

JUDICIARY TIMES



RESPONSE TO COVID-19

RESPONDING TO
THE COVID-19
PANDEMIC

OPENING OF THE LEGAL YEAR
2020 - PROGRESS THROUGH
THE COLLECTIVE ABILITY OF
THE LEGAL COMMUNITY TO
OVERCOME CHALLENGES

JUSTICE VINCENT HOONG
APPOINTED AS THE NEW
PRESIDING JUDGE OF THE
STATE COURTS

CONTENTS

HIGHLIGHTS

- Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic 01
- Opening of the Legal Year 2020 - Progress through the Collective Ability of the Legal Community to Overcome Challenges 03
- Justice Vincent Hoong Appointed as the New Presiding Judge of the State Courts 05

EVENTS & INITIATIVES

- Singapore International Commercial Court Conference 2020 05
- Update on Recommendations by Committee to Review and Enhance Reforms in the Family Justice System 06
- Transcending Time and Space: Judicial Heritage Gallery @ Supreme Court 07
- New Book Launched to Commemorate State Courts' Old and New Buildings 08
- The State Courts Time Capsule 09
- Celebrating Lunar New Year with the Elderly and Less Privileged 10

NOTABLE VISITS

TRANSFORMATION AND INNOVATION IN THE JUDICIARY

WHAT'S NEW?

BEHIND THE SCENES

RESPONDING TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



The rapidly evolving COVID-19 situation has caused disruptions to the communities and institutions all over the world. The Singapore Judiciary is no exception. To ensure the health and safety of practitioners, court users, judges and staff, the Singapore Courts implemented a series of precautionary measures, which ranged from those that followed the advisories and directives of the Singapore Ministry of Health and the Public Service Division to those that were more specific to ensuring the continuity of access to justice.

"We will continue to take all measures to minimise the risk of transmission for judges, court staff, practitioners and court users, while balancing this against the need to maintain access to justice even in these challenging times."

Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon



SUMMARY OF MEASURES

Announced on 26 March

In the Courthouse

- Increased cleaning of common areas and high-touch points
- Declaration and registration before entry
- Suspension of guided tours and closure of certain public areas
- Marked out spacing in queue lines at front-line counters, seats at waiting areas, viewing galleries, and in the lifts

Court Hearings

- No more than two lawyers/litigants per party may appear
- Staggered hearings
- Remote hearings

At the Workplace

- Physical segregation of judges and staff
- Telecommuting, staggered working and lunch hours
- Safe distancing
- Regular temperature taking

Announced on 5 April

Only essential and urgent matters will be heard during the "Circuit Breaker" Period

On 5 April, in response to Singapore's implementation of a "Circuit Breaker" to combat the local transmission of COVID-19, Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon directed the Singapore Courts to hear only essential and urgent matters during the Circuit Breaker period. This direction applied (but was not limited) to appeals, trials, applications (interlocutory or otherwise), case management conferences and pre-trial conferences in the courts. As far as possible, these matters would be heard by electronic means of communication.

Leveraging Technology

Technology has been a pivotal driver in enabling access to justice. Over the years, the Singapore Courts have leveraged technology to support their operations and enable certain processes to be performed online without the need for physical attendance in court.

Online case management systems - for case filing and court applications

Online dispute resolution platforms - for parties to reach amicable solutions

Video conferencing facilities - for court hearings and chamber matters to be conducted remotely

Online chat platforms - to address general enquires

These technological solutions have enabled justice to remain accessible and the courts to continue their operations amidst the unprecedented situation brought about by COVID-19. The Singapore Courts will continue to harness technology to improve their operations and services to court users, and be ready to meet future challenges.



OPENING OF THE LEGAL YEAR 2020 – PROGRESS THROUGH THE COLLECTIVE ABILITY OF THE LEGAL COMMUNITY TO OVERCOME CHALLENGES

In his response to the address made by the Attorney-General, Mr Lucien Wong, and President of the Law Society, Mr Gregory Vijayendran, at the Opening of the Legal Year 2020 Ceremony on 6 January, Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon highlighted the progress and noteworthy developments of the courts, as well as outlined the upcoming projects for the Judiciary. For a large part of his address, the Chief Justice shared some of the views and ideas which had emerged from the Judiciary's conversations with various sectors of the professional community in 2019. The conversations had mainly touched on four key themes, which included the continuous development and training of future lawyers, and the building of law firms of the future to enhance the state of technology adoption. The third major theme of the conversations concerned the future of the justice system which the Chief Justice said needed to be guided by the principles of accessibility, proportionality and peacebuilding. The fourth and final major theme canvassed in the conversations related to the regulation of legal services of the future. According to the Chief Justice, the challenge in this area arose, in particular, from the emergence of alternative legal service providers, which had resulted in a legal marketplace that became more competitive, diverse, and commercialised. In closing, the Chief Justice urged the legal community to take heed of the challenges ahead and expressed his confidence that with the collective ability of the fraternity, everyone can progress towards a brighter future.



BUILDING A PROFESSION FOR THE FUTURE

THE OPENING OF THE LEGAL YEAR 2020 | Response by Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon

OUR PROGRESS

CIVIL JUSTICE

Establishment of the Appellate Division of the High Court will address the growing caseload of the Court of Appeal. Legislative amendments implementing the new Rules of Court proposed by the Civil Justice Commission are underway.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

The Criminal Procedure Rules Committee, which comprises representatives from the Judiciary, the Bar and the Government, will streamline criminal procedure with stakeholder's input.

