

ANNUAL REPORT 2013



RENEWING
OUR
COMMITMENT
TO JUSTICE

As the courts of first instance, the Subordinate Courts play an integral role in the administration of justice in Singapore. With an average volume of 350,000 cases annually, the Subordinate Courts handle more than 95 per cent of the total caseload in Singapore.

To more accurately reflect the proper standing of the Subordinate Courts as the primary dispensers of justice, the Subordinate Courts (Amendment) Bill ("the Bill"), with the renaming of the Subordinate Courts to State Courts as a key feature, was first introduced in Parliament on 11 November 2013. The Bill was passed on 21 January 2014.

On 7 March 2014, the "Subordinate Courts" was officially renamed "State Courts" and The Honourable the Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon officiated the launch of the new name and logo.

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With Warmest Appreciation to

All who have contributed to this publication



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FOREWORD BY THE HONOURABLE THE CHIEF JUSTICE



This annual report is the very first to be published by the State Courts of Singapore. This new name, which was very recently conferred in March 2014, marks a fresh start for the Courts as they embrace their integral role of dispensing justice in our nation-state.

It is with a fresh perspective that the State Courts now survey the year that has just passed. These Courts have chosen to review their work with the goal of “renewing [their] commitment to justice”, as encapsulated in the report’s title. The State Courts’ work traverses a wide range of offences and disputes occurring in our society, and their decisions have immense impact on many spheres including commercial dealings, closest familial relationships and public safety. It was observed as far back as the 17th century by Thomas Hobbes that the “law is the public conscience”. Being a central part of the Singapore Judiciary, the State Courts play a major role in safeguarding this public conscience and ensuring confidence in the Rule of Law. It is therefore crucial that the State Courts’ continual quest for improvement be constantly underpinned by the simple yet profoundly fundamental concept of justice.

In this connection, I am heartened to read in the annual report about the ways in which the State Courts have in the past year enhanced their delivery of justice and facilitated greater access to justice. Their reforms have ranged from developing comprehensive filing and case management systems like the Integrated Electronic Litigation System and the

Integrated Criminal Case Filing and Management System, to many efforts to assist litigants such as publishing toolkits to help them navigate civil applications, introducing an Amicus Curiae scheme for family disputes involving children and publishing a comprehensive third edition of the “Blue Book” concerning sentencing practice for criminal offences.

These Courts are also firmly committed to equipping their Judges to handle challenges that may arise in the administration of justice. A series of judicial training videos had been created, and the Courts’ judicial training framework had been refined to facilitate comprehensive training for core judicial skills. The annual report also features notable judgments made by the State Court Judges in 2013. In sum, the State Courts’ commitment to deliver justice excellently has been displayed on many fronts.

As the State Courts renew their commitment to justice, I trust that their Judges and Court Administrators will continue to make a discernible impact on all their court users. I extend my very best wishes to the State Courts as they commence a new chapter with the same unstinting commitment to justice.

SUNDARESH MENON

Chief Justice
Republic of Singapore

MESSAGE FROM
THE PRESIDING JUDGE OF
THE STATE COURTS



On 30 September 2013, we bade farewell to former Chief District Judge Tan Siong Thye, who was elevated to the Supreme Court. We wish to express our deepest gratitude to Judicial Commissioner Tan Siong Thye for his visionary leadership and guidance over five sterling years, and to convey our heartiest congratulations and best wishes on his new appointment.

The theme for the Annual Report 2013 is "Renewing Our Commitment to Justice". This is indeed apt as amidst the many changes that we began to initiate in 2013, we remain steadfastly committed to delivering fair and accessible justice to serve the people of Singapore.

Renaming of Subordinate Courts to State Courts

In 2013, we began work on rebranding the Subordinate Courts, which were renamed State Courts on 7 March 2014. The State Courts' new corporate logo was selected by our staff. The appointment of Chief District Judge was re-designated on 14 April 2014 as "Presiding Judge of the State Courts", an appointment which is held by a Judge or Judicial Commissioner of the Supreme Court. Judges have been wearing judicial robes since 23 May 2013 when presiding over open court hearings, as a symbol of the importance of the judicial function while emphasising that each Judge acts with fairness, integrity, even-temperedness, patience, and absolute rectitude.

Global Performance Excellence Awards

In July 2013, the Courts were awarded the World Class Award of the Global Performance Excellence Awards (GPEA) by the Asia Pacific Quality Organization

(APQO). The World Class Award is the highest honour conferred by the APQO, and the Courts were the only recipient of this award in the "Not-for-Profit" category in 2013. The GPEA is the only formal international recognition of organisational and business excellence.

Judicial Governance Programme

Twenty-seven participants from 15 countries, including Chief Justices, Superior Court Judges, Registrars, Judge Administrators and Permanent Secretaries, attended the inaugural Judicial Governance Programme from 8 to 12 July 2013. This Programme, which was jointly organised by the Courts and the Civil Service College, promoted knowledge sharing among foreign judiciaries and other organisations with regard to Singapore's judicial administration, development, and governance model. It also helped to profile Singapore's legal system internationally.

Primary Justice Project

In his keynote address during the Subordinate Courts Workplan 2013, The Honourable the Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon announced that the Courts would embark on the Primary Justice Project (PJP). Akin to a primary healthcare provider that assists a patient before deciding whether to refer him to a hospital or specialist, the PJP would serve as an intermediate step to attempt to resolve a dispute without necessarily bringing the case to the Courts.

