

Judiciary responds to enquiries on a case's hearing arrangements

The following is issued on behalf of the Judiciary:

Regarding enquiries on the arrangements for the hearing of a case involving 47 defendants at the West Kowloon Magistrates' Courts, the Judiciary issued the following response:

The courts must adjudicate cases in accordance with the law and court procedures. To ensure efficient administration of justice, the courts have always sought to complete the hearing of each case as soon as practicable.

Regarding the case concerned, all 47 defendants must be heard before the same magistrate according to court procedures as they were charged with the same offence under the same case. Besides, the case was first brought to the court for mention hearing on March 1. The many defendants involved in the case were all charged on the day before and arranged to appear in court the following day. Given the very short time available, the court had to urgently make the best use of the limited court facilities to put in place arrangements for the hearing of the case. These included those relating to operational arrangements for the hearing, broadcasting, allocation of seats for the public and media, crowd control, security, etc. The hearing lasted for four consecutive days, spanning more than 40 hours. In addition to handling the hearing process, the court at the same time had to deal with admission queuing, court security and anti-epidemic arrangements every day, involving hundreds of court users both inside and outside the court building from time to time. In the face of such unprecedented and huge challenges, there were inevitable shortcomings in some of the implementation details.

The Judiciary has taken note of the views from various sectors of the community on the hearing and other arrangements for the case. The Chief Justice of the Court of Final Appeal, Mr Andrew Cheung Kui-nung, has instructed that subject to the safeguarding of the due administration of justice, the Judiciary should immediately review the overall arrangements of handling cases involving a large number of litigants and observers at all levels of courts, with a view to adopting improvement measures in a timely manner in respect of all relevant areas, including scheduling of hearings, allocation of seats for observers and broadcasting arrangements.