FAMILY JUSTICE

Recommendations of the Committee to Review and Enhance Reforms in the Family Justice System aim to promote therapeutic justice through a multi-disciplinary approach and help families find a constructive way forward.

STATE COURTS

The State Courts have relocated to the new State Courts Towers and will collaborate with the Singapore Academy of Law to set up a co-working space, "CLICKS @ State Courts", to promote pro bono work and drive legal innovation and entrepreneurship.

SINGAPORE INTERNATIONAL COMMERCIAL COURT (SICC)

- Development of a new standard-setting body of procedural rules incorporating best international practices in commercial dispute resolution.
- Forthcoming SICC symposium on trends and developments in international commercial litigation.

INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENTS

- Engagement with ASEAN community deepened through the ASEAN Law Association and Council of ASEAN Chief Justices.
- Engagement with China deepened through the Singapore-China Legal and Judicial Roundtable and other collaboration.
- Hosting of third meeting of the Standing International Forum of Commercial Courts.
- The Singapore Judicial College has developed an international portfolio and will focus on capacity-building engagements with foreign judiciaries.
- Appointments of Singapore Judges in overseas courts reflect the commitment to promote the rule of law internationally and reflect the standing of the Singapore Judiciary.

1. DEVELOPING LAWYERS OF THE FUTURE

- Our system of legal education and training may require reimagination to help our lawyers navigate vastly more challenging conditions. Possibilities include:
 - A steering forum for legal education and training to articulate a strategy for reform.
 - More diverse pathways to the Bar for aspiring lawyers.
 - Redesigning undergraduate programmes and continuing legal education.

2. BUILDING LAW FIRMS OF THE FUTURE

- Local firms to embrace technological solutions in order to compete sustainably.
- A growing need for the complementary services of allied legal professionals.

3. REIMAGINING THE FUTURE OF OUR COURTS

- To meet the justice needs of our changing society, we must embrace the idea of a court that:
 - Seeks to address unmet justice needs in society.
 - Promotes lasting peace by repairing and reinforcing relationships.
 - Empowers users through an extensive suite of assistive services.
 - Offers the public insight into the role and function of the courts and how they decide cases.

4. REGULATING LEGAL SERVICES OF THE FUTURE

- Over time, the emergence of alternative legal service providers will result in a more crowded, competitive and diverse legal marketplace.



Scan the QR code for the full response by the Chief Justice
go.gov.sg/cj-oly2020-speech

The day concluded with the annual Judiciary Dinner hosted by Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon and Mrs Menon at the Istana. Graced by Her Excellency President Halimah Yacob and Mr Mohamed Abdullah Alhabshee, distinguished local and overseas guests from the legal community attended the Dinner.



JUSTICE VINCENT HOONG APPOINTED AS THE NEW PRESIDING JUDGE OF THE STATE COURTS

Justice Vincent Hoong was appointed the new Presiding Judge of the State Courts on 1 April. He took over from Justice See Kee Oon who stepped down on 31 March, after six years as the head of the State Courts.

Justice Hoong joined the Singapore Legal Service in 1984 and was posted to the then Subordinate Courts as a Magistrate. In 1986, he held the appointment of Assistant Registrar in the Supreme Court before returning to the Subordinate Courts in 1990 as a District Judge. He was posted to the Singapore Land Registry of the Ministry of Law in 1997 and had since held a range of key portfolio, including Chief Executive of the Singapore Land Authority, Registrar of Titles & Deeds and Controller of Residential Property, and Commissioner of Lands.

In April 2015, Justice Hoong was appointed Registrar of the Supreme Court. During his term, he played an instrumental role in guiding the Supreme Court through many of its reforms and initiatives, such as in the management of cases in the High Court and Court

▼ Justice Vincent Hoong



▼ Justice See Kee Oon



of Appeal, as well as improvements to the practice and procedures in corporate insolvency and restructuring cases.

Justice Hoong was appointed as a Judicial Commissioner of the Supreme Court on 10 April 2019, and as a High Court Judge on 3 January 2020.

Justice See, who had steered the State Courts through numerous milestones and played the pivotal role of leading the organisation in its historic move to the State Courts Towers in 2019, will continue his appointment on the Supreme Court Bench.

EVENTS & INITIATIVES

SINGAPORE INTERNATIONAL COMMERCIAL COURT CONFERENCE 2020

The Singapore International Commercial Court (SICC) Conference, which took place from 7 to 8 January at the Supreme Court, saw the coming together of the Supreme Court bench and the SICC International Judges to deliberate on matters of importance to the SICC as well as its plans for the future. Joining the SICC for the first time were the newly appointed Judicial Commissioner S. Mohan, Justice Arjan Kumar Sikri from India, and Justice Doug Jones AO from Australia. The annual two-day conference also had members of the Supreme Court senior management in attendance. The participants discussed issues that ranged from how the SICC could leverage on changes to Singapore's enforcement regime to cross-border insolvency developments and the future of the SICC, as well as the competitive advantages which the SICC could offer over arbitration in the area of infrastructure and construction.