The Courts began work with The Law Society of Singapore to build up a corps of primary justice lawyers. These lawyers will provide a basic tier of legal services at

a fixed fee. The Courts will work with the Law Society to produce toolkits for their work and link them to suitable parties through the Community Justice Centre.

Community Justice Centre

The Community Justice Centre (CJC) was officially opened by Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon on 1 March 2013. Building on the services provided by the HELP (Helping to Empower Litigants-in-Person) Centre, the CJC provides a range of assistance to litigants-in-person. It is an independent charity which involves the State Courts, Ministry of Law, Ministry of Social and Family Development, Tan Chin Tuan Foundation, and the Law Society as its stakeholders.

eLitigation for Civil and Family Cases

The Integrated Electronic Litigation System (eLitigation) was officially launched in the Civil Justice Division on 30 September 2013 and in the Family and Juvenile Justice Division on 2 December 2013. Replacing the Electronic Filing System, eLitigation provides court users with a single access point for the active case management of court matters, and serves as a one-stop portal for all case-related interactions with the Courts. To facilitate the implementation of eLitigation, the relevant Rules of Court and the Practice Directions were amended accordingly.

Simplification of the Procedure for Lower Value Civil Claims

The current regime prescribes the same procedure in all civil disputes, regardless of their monetary value. Around 89 per cent of writs filed at the Civil Justice Division involve sums of \$60,000 or less. A review was undertaken with a view to proposing a simplified process for claims of \$60,000 and below to

reduce the cost of litigation, emphasise consensual outcomes, and adjudicate those cases that have to proceed for trial more expeditiously.

Motor Accident Guide

Claims arising from motor accidents form about 30 per cent of the civil cases filed in the State Courts annually. In 2013, we began work on the Motor Accident Guide (MAG). The MAG would be a quick reference guidebook that provides a range of likely liability findings for a comprehensive series of motor vehicle accident scenarios. This will allow parties as well as stakeholders such as insurance companies and workshops to make informed decisions for their cases, with a view to settlement to save time and other resources.

Toolkits to Assist Litigants-in-Person

To assist litigants-in-person in navigating our court processes, two toolkits – the Examination of Judgment Debtor Toolkit and the Interpleader Summons Toolkit – were launched in 2013. Both toolkits are user-friendly, offering overviews of the relevant court processes, practical guidance on filling up the court forms and the types of supporting documents required.

Reforms to Family Justice

An inter-agency group comprising Supreme Court Judges, Family Court Judges, and representatives from the Ministry of Law and Ministry of Social and Family Development, was formed to work with family law practitioners and academics to consider possible reforms in the area of family justice. These include the use of collaborative law in family justice, adoption of a less adversarial approach in hearings, and establishing a separate Family Justice Court.

Family Justice Practice Forum

The inaugural Family Justice Practice Forum was held on 18 October 2013. Jointly organised by the Courts and the Ministry of Social and Family Development, the event was attended by more than 300 participants representing more than 100 agencies. The Forum's theme was "Collaborations for Holistic Outcomes", and it focused on understanding family violence issues and divorce and custody processes. The Forum provided the relevant stakeholders with a useful platform to share their organisations' work and roles in the family justice system.

Integrated Criminal Case Filing and Management System (ICMS)

The Integrated Criminal Case Filing and Management System (ICMS) is an integrated e-filing and e-workflow case management system for the Criminal Courts. Phase 1A of the ICMS was launched in July 2013, and it is being progressively rolled out in phases. This is a paperless system that enables all enforcement agencies to commence criminal prosecutions and other criminal matters electronically without a courthouse visit. The prosecution and defence will be able to file applications and receive court orders and documents online.

Publication of Practitioners' Library: Sentencing Practice in the Subordinate Courts, 3rd Edition

Fondly known amongst criminal law practitioners as the "Blue Book", the third edition of the *Practitioners' Library: Sentencing Practice in the Subordinate Courts* was officially launched on 20 August 2013. This is the only sentencing book in Singapore that comprehensively analyses the sentences meted out for myriad offences, providing a useful guide to the sentencing tariffs for those

offences. The new edition has been updated to include new case law and updated legislation, such as the Criminal Procedure Code (amended in 2011) and the Penal Code (amended in 2008).

Enhanced Resolution of Regulatory Offences

Offenders may be allowed to resolve certain categories of minor regulatory offences, by requesting for these matters to be compounded at the Court's 'doorstep' on the day of the hearing, without their cases being mentioned in Court. Another enhancement is facilitating the payment of fines for plea of guilt and composition cases in minor traffic offences by leveraging on technology (i.e. AXS mobile applications and internet payment facilities).

Witness Support Scheme

The Witness Support Scheme assists witnesses in court preparation by providing a tour of the courtroom and explaining the criminal court proceedings, commonly used terms in Court and the role of the witnesses. Such trial preparation assistance seeks to make testifying in Court a less stressful experience for lay witnesses. The Scheme will also provide counselling and referral social services to vulnerable witnesses.

Conclusion

2013 has indeed been a fruitful year for us. I am fully confident that under the guidance of The Honourable the Chief Justice and with the dedication and support of my colleagues, the State Courts will continue to forge ahead with renewed commitment in the coming years.

