of the GAP, the Judiciary will incrementally carry out more court business under reduced capacity from April 12, 2022, having regard to the need for social distancing in light of the public health situation as well as for ensuring orderly resumption of court proceedings and registry business.

## Court proceedings

From April 12, 2022, all hearings (including criminal and civil proceedings) will generally resume unless otherwise directed by the court. To reduce the overall capacity of court operations, some court hearings will be scheduled with wider intervals where appropriate.

The Judiciary will continue to adjust the seating capacity of the public gallery of courtrooms and court lobbies to enhance social distancing and limit the flow of people. Broadcasts of proceedings to court extensions will continue to be arranged where necessary and practicable.

The court will continue to make greater use of remote hearings and/or paper disposal for civil proceedings and other suitable cases where appropriate. The court will give directions for individual cases in this regard.

#### Registries and accounts offices

Registries and accounts offices will reopen progressively in phases starting from April 12, 2022. The reopening dates for the registries and accounts offices are set out as follows:

April 12	High Court Competition Tribunal Magistrates' Courts Small Claims Tribunal Obscene Articles Tribunal Coroner's Court
April 13	Court of Final Appeal Labour Tribunal
April 14	District Court
April 20	Family Court
April 21	Lands Tribunal

The operating hours of the registries and accounts offices will be reduced, i.e. from 8.45am to 12.30pm and from 2pm to 5pm (Monday to Friday, except public holidays) until further notice. There will be special arrangements on certain court business at the High Court Registry, the Probate Registry at the High Court and the District Court Registry with details set out in the Notification. To enable registry business to be conducted in a more spacious environment during the initial reopening period, the registry areas may be suitably expanded to other floors or areas in the same building as necessary. Court users will be given specific instructions in this regard.

In anticipation of the huge volume of registry business during the first few days of reopening, suitable queueing and ticketing arrangements will be put in place at some registries and accounts offices to regulate the flow of people and reduce crowd gathering where necessary. Details are set out in the Notification.

#### Other supporting offices

Similarly, the offices that provide support services to court users and the public will also be reopened in phases. Details are set out in the Notification.

#### Public health measures

For public health reasons, the Judiciary will continue to enforce all

preventive and crowd management measures, including the Vaccine Pass; body temperature checks; use of the "LeaveHomeSafe" mobile application; wearing of surgical masks at all times unless otherwise directed by Judges or Judicial Officers; reduced seating capacity of courtrooms, court lobbies and registries; enhanced cleaning and disinfection of public and staff areas; provision of hand sanitiser at different locations; and installation of protective shields and partitions in courtrooms as appropriate.

Any court users including parties and legal representatives who have a fever or a high body temperature; who are subject to any quarantine requirement, medical surveillance or compulsory testing while waiting for test results; or who have preliminarily tested positive or tested positive for COVID-19 are not allowed to enter Judiciary premises. They should apply to the court as soon as practicable for permission of absence or inform the court with reasons for absence as appropriate.

### Implementation of the Stage Two Vaccine Pass

The Judiciary has been implementing the Stage One Vaccine Pass since March 2, 2022, under which all persons must have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine before they are allowed to enter Judiciary premises with exemption granted to the following persons:

- (a) children aged under 12;
- (b) holders of the COVID-19 Vaccination Medical Exemption Certificate; or
- (c) persons who must enter the relevant Judiciary premises to attend to court business on the day as parties to or witnesses in a legal proceeding, legal representatives with prior permission by the presiding judge or judicial officer concerned to attend a hearing on behalf of their clients, or jurors in a proceeding which has commenced before March 2, 2022.

Starting from April 30, 2022, the Judiciary will implement the Stage Two Vaccine Pass in accordance with the Government's latest Vaccine Pass requirements. In essence, all persons must have received at least two doses of a COVID-19 vaccine before they are allowed to enter Judiciary premises, save for persons aged 12 to 17 and persons recovered from COVID-19 who must fulfil the Government's relevant requirements. The exemption conditions for Stage Two remain the same as those in Stage One. The Judiciary will continue to conduct active checking at the points of entry by using the QR Code Verification Scanner mobile application developed by the Government for scanning the relevant QR code and keeping the record for 31 days. As the checking procedures at entry points need time to complete, court users are strongly advised to reserve sufficient time when they come to Judiciary premises for court business.

### Enquiries

For enquiries regarding general arrangements on the court business, the

following hotlines are being operated from Monday to Friday from 8.45am to 12.30pm and from 2pm to 5pm:

- General Information: 2869 0869
- Court of Final Appeal: 2123 0123
- High Court: 2523 2212
- Probate: 2840 1683
- Competition Tribunal: 2825 0426
- District Court: 2845 5696
- Family Court: 2840 1218
- Lands Tribunal: 2771 3034
- Labour Tribunal: 2625 0020
- Small Claims Tribunal: 2877 4068
- Magistrates' Courts: 2677 8373
- Obscene Articles Tribunal: 3916 6303
- Coroner's Court: 3916 6204
- Bailiff Section: 2802 7510
- Court Language Section: 2388 1364