UPDATE ON RECOMMENDATIONS BY COMMITTEE TO REVIEW AND ENHANCE REFORMS IN THE FAMILY JUSTICE SYSTEM

The Ministry of Law and Ministry of Social and Family Development had concluded their assessment of all the feedback received, via a six-week public consultation, on the recommendations submitted by the Committee to Review and Enhance Reforms in the Family Justice System (RERF Committee) in September 2019. There was wide support for many of the recommendations, especially in the areas of early support for couples facing divorce, and enhancements to the family justice system. The Ministries had accepted the recommendations from the RERF Committee, and would be working with the Family Justice Courts, Divorce Support Specialist Agencies and other legal and social sector partners to look into the implementation of relevant enhancements, taking into account the public's feedback and suggestions. This would contribute to a more effective family justice system and a more robust ecosystem of support for families.

The RERF Committee had released its recommendations, which aimed to further strengthen the family justice system by incorporating principles of therapeutic and restorative justice in the resolution of family disputes. This would include promoting the use of multi-disciplinary approaches and processes (e.g. counselling, mediation and conciliation) to resolve family disputes outside the court, which would minimise the need for families to undergo litigation. The emphasis was on healing relationships and re-opening communication channels between family members caught in acrimonious disputes, to achieve more sustained and positive family outcomes. These recommendations would allow the Government, Judiciary and community partners to better support families going through disputes.

More upstream pre-divorce support for couples



- Enhance existing Mandatory Parenting Programme for divorcing parties with children under the age of 21
- Provide easy access to divorce-related information and services on a consolidated online platform
- Encourage counselling and mediation before parties file for divorce
- Strengthen capabilities of social sector professionals providing divorce support, to better assist divorcing parties

Enhancements to the family justice system to achieve better family outcomes



- Enhance the judge-led approach for the just, expeditious and economical disposal of proceedings
- Simplify the Family Justice Rules, which will result in simpler procedures, more timely processes and increased affordability
- Broaden the enforcement regime for child access orders to promote compliance
- Facilitate access to more affordable legal services in order to enhance access to justice
- Certify and accredit family law practitioners

More protection for persons without mental capacity and more support for their caregivers



- Simplify the deputyship application process to make it simpler and more affordable for caregivers who require deputyship powers
- Provide training and support for appointed and prospective deputies to better understand their role and obligations
- Facilitate the use of counselling and mediation for dispute resolution and better support deputies who may face caregiver stress
- Enhance the Office of the Public Guardian's supervision of deputies so that appropriate intervention can be rendered for cases facing challenges
- Build up capabilities of professionals in the social sector to better support caregivers of those who have lost mental capacity

TRANSCENDING TIME AND SPACE: JUDICIAL HERITAGE GALLERY @ SUPREME COURT

The Supreme Court's Judicial Heritage Gallery (JHG) was launched by Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon at the Opening of the Legal Year 2020.

An Immersive and Experiential Journey at the Judicial Heritage Gallery

Located at the Supreme Court, the JHG provides visitors with an immersive and experiential journey on the evolution of the Judiciary as it grows and develops with Singapore's social history. Of particular interest is the twinning theme of justice shaping society even as society shapes justice.

One distinctive feature of the JHG is an interactive digital multimedia wall that sets, in moving frames, scenes from Parliamentary sittings concerning legislation impacting the courts and coverage of prominent court cases, against a backdrop of key moments in Singapore's social history.

Have Your Say in Designing the Courtroom of the Future

The Year is 2065. Visitors can look forward to co-designing the Courtroom of the Future. Of notable interest is a question on whether a robot judge is desired in the future courtroom, as well as a segment titled the "Rule of Law" Quiz. These questions are projected onto transparent panels which resemble a scene from a futuristic movie, and leaves visitors with a sense of having a say in a timed moment to come.

"Emily"

In a 3-Act animation production, visitors are taken through the story of Singapore and the Rule of Law through the eyes of "Emily", a young child.

Artefacts

Completing the gallery are close-up portraits of Singapore's Chief Justices and interviews of Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon and Justice Chao Hick Tin. A rare video footage of an old ceremonial procession for the Opening of the Legal Year stands next to a transparent



wardrobe featuring the judge's wig and robe worn in the past. A replica of the 1215 Magna Carta, presented to the Supreme Court by the British High Commission in 2015 to celebrate its Octocentenary and Singapore's Golden Jubilee, is also on display.

Welcome to the JHG

The JHG is open from Mondays to Fridays, from 8.30am to 6pm. Admission is free. Look out for announcements on the Supreme Court website on future programmes to be launched during the year-end school holidays, featuring "Emily" and her friends.

NEW BOOK LAUNCHED TO COMMEMORATE STATE COURTS' OLD AND NEW BUILDINGS



To commemorate their move from the former State Courts Building to the State Courts Towers in December 2019, the State Courts have published *One Havelock Square*, which showcases both the old and new courthouses.

The book, which is an eponym of the address of both courthouses, offers both a journey of nostalgia and hope, as it documents the history that the State Courts' judges, staff and stakeholders had created in the old building and the new chapter that they will embark on in the two-tower courthouse. The 169-page book also comes with a companion microsite that presents readers with photographs of the old and new courthouses. The juxtaposition of the past and present, as well as the showcase of the purpose-built spaces and modern-day facilities to deliver access to justice, illustrate the marriage of form and utility in the design of the two distinctive courthouses.