SEE KEE OON

Presiding Judge of the State Courts

ORGANISATION CHART



FROM SUBORDINATE COURTS TO STATE COURTS



The Subordinate Courts play an integral role in the administration of justice in Singapore. With an annual caseload of about 350,000 and managing more than 95 per cent of the Judiciary's total caseload, the Courts are far from being "subordinate"; they are the primary dispensers of justice, dealing with a wide spectrum of disputes including criminal prosecutions, coroner's inquiries, civil disputes, small claims, family disputes and juvenile justice, and ensuring that access to justice is available to all.

Renaming to "State Courts"

To more accurately reflect the role and function that the Subordinate Courts play in the Judiciary and society, the Subordinate Courts (Amendment) Bill ("the Bill"), with the renaming of the Subordinate Courts to State Courts as a key feature, was first introduced in Parliament on 11 November 2013. In the

second reading of the Bill, Senior Minister of State for Law, Ms Indranee Rajah, SC, noted that the choice of the name "State Courts" reflects "the important national function that the State Courts perform in adjudicating disputes and dispensing justice, and combines dignity with gravitas".

The Bill was passed on 21 January 2014 and on 7 March 2014, The Honourable the Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon officially launched the new name and logo of the State Courts.





The State Courts logo features an emblematic illustration of the new State Courts Complex together with a stylised bridge. On the left of the logo, a clean representation of the tower complex is applied – two coloured tower blocks representing the courtroom tower and the administrative tower. The towers are solid at the base, illustrating a firm commitment to justice anchored in the law while the angled peaked tops represent progress and aspiration towards excellence. The modern and sturdy typeface signifies the State Courts as a forum where justice prevails and disputes are resolved fairly and amicably.

The flat arc symbolically represents a bridge connecting the two towers of the State Courts Complex. Metaphorically, the stylised bridge that connects both the tower blocks not only emphasises the inter-connectivity between the judicial and administrative functions for the smooth running of the courthouse, but is also a symbolic reminder of the need to ensure access to justice to the people of Singapore through the State Courts' unstinting commitment to serving society.

The Bill also introduced other changes in relation to the apex post in the State Courts and the appointment of their Judges.

Elevating the office of the "Chief District Judge" to "Presiding Judge of the State Courts"

The office of the Chief District Judge was elevated to that of the Presiding Judge of the State Courts, to reflect the wide-ranging jurisdiction and power vested in the State Courts, and the growing

complexity of the cases filed there. It is also an assurance of the highest standard of leadership for the State Courts.

The position of the Presiding Judge is held by a Judge or Judicial Commissioner of the Supreme Court, and the appointment is made by the President of Singapore, on the recommendation of the Chief Justice. On 14 April 2014, Mr See Kee Oon was sworn in as a Judicial Commissioner and appointed the Presiding Judge of the State Courts.



Photo courtesy of Ministry of Communications and Information

Increasing the Minimum Statutory Requirement for the Appointment of District Judges and Magistrates

The minimum statutory requirement for a legally qualified person to be a District Judge was increased from five years to seven years, while the minimum statutory requirement for a legally qualified person to be a Magistrate was raised from one year to three years. Raising the criterion for these appointments guarantees a more experienced and mature Bench and underscores the importance of the responsibilities that these Judges carry out. This would, in turn, enhance the standing of the State Courts.

Refreshing the State Courts' Justice Statement

Along with the name change, the State Courts' justice statement, comprising their shared vision, mission and core values, was refreshed. Although not substantially different from the previous version, the refreshed justice statement reaffirms the State Courts' commitment to inspiring public trust and confidence through an effective and accessible justice system.



SHARED VISION Inspiring public trust and confidence through an effective and accessible justice system

MISSION Serving society with quality judgments, timely dispute resolution and excellent court services

CORE VALUES Fairness
Accessibility
Independence, Integrity, Impartiality
Responsiveness

Donning of Judicial Robes by Judges

Since 23 May 2013, Judges in the State Courts have been wearing judicial robes when presiding over open court hearings. A practice common in other jurisdictions where judges in the first instance courts, like the superior courts, also wear judicial robes, the introduction of the robes in the State Courts is to remind Judges and parties in a courtroom of the roles and functions of the Courts and their officers. During the inauguration of the judicial robes, the Chief Justice explained the significance of the robes:

... most judicial systems recognise that there is an important symbolism that is embedded in this practice of donning the judicial robes. I think there is both an internal as well as an external dimension to this and both are rooted in the special sense of identity that the robe conveys.

The internal dimension is that of the Judge who is urged to constantly remember, each time

he dons the robe, that he is putting aside his usual self and taking on the very important identity of a Judge together with the responsibility that comes with it of being a symbol of fairness, integrity, even-temperedness, patience and absolute rectitude.

The external dimension is that of others in the courtroom, who are reminded by the visible and manifest difference in the Judge's outer appearance of that Judge's inner identity that is rooted in his utter commitment to be independent and impartial, and to do right by all without fear or favour, affection or ill-will.

Notwithstanding these changes, the State Courts will continue to fulfil their role as the primary dispensers of justice in the Singapore Judiciary, ensuring access to justice to the people of Singapore through their unstinting commitment to serving society.

ANNUAL REPORT

OUR COMMITMENT TO JUSTICE

2013

SIGNIFICANT CASES

CRIMINAL JUSTICE DIVISION

Corruption involving Public Servants

Ng Boon Gay, the former Director of the Central Narcotics Bureau, claimed trial to four charges of corruptly obtaining sexual gratification from a sales representative who worked for two companies that marketed products to government agencies. The Court acquitted the accused after finding that there was no corrupt element or guilty knowledge as the sexual acts arose in the context of an intimate relationship between the accused and the sales representative.

Peter Lim, the former Commissioner of the Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF), claimed trial to one charge of corruptly obtaining sexual gratification from a manager working for an SCDF vendor. The Court rejected the accused's defence that he was in an intimate relationship with the manager, and found that there was a corrupt element and guilty knowledge in the transaction. The Court sentenced the accused to six months' imprisonment.

Coroner's Case

Dr Shane Todd, an American researcher working in the Institute of Microelectronics (IME) in Singapore, was found hanged in his apartment in June 2012. The case generated significant attention locally and internationally when Dr Todd's parents suggested that their son had been murdered because of a military-related research that he had done in IME, whereas investigations by

the Singapore Police Force suggested that he had taken his own life. After 10 days of testimony by 74 local and foreign witnesses, the Coroner concluded that Dr Todd had committed suicide by hanging and that there was no foul play involved. After the verdict, the Embassy of the United States in Singapore stated that the Coroner's Inquiry was "comprehensive, fair, and transparent".

CIVIL JUSTICE DIVISION

Unilink Credit Pte Ltd v Chong Kuek Leong

The Plaintiff, a licensed moneylender, was seeking to recover the balance of a loan which had the following repayment terms and interest charges:

- (a) Interest – 72 per cent per annum
- (b) Late interest – 240 per cent per annum
- (c) Late payment charges - \$80 per day
- (d) Loan tenure – 10 months repayable in monthly instalments

The Deputy Registrar (“DR”) had found that the interest rates charged were unreasonable. He exercised his powers under section 23 of the Moneylenders Act to review if the interest rate or other fees charged were excessive and the transaction unconscionable. In lieu of the interest rates claimed, the DR allowed the Plaintiff to impose interest at 18 per cent per annum for both the principal amount and the late payment interest.

The Plaintiff appealed against the DR’s decision. The Court hearing the Registrar’s Appeal observed that:

- (a) The Plaintiff’s interest rate on the principal sum lent, at 72 per cent per annum, was about five times that charged by banks.
- (b) In comparison against the interest rates charged by credit card companies on overdue payments, the late interest rate of 240 per cent per annum charged by the Plaintiff was high, excessive and disproportionate to any real loss that the Plaintiff could prove.

The Court eventually found that the rates charged by the Plaintiff were either unconscionable or substantially unfair. The Court set aside the DR’s award of interest at the rate of 18 per cent per annum and substituted it with the rate of 24 per cent per annum.

Philip Mockridge v Ruby, Thai Inspired Cuisine

In a case between a customer (the Plaintiff) and a restaurant (the Defendant), the Plaintiff alleged that when he bit into the chicken cheese balls he had ordered, hot cheese squirted out and caused burn spots on some parts of his left forearm. The Plaintiff alleged that this caused him great pain for several days. He consulted a doctor on the fifth day and was diagnosed to have sustained second-degree burns.

The Defendant’s case was that the cheese balls were meant to be served hot and his service staff had warned the Plaintiff of the hot cheese balls when serving the dish.

The Court found that the Defendant did owe the Plaintiff a duty of care to warn him that the cheese balls were hot and care had to be taken when eating them. The Court ordered the Defendant to pay the Plaintiff \$1,500 in damages.

FAMILY AND JUVENILE JUSTICE DIVISION

Application under the International Child Abduction Act

A German father applied under the International Child Abduction Act for the return of his child to Germany from Singapore. The Singaporean mother resisted the application by relying on the defence in Article 13(b) of the Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction, namely that there is a grave risk that the child's return would expose him to physical or psychological harm or otherwise place the child in an intolerable situation. The mother claimed that she had been abused by the father and her mother-in-law, and that if she returned to Germany, the continued abuse would place the child in an intolerable situation.

The Family Court allowed the father's application. It decided that any friction

between the child's mother and her mother-in-law did not impact the child. There was also no allegation of any child abuse, ill-treatment or violence by the father against the child. The Court attached little weight to a doctor's report that it would be unwise to separate the mother and child, as it was solely based on information provided by the mother. The mother appealed against the decision.

The Family Court's decision was upheld by the High Court. The mother then appealed to the Court of Appeal. On 3 December 2013, the Court of Appeal ordered the return of the child to Germany on the basis of various undertakings by both parties being performed.

Application to be Appointed Deputies under the Mental Capacity Act

Two siblings applied to be appointed as deputies of their sister ("the Patient") whom they alleged lacked mental capacity, in relation to her property and affairs.

The Family Court considered, among other factors, evidence from doctors, medical experts, family members and the Patient's evidence in Court from which inferences on her mental capacity were drawn. The Court concluded that the Patient was unable to retain relevant information long enough to weigh it and

make decisions, as well as understand and appreciate the implications of her actions.

The Family Court's decision was overturned by the High Court on appeal. The High Court decided that not all practicable steps had been taken to help the Patient understand, retain and weigh information and communicate decisions.

The matter is currently pending before the Court of Appeal.