One Havelock Square is not an ordinary book. With the aid of smart devices, the book offers an immersive experience through augmented reality and virtual reality technologies. Readers can watch insightful video interviews, tour lesser-known areas in the old State Courts Building, and view three-dimensional models of the two courthouses. The book is also a record of the personal reflections and aspirations of the people of the State Courts, past and present, which will remind both the State Courts and the people they serve of their commitment to administering justice with quality judgments, timely and effective dispute resolution, and excellent court services.

Highlights:

- Design of the State Courts Building and State Courts Towers
- Interviews with the Chief Justice and the past and present heads of the State Courts
- Reflections and aspirations of past and present judges and staff
- Exclusive photographs of the two courthouses
- Virtual tours of lesser-known areas in the State Courts Building



Scan the QR code to
read the book online

go.gov.sg/onehavelocksquare





"It is my hope for the generations to come that when they see these items in their time, they will realise how far we have come, and how important it is to continue striving to leave our institution better than when we first inherited it."

Justice See Kee Oon

THE STATE COURTS TIME CAPSULE

In the year 2050, the State Courts will open a time capsule and reveal a selection of items that their judges and staff of today had specially chosen for preservation. These include courtroom artefacts such as hardcopy court files, mention slip books and old courtroom door knockers that would provide a glimpse of how court proceedings were like in the past.

The judges and staff of the State Courts also donated a number of items - photographs, office mementoes, and even a record of aspirations for the organisation in the hope that future generations will continue to be inspired and imbued with the spirit of upholding justice and serving society.

To allow visitors to learn more about the items within, the time capsule has an interactive display panel that provides information about the items.

At the investiture of the State Courts Time Capsule on 20 March, Justice See Kee Oon, the then Presiding Judge of the State Courts, said that the time capsule

preserves a collection of this generation that made the State Courts possible.

The time capsule is located in the State Courts Heritage Gallery, which is open to the public during the official operating hours of the State Courts.



CELEBRATING LUNAR NEW YEAR WITH THE ELDERLY AND LESS PRIVILEGED

The Judiciary, as part of its corporate social responsibility (CSR) efforts, reached out to the less privileged and the elderly through meaningful activities that brought excitement and cheer during the festive period earlier this year.

On 15 January, in collaboration with Food from the Heart (FFTH), 38 staff volunteers from the Supreme Court and Family Justice Courts (FJC) accompanied 35 FFTH beneficiaries and their families to do grocery-shopping at FairPrice Xtra@Jurong Point. The volunteers also helped them plan their purchases for their Lunar New Year celebrations. The beneficiaries received shopping vouchers that were purchased using the funds raised by the Supreme Court and FJC in support of FFTH.

On 3 February, more than 30 volunteers from the State Courts celebrated the 10th day of the Lunar New Year with the residents of the Kreta Ayer Senior Activity Centre. In addition to receiving mandarin oranges and red packets, the residents were served lunch and were treated to an afternoon of entertainment that included a quiz and special performances by State Courts' staff.



17 Jan 2020 Courtesy call on Chief Justice by British High Commissioner to Singapore, Her Excellency Kara Owen

Her Excellency Kara Owen, British High Commissioner to Singapore, called on Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon on 17 January and spoke on the very warm relations between the United Kingdom and Singapore judiciaries. During the call, they discussed the various events involving judiciaries of the Commonwealth region, as well as how the collaboration between the United Kingdom and Singapore courts could be developed further.



NOTABLE VISITS

NOTABLE VISITS

23 Jan 2020 Judicial Training Programme for the Qatar Judiciary

On 23 January, judicial officers from the Qatar Judiciary, specialised enforcement courts, visited the State Courts on a learning journey, which was part of their Singapore Judicial College Customised Judicial Training Programme. They were received by the then Presiding Judge of the State Courts, Justice See Kee Oon, and District Judge Toh Yung Cheong. District Judge Ow Yong Tuck Leong gave presentations on the Integrated Case Management System and Community Justice and Tribunals System, while District Judge Colin Tan from the Family Justice Courts shared about the Integrated Family Application Management System. The judicial officers were given a tour of the courts' premises and were introduced to the facilities/functions in the new State Courts Towers.

**24 Jan 2020** Visit by President of the Queensland Court of Appeal

The President of the Queensland Court of Appeal, The Honourable Justice Walter Sofronoff, called on Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon on 24 January. After the call, Justice Sofronoff was brought on a tour of the newly launched Judicial Heritage Gallery.

**3 Feb 2020** Courtesy call on Chief Justice by Ambassador of the Kingdom of Spain to Singapore, His Excellency Santiago Miralles Huete

His Excellency Santiago Miralles Huete, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Spain to Singapore, called on Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon on 3 February. They both had a fruitful discussion on possible collaborative projects, which would enable the Spanish business community to better understand the legal system in Singapore and the region.

5 - 6 Feb 2020 Visit by Justice Miyazaki Yuko from the Supreme Court of Japan

Justice Miyazaki Yuko led a delegation of officials from the Supreme Court of Japan and called on Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon on 6 February. At the call, they exchanged insightful pointers on the judiciaries of Singapore and Japan, and discussed possible judicial cooperation. Justice Miyazaki Yuko and her delegation were brought on a tour of the Supreme Court after the call.