SIGNIFICANT INITIATIVES

CRIMINAL JUSTICE DIVISION

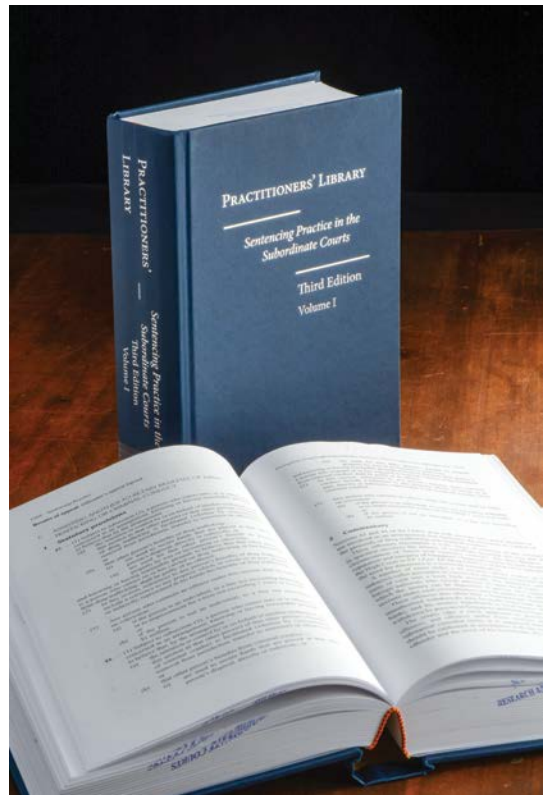
Publication of Practitioners' Library: Sentencing Practice in the Subordinate Courts, 3rd Edition

20 August 2013 saw the official launch of the third edition of the *Practitioners' Library: Sentencing Practice in the Subordinate Courts*, fondly known amongst criminal law practitioners as the "Blue Book". This comes a decade after the second edition was published and as with the earlier publications, this new edition was produced in collaboration with LexisNexis (Southeast Asia).

The Blue Book is the only sentencing book in Singapore that provides a comprehensive analysis of the sentencing tariffs for myriad offences. It also has useful commentaries that provide insights into the applicable sentencing principles and considerations for various offences.

The new edition is the result of the hard work and commitment of 27 Judges. It is updated with new case law and revised to integrate new legislation such as the Criminal Procedure Code amended in 2011 and the Penal Code amended in 2008, both of which introduced many changes to the criminal and sentencing laws in Singapore.

The Blue Book serves as a useful aid to the practitioners in the Criminal Bar as well as the prosecutors in relation to sentencing matters for offences that are regularly dealt with in the Courts; references to the Blue Book are commonly made when parties deliver their submissions.



“Prior to the sentencing practice book, we had to go about talking to fellow lawyers in the Bar Room or even popping into a Court to see what kinds of sentences were being meted out. Now we no longer feel ‘handicapped’ in Court.”

Mr Amolat Singh
Solicitor, Amolat & Partners

CIVIL JUSTICE DIVISION

Toolkits to Assist Litigants-in-Person

In view of the rising numbers of Litigants-in-Person (LIPs), the Civil Justice Division continued to explore ways to assist the LIPs in navigating court processes through user-friendly toolkits.

After the successful launch of the Probate and Administration Toolkit in 2012, the Civil Justice Division launched two

other toolkits in 2013, the Examination of Judgment Debtor Toolkit and the Interpleader Summons Toolkit. Both toolkits offer a clear overview of the relevant court processes, practical guidance on filling up the court forms and the types of supporting documents required.

FAMILY AND JUVENILE JUSTICE DIVISION

Inaugural Family Justice Practice Forum

The Family and Juvenile Justice Division (FJJD) adopts a holistic approach to family dispute resolution, which includes repairing family relationships and upholding a child's interests. This requires close cooperation with the relevant stakeholders.

On 18 October 2013, the FJJD co-organised the inaugural Family Justice Practice Forum, themed *Collaborations for Holistic Outcomes*, with the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF). The Forum sought to engage the relevant stakeholders, such as the Singapore Police Force (SPF) and the Family Bar, as well as to exchange ideas and update one another on their respective programmes and initiatives.

Three hundred and fifty participants attended the half-day event which comprised two sessions: "Family Violence – Collaborations to Protect and Preserve Families" and "Divorce and its Legacy on Children". There were presentations by speakers from MSF, FJJD, the Family Bar, SPF, HELP Family Service Centre and the Care Corner Project START. Each session culminated in a panel discussion with active participation from the audience.



CORPORATE AND COURT SERVICES DIVISION

Call Centre for Improved Call Management



Members of the public and court users frequently make phone calls to the State Courts to obtain information on various matters. To improve call management and service delivery, the Communications Department set up an in-house Call Centre in August 2013.

Managed by experienced call handlers who are trained to attend to cross-divisional queries and equipped with sophisticated call-handling capabilities (such as the ability to place calls in a queue and to route calls to the first available call handler), the Call Centre provides a one-stop access to callers for information on matters related to the Courts. With the Call Centre, counter staff can devote their time to attending to in-person queries and processing cases without having to answer telephone enquiries at the same time, thereby improving their productivity.

As the Call Centre offers real-time update on call volume and records the call transactions, supervisors can also review the call records to ensure that service delivery standards are met. Since its launch until December 2013, the Call Centre had handled close to 18,000 enquiries.

Enhancing the Quality of Court Services

In 2013, basic Malay and Mandarin classes were conducted for front-line staff with a keen interest in languages. After completing the course, the participants were better able to assist and serve members of the public who do not understand English well. The Chinese and Malay Language Sections will conduct another round of classes in 2014.

The Foreign Interpreters' Management Unit (FIMU) conducted a knowledge-sharing session in 2013 on court processes and procedures for its foreign interpreters. This is part of FIMU's efforts to maintain the high service standard and professionalism of the foreign interpreters.

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND TECHNOLOGY DIVISION

Judicial Governance Programme

The inaugural Judicial Governance Programme (JGP) was co-organised by the Subordinate Courts and Civil Service College (CSC) from 8 to 12 July 2013 to share with overseas judiciaries and organisations the Courts' experiences in court governance, administration and judicial capabilities. Twenty-seven participants comprising Chief Justices, Deputy Chief Justices, Superior Court Judges, Registrars, Judge Administrators and Permanent Secretaries from 15 countries participated in the JGP.

The participants gained a unique perspective into Singapore's judicial system through the briefings, discussions, workshops, interactions with the

stakeholders in the Singapore justice system, and learning journeys to the Attorney-General's Chambers, Singapore Academy of Law, Subordinate Courts, Supreme Court and The Law Society of Singapore.

The feedback on the programme was encouraging. Many participants found the training useful and indicated that they would apply the knowledge gained in their country's court systems. One of them noted, *"It has been refreshing to attend a course aimed at practical initiatives... Participants will go home as inspired visionary leaders striving towards court excellence, equipped with the basic tools for achieving such vision."*



LAUNCH OF THE COMMUNITY JUSTICE CENTRE

The Community Justice Centre (CJC), a registered charity with Institute of Public Character status, was officially launched in March 2013. Jointly established by the Ministry of Social and Family Development, Ministry of Law, State Courts, The Law Society of Singapore and Tan Chin Tuan Foundation, the CJC was set up as a one-stop hub to provide Litigants-in-Person (LIPs) with support services such as legal clinics, information and referral services.

The mission of the CJC is to provide access to justice, especially for needy LIPs of whom a vast majority come from low-income backgrounds and have only primary and/or secondary school education. Community partnerships are forged with volunteers, social agencies and the legal sector to provide a three-tiered approach in assisting the needy.

The Court Facilitators programme, which is aided by volunteer students from the law faculties of the National University of Singapore and Singapore Management University, helps LIPs to navigate within the court setting and provides practical support like explaining the different court processes to the LIPs.

The "Guidance for Plea" Scheme has volunteer lawyers giving pro bono and immediate advice to unrepresented litigants who may be unaware of their rights while the "Friends of Litigants-in-Person" programme provides emotional support and guidance to LIPs.

Moving forward, the CJC will be adopting a holistic approach to better support litigants in a desperate predicament. For litigants who are unable to afford a lawyer and do not qualify for legal aid, the CJC will offer schemes such as the Primary Justice Project where basic legal services are provided at a low cost, with a view to achieving out-of-court settlement even before a case is filed in Court.

An interim welfare support system for families of court users facing financial hardship will also be introduced. This is to assist the unrepresented litigants while they await the outcomes of referrals by the CJC to family service centres for longer-term and sustainable support.

HONOURING COURT VOLUNTEERS

At the Court Volunteers' Appreciation Dinner on 8 November 2013, three volunteers were recognised for their sterling contributions. The Guest-of-Honour, The Honourable the Chief Justice Sundaresh Menon presented the awards to the outstanding volunteers during the dinner at the Furama City Centre Hotel:

- Outstanding Volunteer - Advocate and Solicitor Category: Mr Lim Tat
- Outstanding Volunteer - Open Category: Mr Chng Beng Guan
- Outstanding Volunteer - Student Category: Ms Laura Eng



The Chief Justice (3rd from left) with the Outstanding Volunteer Award recipients (from left) Mr Lim Tat, Mr Chng Beng Guan and Ms Laura Eng

Mr Lim Tat has been an Associate Mediator with the Primary Dispute Resolution Centre since 2009. In the last four years, Mr Lim has proven to be one of the most avid mediators. There were several occasions when he scheduled a mediation session at his own time, so the case had greater chances of settlement. Recently, Mr Lim was also a trainer in a two-day mediation advocacy workshop for lawyers, a joint collaboration of the Singapore Mediation Centre, The Law Society of Singapore and the State Courts.

Mr Chng Beng Guan has volunteered as a Mediator at both the Crime Registry and Maintenance Mediation Chambers since 2005. Approachable and friendly, Mr Chng always displayed enthusiasm in trying to mediate conflicts between parties, often arriving early for his sessions and making effort to finish each case on time.

Ms Laura Eng volunteers with the Community Justice Centre as a Court Facilitator in the Family Court and Court 23, a Criminal Mentions Court. Armed with a positive attitude and readiness to help others, Ms Eng also provided a listening ear to those who needed to ventilate.

INTERNSHIP PROGRAMMES

Since 2000, the State Courts have offered internship opportunities to interested law undergraduates. The programme has since expanded, and in close collaboration with organisations such as the Legal Service Commission, Singapore Academy of Law and Public Service Division, the internship opportunities are now open to students from different academic backgrounds and disciplines. The programmes offer the interns an insight into the judicial administration process, in an environment of mentorship, interaction and collegiality.

In 2013, the Internship Committee hosted 455 interns, across several internship programmes. They included the Civil Service Internship Programme, Legal Service Judicial Internship Programme, Public Service Commission Scholars' Mid-Term Programme, Singapore Academy of Law Litigation Internship Programme, Temasek Polytechnic Law Internship Programme and Legal Service Senior Officers Law Clerks' Programme.

The internship programmes have received favourable response from the interns. The participants found the internships interesting and educational.