The delegation also visited the Family Justice Courts (FJC) as well as the State Courts on 5 February. At the FJC, the delegation was received by Deputy Presiding Judge Chia Wee Kiat and was briefed by District Judge Jinny Tan on the use of technology by litigants-in-person. At the State Courts, the delegation was received by Deputy Presiding Judge, Ms Jennifer Marie, and was briefed by District Judge Shawn Ho on the adoption of technology and artificial intelligence in court proceedings. A fruitful exchange on the current trends in court technology and the challenges faced during implementation followed. The delegation was also given a tour of the FJC and State Courts.

**10 - 11 Feb 2020** Chief Justice's Visit to Myanmar

The Supreme Court of Singapore and the Supreme Court of the Union of Myanmar signed a Memorandum of Guidance as to Enforcement of Money Judgments (Memorandum) during Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon's visit to Nay Pyi Taw from 10 to 11 February. This is the first such Memorandum established between the courts of two ASEAN member states. The Memorandum seeks to enhance clarity and promote mutual understanding of the laws and judicial processes concerning the enforcement of money judgments between the two courts.



After the signing of the Memorandum, the Chief Justice paid a courtesy call on His Excellency Chief Justice U Htun Htun Oo at the Supreme Court of the Union of Myanmar. At the meeting, the two Chief Justices held substantive and wide-ranging discussions on bilateral, regional and international issues of mutual interest. They also reaffirmed the warm and long-standing relations between the two judiciaries and welcomed the steady progress in judicial cooperation and exchanges in recent years.

In his capacity as President of the ASEAN Law Association (ALA), the Chief Justice paid a courtesy call on the Chairman of the ALA Myanmar National Committee, His Excellency Attorney General U Tun Tun Oo, at the Attorney General's Office of the Union of Myanmar.

18 Feb 2020 Visit by Chairman of the Communist Party of Vietnam's Commission for Internal Affairs

Chairman of the Communist Party of Vietnam's Commission for Internal Affairs, Mr Phan Dinh Trac, called on Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon on 18 February. Chairman Trac was in Singapore under the S R Nathan Fellowship programme. At the meeting, the Chief Justice and Chairman Trac reaffirmed the strong bilateral relationship between Singapore and Vietnam. They had a good discussion and exchange of views on matters relating to the Singapore judicial system, judicial reforms such as the adoption of technology to enhance judicial processes in Singapore, as well as recent initiatives rolled out by the Supreme Court of Singapore, including the establishment of the Office of Transformation and Innovation (Judiciary) in January 2019. Chairman Trac was joined by Mr Le Viet Chu, Secretary of the Quang Ngai Provincial Party Committee, and Ambassador of Vietnam to Singapore, Tao Thi Thanh Huong, at the meeting.

6 Mar 2020 Courtesy call on Chief Justice by Ambassador of Japan to Singapore, His Excellency Jun Yamazaki

His Excellency Jun Yamazaki, Ambassador of Japan to Singapore, called on Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon on 6 March. At the call, they discussed, amongst other topics, judicial cooperation between Japan and Singapore.



JUSTICE AEDIT ABDULLAH'S INTERVIEW IN THE IT SOCIETY

When Legal Becomes Legaltech: Challenges and Opportunities for the Practice

This article is republished with permission from The IT Society, a publication of Singapore Computer Society.

Justice Aedit Abdullah
High Court Judge, Supreme Court, Singapore
Age: 49
Earliest Tech Experience:
Eight years old with Apple II Plus
Currently Playing:
Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order on PS4
Pet Topics:
Using Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the Law
Favourite Way to Relax: Catch up on sleep

Technology is both exciting and unsettling. Particularly, for the legal profession which highly values test cases, it has opened up opportunities to bring about greater fairness. Conversely, its fast pace of change and supposed power to disrupt the practice has also given rise to uncertainties for legal professionals. *The IT Society* caught up with Justice Aedit Abdullah from the Supreme Court to gain an insider's perspective on the matter.

Q: Question, **JAA:** Justice Aedit Abdullah

Q: Are there more similarities between law and technology than most people know?

JAA: People tend to perceive law as traditional. However, the truth is we have benefited in tangible ways from incorporating technology into our everyday work. One example is the law library. While it remains essential to our practice, we are able to function on a leaner library now because much of the information is available online.

Furthermore, the wide availability of legal information from other jurisdictions has made it easier for local lawyers and judges to keep abreast of cases and statutes overseas and assess their relevance for the Singapore context. Significantly, it allows people to make the best argument they can, marshal the evidence they need, gather the information they require and reproduce the critical documents necessary.

Hence people in the legal industry are increasingly seeing a need to change and adopt technology into their everyday work. Particularly, developments in the areas of AI and data mining present exciting opportunities for us to do our jobs faster and better.

Q: We hear about benefits of technology for the practice. What about for the man on the street?

JAA: For the man on the street, thanks to technology, access to justice has become easier. In the past, the court system is paper-based - so for any one case there are many papers moving around and it takes time for the papers to cycle through each process. Today, many things are digitalised. Not only does this speed up the process, there is also a lower possibility of documents and information getting lost. That means safer, easier and faster legal processes for everyone.

In addition, it is now more convenient for the public to locate the latest statutes and regulations through our online resources. They can be assured that information is always up to date and, if they like, even find out when they became effective and were last updated. The abundance of cases

available in our portal also empowers the public's better understanding of regulations and their enforcement.

Q: Given the many benefits of technology, why are law firms less than enthusiastic in embracing technology?

JAA: Contrary to that perception, there is actually a lot of energy in Singapore regarding legaltech, and there are plenty of novel ideas which will hopefully find traction in the market. I know for a fact that quite a few of our law firms have actually embarked on technology in a big way - coming out with their own solutions and bringing them to market.