"At the Primary Dispute Resolution Centre, I was given the chance to use eLitigation in day-to-day operations. This allowed me to become familiar with the system. One of the things which I enjoyed doing most was to fix hearing dates for law firms using eLitigation. All in all, I truly enjoyed my three months here. Everyone, including the guards and cleaners, is so welcoming. My experience at the Courts is one that I will never forget. I will definitely make good use of everything that I have learnt here."

Gan Guo Jing

Temasek Polytechnic Law Internship Programme

"I was not expecting to learn much due to the short duration of the internship. However, what I have learnt far surpassed any expectations I had, and it was a very informative and enjoyable experience. I really appreciate the Judges taking time out of their busy schedules to talk to us and imparting both legal and life advice. Experiencing the operations of the different justice divisions gave me a good insight into the range and scale of the work handled there."

Seraphina Chew

Legal Service Judicial Internship Programme

CASELOAD AND STATISTICS

| CASELOAD PROFILE* | 2012 | 2013 ^(P) |
|--|----------------|---------------------|
| CRIMINAL JUSTICE DIVISION | 262,336 | 253,600 |
| Criminal and Departmental/Statutory Board | | |
| Criminal Charges ¹ | 58,992 | 60,800 |
| Departmental/Statutory Board Charges and Summonses | 128,587 | 114,200 |
| Traffic Charges and Summonses | 67,548 | 72,300 |
| Others | | |
| Coroner's Court Cases | 4,172 | 4,100 |
| Magistrate's Complaints | 3,037 | 2,200 |
| CIVIL JUSTICE DIVISION | 73,793 | 66,480 |
| Originating Processes | 42,490 | 37,650 |
| Writs of Summonses (DC & MC) | 37,944 | 32,800 |
| Originating Summonses | 524 | 450 |
| Probate | 4,022 | 4,400 |
| Interlocutory Applications | 15,074 | 14,180 |
| Summonses ² | 10,344 | 10,000 |
| Summonses for Directions (O.25/37) | 4,289 | 3,800 |
| Summary Judgment (O.14) | 441 | 380 |
| Others | | |
| Taxation | 162 | 150 |
| Assessment of Damages | 2,633 | 2,600 |
| Small Claims Tribunals | | |
| Claims | 13,434 | 11,900 |

CASELOAD PROFILE***2012****2013^(p)****FAMILY & JUVENILE JUSTICE DIVISION****24,119****23,680****Maintenance****6,609****6,160**

Fresh Applications

1,737

1,500

Enforcement of Maintenance Orders

3,176

3,000

Variation/Rescission/Suspension of Maintenance Orders

1,181

1,200

Enforcement of the Maintenance of Parents Tribunal Orders

53

50

Enforcement of Syariah Court Orders

462

410

Family Violence**3,347****3,340**

Fresh Applications for Personal Protection Order (PPO)

3,069

3,100

Variation/Rescission of PPO

169

120

Breach of PPO

109

120

Divorce

Divorce Writs

6,276

6,400

Ancillary Matters

1,877

1,700

Others

Adoption

387

370

Originating Summonses (Family)

530

530

Breach of Syariah Court Orders

258

240

Summonses (Family)³

3,614

3,600

Juvenile Court**1,221****1,340**

Juvenile Arrest Charges

966

1,100

Beyond Parental Control⁴

68

90

Child Protection Orders⁴

69

40

Police Summonses/Summonses & Tickets, and Other Charges

118

110

Total**360,248****343,760****Notes**^(*) Figures for 2012 were revised in 2013^(p) Projected figures¹ Includes DAC, MAC, PSS, PS & other charges² Excludes O.25/37³ Includes Divorce, Originating Summons (Family) and Adoption summonses⁴ Refers to number of juveniles

COURT USERS SURVEY 2013

Court Users Surveys are regularly conducted to ascertain the level of confidence in the Courts and the level of satisfaction on the quality of the services rendered to court users. Such feedback is vital for the Courts to remain responsive to their users and the environment. The latest survey conducted in 2013 was administered by Forbes Research Pte Ltd. The results were:

9 in 10 
of the respondents had confidence in the fair administration of justice in Singapore.

98% of the respondents were satisfied with the services provided by the Courts.



Perceptions of the Courts aligning themselves with their core values of F.A.I.R (Fairness, Accessibility, Independence, Integrity, Impartiality, Responsiveness) were very positive among the surveyed court users, with all the value categories achieving more than **90%** favourable rates.

The three justice divisions, namely the Criminal, Civil, and Family and Juvenile Justice Divisions, were well-perceived by the respondents, with **9 out of 10** giving favourable feedback and agreeing that they had met their expectations.

96% of the surveyed users agreed that the use of technology had brought about greater efficiency in the Courts.



Almost all of the respondents found the Courts' personnel courteous, helpful, knowledgeable, efficient, responsive, empathetic and had good communication skills.



ANNUAL REPORT

AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

2013

LOCAL AWARD

Community Chest Award

The Subordinate Courts were accorded the SHARE Bronze Award in 2013 for their participation in the SHARE (Social Help & Assistance Raised by Employees) programme. SHARE is a donation programme run by the Community Chest to raise and provide a stable source of funds for its beneficiaries. The SHARE Award is given by the Community Chest as a tribute to the fundraising efforts of the award winners, their sense of corporate social responsibility, and their partnership with Community Chest to help those in need.