That said, due to the nature of the legal industry in Singapore, there are many small legal firms juggling with various aspects of day-to-day operations - from dealing with clients' demands to ensuring the sufficiency of their manpower resources, bottom line, etc. It is understandable why technology adoption takes a back seat for them. Nonetheless, the Ministry of Law (MinLaw) and Singapore Academy of Law (SAL) recognise that there is much that they can stand to gain from technology, and have therefore been very active in encouraging them to explore technology through initiatives such as the Future Law Innovation Programme (FLIP) and helping them address costs and training concerns.

Q: With technology in the background, what lies ahead for the legal profession and our legal system?

JAA: For all the good that technology brings, we acknowledge that not all technology is appropriate for our purpose and when used inappropriately, it could do more harm than good. One instance is the video broadcast of trials in courts. Although we see some benefits for the public, we are also careful that people might grandstand, play the gallery and make things up which may not be conducive to the victim of a crime or the legal proceedings.

Then there is also the paradox that while technology helps speed up court processes, it has also engendered more work for legal professionals. The size of bundles that lawyers pass to courts have grown. The submission lengths have become longer. Consequently, judgments have also grown because more ground has to be covered. It has become part and parcel of our work to deal with more materials, more complex cases and lengthier arguments.

But I believe that the solution does not lie in prohibiting people from making use of what is available to bring about greater justice. Instead, technology like AI should be leveraged to help us filter, zoom in on key points, bring up relevant case law and help with legal research. Areas such as real-time proceedings transcription and automated translation without human intervention are also expected to bring about greater efficiency and make it easier for everyone to follow court proceedings.

Concurrently, efforts are in place to enhance our online systems. Through making our existing eLitigation system mobile responsive, we hope to improve accessibility and encourage use. Meanwhile, we are also exploring possibilities of allowing people to have their disputes heard online - thereby reducing costs when seeking justice.

Ultimately, as long as we stay committed to ensuring that there is justice for the man on the street, rather than serving our interests as judges and lawyers, I believe legal professionals will be able to make use of our training in ways that matter - whether it is collaborating with technologists, becoming technologists ourselves or evolving our role to become counsellors.

"As we look to maximise the benefits technology offers, it is important to be mindful to not just go after shiny new things. We want to deploy technology appropriately so that it is the solution most effective for the problem. The last thing we should do is to over-engineer - no matter how attractive it may seem."

▶ What is a quote you live by?

The Serenity Prayer: 'God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference. Reinhold Niebuhr.'

▶ Who inspires you professionally?

There are many local, English & American judges who've been examples guiding the way I work and reason.

▶ The law industry should embrace legaltech because...

there is simply no choice. Change is coming and unavoidable.

▶ What excites you most about legaltech?

That it holds the potential of increasing access to justice if done right; putting law in the hands of those who need it.

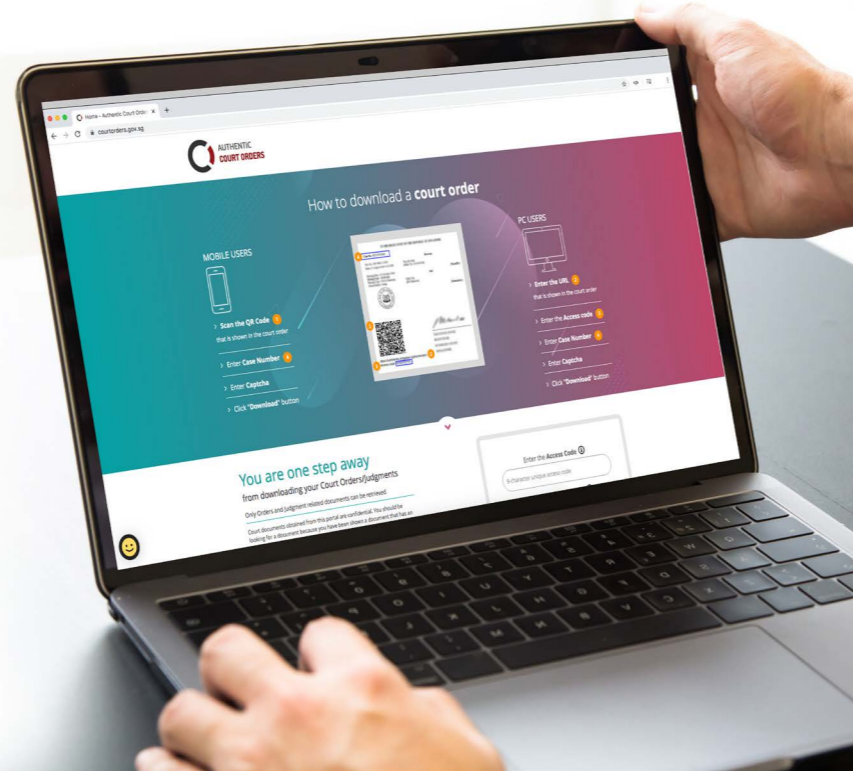
▶ Will we ever see an AI judge on the bench?

Yes, but perhaps not for a couple of decades. The technology may be available before people are ready. Yet, attitudes could change and we may see it sooner.



AUTHENTIC COURT ORDER

From 2 January, parties who need to show their Court Order to others will no longer need to provide a Certified True Copy (CTC) of the order. With the launch of the Authentic Court Orders (ACO) system, eligible Court Orders that are included in the ACO system can be validated online. Parties can show a photocopy, email, or even a faxed copy or a screenshot of an ACO to any relying party. The relying party (a bank, government agency, etc.) can verify the authenticity of the order by retrieving a validated copy of the same order directly from the official ACO website at <https://www.courtorders.gov.sg>. This can be done using a QR Code reader or keying in the Reference Number of the Court Order. This service is free of charge.



Scan the QR code for more information on ACO [go.gov.sg/autentic-court-order](https://www.courtorders.gov.sg/autentic-court-order)

ASYNCHRONOUS HEARINGS UNDER THE SPECIALLY MANAGED CIVIL LIST

From 1 April, Pre-trial Conferences for certain categories of cases will be conducted asynchronously in order to better utilise court resources, as well as save time for counsel.



Scan the QR Code to read the Registrar's Circular [go.gov.sg/2020rc3](https://www.go.gov.sg/2020rc3)

ONE-TIME EMERGENCY FUNDING

The Family Justice Courts and DBS/POSB have commenced an initiative to provide support to families who may have a member lacking mental capacity (P), especially those of low-income. This initiative aims to help P and his family members to have emergency access to P's funds while they seek other forms of help. This will be especially useful in cases where P may be incapacitated due to a sudden accident and his dependants require access to these funds for their daily subsistence. Since 7 February, the initiative has been piloted in six POSB branches*

* Toa Payoh Central, Yishun West, Bedok Central, Hougang Central, Tanjong Pagar and Jurong Point



Neighbours first, bankers second

Access Emergency Funds for a Loved One who has Lost Mental Capacity

If you are an immediate family member of a loved one who has lost mental capacity, you can apply under a simplified track of the Mental Capacity Act (MCA) to withdraw funds from their bank accounts to care for their (and their dependants') urgent needs.

One time withdraw of up to S\$5,000 in emergency funds, while you seek other forms of assistance.

3 Steps to Apply

We worked with the Family Justice Courts (FJC) to design a 3-step application process. Here's an overview so you'll know what to expect at every step. You should typically receive a response within three working days of the submission of the application, if the application is in order.

1 Medical Check

Bring your loved one to a registered medical practitioner in Singapore for medical assessment to confirm that they have lost mental capacity. The doctor will prepare a **medical report** certifying this.

The doctor will submit the medical report and an email notification of this will be sent to you.



your CHECKLIST

- Your loved one's NRIC (or passport and FIN if not a citizen/PR)
- Your NRIC (or passport and FIN if not a citizen/PR)
- Fees for the medical report, to be paid directly to the doctor

2 Application (1st Bank Visit)

Once you receive a notification, head to any of these 6 POSB branches:

- Toa Payoh Central
- Yishun West
- Bedok Central
- Hougang Central
- Tanjong Pagar
- Jurong Point

We will then assist you with making your application for emergency funds.



Your CHECKLIST

- Proof of your relationship (Marriage, Birth or Adoption Certificate)
- Your Birth Certificate and NRIC (or passport and FIN if not a citizen/PR)
- Your SingPass login details and a valid email account
- \$40 application fee to FJC (payable online)
- Medical report is valid up to 6 months

3 Fund Release (2nd Bank Visit)

Once FJC grants your application, a Court Order will be sent to you by email.

Present this Court Order at the same POSB Branch you visited and we will be able to release the funds.



Your CHECKLIST

- Your NRIC (or passport and FIN if not a citizen/PR)
- Court Order email from FJC



Further Enquiries
You may contact the Family Justice Courts at **63257619** or email FJCOURTS_MAINTPOS@FJCourts.gov.sg

More Information
posb.com.sg/fjc

BEHIND THE SCENES WITH COURTS' FRONT-LINE OFFICERS



Nurul Sultana



Chloe Tan



Sangeeta Devi

Understanding and anticipating customers' needs is a core value of our Customer Service Creed. But in reality, it is easier said than done!

In this issue, we interview our front-line officers **Nurul Sultana** from the Supreme Court, who largely attends to enquiries from court users at the Information Counter, **Chloe Tan** from the State Courts who handles telephone enquiries, and **Sangeeta Devi** from the Family Justice Courts (FJC) who attends to walk-in court users filing for Personal Protection Orders (PPO) due to family violence issues. They are constantly meeting and greeting people from all walks of life with a smile. Read on to find out more about the work they do.

How long have you been working in the courts?

Nurul: I have been working at the Supreme Court for eight years. This is my first job in customer service.

Chloe: I joined the State Courts six years ago and this is actually my first job in a call centre. Although I have experience in customer service, I knew that working in a call centre dealing with matters related to the State Courts would be a very different and interesting experience altogether.

Sangeeta: I joined FJC two years ago. I have worked in other sectors, which included healthcare, telecommunication, education and transportation. I have 25 years of experience as a front-line officer. Although I have experience as a front-line officer, I knew that working in FJC would be challenging as it deals with family violence and the law. However, I am happy to learn new things with every organisation I join.

What are your responsibilities?

Nurul: My responsibility as a front-line staff is largely to attend to enquiries from court users and visitors.

Chloe: I handle a wide range of enquiries in relation to the State Courts and even certain matters that are dealt in FJC. These include guiding court users through certain court processes or applications, and liaising with officers from other departments.

I also take on an additional role as a team leader, whereby I would monitor the call queue system and assist my colleagues in handling matters that are more complex. In addition to that, I prepare the daily call centre and productivity statistics, which allow us to analyse how we are performing.

Sangeeta: My main responsibility at the Family Protection Centre (FPC) is to be a good listener to court users who are facing family violence issues. Court users will share with me their troubles and concerns and I try my best to comfort them and provide basic counselling to make them feel at ease. I also explain to them the procedure to apply for a PPO and the possible follow-up actions.

Describe a typical work day.

Nurul: My typical work day includes ensuring The Learning Court is operational for visitors to use, attending to enquiries from court users and directing them to the courtroom or chambers if they have a hearing and are unsure where it is. I would also assist court users who are not familiar with the Centralised Display Management System kiosk and register external contractors who are in the building for maintenance works.

Chloe: The hustle and bustle begins as soon as our phone lines open. Therefore, the first thing I do to prepare myself is to log on to all the various court case management systems, prepare my notes and access the relevant webpages so that I have ready information on hand. In between calls, I would read updates on the organisation, including new court processes and procedures, monitor our call volume and performance, and provide guidance and assistance to my team members where necessary.

Sangeeta: Every day I will attend to about 15 court users face-to-face, and answer phone calls from Family Service Centres such as PAVE, Trans-Safe Centre and Care Corner. I also follow up on administrative matters relating to ongoing cases, such as the printing of court orders like Summons, Expedited Orders and Complaint forms, and liaising with the police, hospitals, law firms and telcos.

Why are you passionate about your job?

Nurul: It gives me an opportunity to meet people from different backgrounds and contribute positively to their experience at the court.

Chloe: I get a great sense of satisfaction from helping others. It is tremendously fulfilling to be able to help a court user understand or navigate certain court processes that could be daunting. I had an interest in the judicial system even before I joined the State Courts. As such, being part of this organisation and contributing to its excellent court services drives my passion for this job.

Sangeeta: This is not an easy job, but I am determined to make sure that every court user whom I attend to will walk out of the FPC with a smile on his/her face knowing he/she has been helped and is assured of his/her safety.

What are some valuable skills or lessons that you have learnt from the job?

Nurul: To be tactful and efficient. Court users and visitors pay close attention to how we respond and they like to be served as quickly as possible.

Chloe: Effective communication. This skill comprises complete focus and active listening to be able to understand the court user's question(s) from his perspective and then be able to reply in a coherent manner that would be clearly understood.

Sangeeta: A better understanding of the legal system and issues faced by the community.

What are some of the challenges that you face?

Nurul: Handling difficult court users and yet staying calm and professional in our dealings.

Chloe: I often encounter callers who would ask if they could sue for this or file a claim for that. I usually explain that I am not in the position to provide advice for any matter that is or may come within our court system. I would try to explain what constitutes legal advice, which may be difficult for some to understand. In any case, I would still direct them to the appropriate channels where they can get help.

Sangeeta: Dealing with difficult court users. Especially if the counters are busy, court users feel frustrated if they have to wait to see the counsellor.

Share a memorable incident that took place during the course of your job.

Nurul: I recall attending to a worried court user who had misplaced a valuable item in the Supreme Court. I had to calm her down while checking on the matter quickly. Fortunately, the item was later found and she was extremely happy.

Chloe: I once had to explain the entire Small Claims Tribunals process in Teochew - a dialect that I rarely speak. I was upfront with the caller, an elderly woman who spoke only in that language, and informed her that I will try my best to be fluent. And I did it! She understood everything I said.

Sangeeta: I recall attending to a woman filing a complaint against her husband. She mentioned that her husband would verbally and physically abuse her in front of her three children. The lady kept crying and later told me that she felt like committing suicide. I had to constantly console her and alerted our in-house counsellors about her.

What are the critical qualities that a front-line service officer should have?

Nurul: A key critical quality that a front-line service officer should have is patience, especially when dealing with unpleasant court users. I find that most of the time, these court users just need a listening ear.

Chloe: Call centre agents must have good listening skills and be able to notice subtle nuances such as sighs or a change in the pitch or tone of voice to be able to better relate to the caller. This is different from counter services where the front-line officer would have the additional advantage of visual cues to identify and adjust his service delivery according to the emotions behind the query or request.

Sangeeta: A critical quality would be staying calm, especially in difficult situations. We must also be knowledgeable, especially on the work that the organisation does, so that we serve our customers well.

What motivates you?

Nurul: The work that I do and the value it provides to the court and its users.

Chloe: My colleagues who never fail to encourage and motivate one another. Being in a work environment where we have positive values, common targets, open communication and support helps me to get through the day and assures me that I am not alone in difficult situations. I have a wonderful team to work with.

Sangeeta: Working well with my colleagues and having great team spirit. With strength and confidence, I am able to always face court users with a smile. Success in continuously attaining court users' satisfaction motivates me to do my job well. I feel that aligning with the organisation's vision and values is one way to achieve my goals.

Jointly brought to you by:



1 Supreme Court Lane
Singapore 178879
E: Supcourt_QSM@supcourt.gov.sg



1 Havelock Square
Singapore 059724
E: contact@statecourts.gov.sg



3 Havelock Square
Singapore 059725
E: FJCourts_QSM@FJCourts.gov.sg