INTERNATIONAL AWARD

World Class Award of the Global Performance Excellence Awards

In 2013, the Subordinate Courts were awarded the apex World Class Award of the Global Performance Excellence Awards (GPEA) under the "Not-for-Profit" category.

The World Class Award is the highest honour conferred by the Asia Pacific Quality Organization (APQO), a non-profit organisation founded in 1985 by National Quality Organisations in Asian and Pacific Rim countries. Launched in 2000, the GPEA is the only formal international recognition of quality performance and business excellence. The award encourages organisations to strengthen their strategies and performance to succeed in the fast-expanding global marketplace.

In 2013, the Subordinate Courts were the only recipient under the "Not-for-Profit" category. This marks another important milestone in the organisational excellence

journey of the Courts. It is a testament to their commitment to better serve society by delivering quality justice for all.



OUR INTERNATIONAL PROFILE

In 2013, Singapore scored well in various surveys conducted by several international organisations. These results are a tribute to the high quality of justice dispensed by the Singapore Judiciary.

INSTITUTE FOR MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT (IMD)

WORLD COMPETITIVENESS YEARBOOK 2013

In May 2013, IMD ranked 60 countries on their ability to create and maintain the competitiveness of enterprises. One assessment component was whether the legal and regulatory framework encourages the competitiveness of enterprises (Table 1) and another component was whether justice has been fairly administered (Table 2). Singapore was ranked in second and fifth position, respectively.

Table 1: Ranking of Singapore's Legal and Regulatory Framework

The legal and regulatory framework encourages the competitiveness of enterprises

| Year | 2013 |
|-------------------------------|------|
| Ranking of Singapore | 2 |
| Rating (0 = worst, 10 = best) | 7.63 |
| No. of countries ranked | 60 |

Table 2: Ranking of Singapore's Administration of Justice

Justice is fairly administered

| Year | 2013 |
|-------------------------------|----------------|
| Ranking of Singapore | 5 ¹ |
| Rating (0 = worst, 10 = best) | 8.51 |
| No. of countries ranked | 60 |

¹ Singapore was ranked highest among the Asian countries surveyed.

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM (WEF) GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS REPORT 2013 - 2014

The WEF 2013-2014 report ranked 148 countries to present a picture of the competitiveness of the economies. 12 pillars of the economy were evaluated and one of them was the institutional framework. This is a critical component as strong institutions protect the rights of the people and provide the stability and confidence to engage in economic activities. Five sub-indicators under the institutional pillar related to judiciary (Table 3) were:

- Efficiency of Legal Framework in Settling Disputes
- Efficiency of Legal Framework in Challenging Regulations
- Judicial Independence
- Property Rights
- Intellectual Property Rights

Table 3: Ranking of Singapore's Judiciary

Institution Pillar (1 = worst, 7 = best)

| Year | 2013 | |
|--|-------|---------------------|
| Efficiency of Legal Framework - (i) Settling Disputes (ii) Challenging Regulations | Rank | (i) 1 (ii) 12 |
| | Score | (i) 6.1 (ii) 4.9 |
| Judicial Independence | Rank | 17 |
| | Score | 5.7 |
| Property Rights | Rank | 2 |
| | Score | 6.3 |
| Intellectual Property Rights | Rank | 2 |
| | Score | 6.1 |

FRASER INSTITUTE

ECONOMIC FREEDOM OF THE WORLD REPORT 2013

Fraser Institute's 2013 annual report contained an index measuring the degree in which the policies and institutions of the countries were supportive of economic freedom.

One hundred and fifty-two countries were rated on their degree of economic freedom. One assessment indicator was "legal structure and property rights". Singapore was ranked fifth overall and first among the Asian countries assessed.

WORLD BANK STUDY

DOING BUSINESS REPORT

In this study, 189 economies were ranked on their ease of doing business, based on various assessment variables, including contract enforcement.

Singapore was ranked in 12th position globally in the contract enforcement variable (Table 4), which measured the efficiency of the judicial system in resolving a commercial dispute, in terms of the number of procedures involved, time taken and cost required. Among the Asian economies rated, Singapore was the third-highest ranked, after Korea (second) and Hong Kong (ninth).

Table 4: Enforcing Contracts (Top 15 Countries)

| Ranking | 2013 |
|---------|--------------------|
| 1 | Luxembourg |
| 2 | Republic of Korea |
| 3 | Iceland |
| 4 | Norway |
| 5 | Germany |
| 6 | Austria |
| 7 | France |
| 8 | Finland |
| 9 | Hong Kong SAR |
| 10 | Russian Federation |
| 11 | United States |
| 12 | Singapore |
| 13 | Belarus |
| 14 | Australia |
| 15 | Hungary |

The ease of doing business index was an indication of whether the regulatory environment was conducive to the operation of business. Singapore topped the ranking for this index. In addition, Singapore was rated to have the least number of procedures involved for a lawsuit (21 steps) and the shortest duration of 150 days to process a case.

WORLD BANK GOVERNANCE MATTERS

AGGREGATE AND INDIVIDUAL GOVERNANCE INDICATORS

The 2013 Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) project by the World Bank reported the aggregate and individual governance indicators for over 200 countries and territories over the period 1996–2012. One of the indicators was the Rule of Law which captured perceptions of the extent to which agents had confidence in and abided by the rules of society, and, in particular, the quality of contract enforcement, property rights, the police, and the court, as well as the likelihood of crime and violence. Singapore has been well-placed in the top 10 per cent over the past 10 years under the Rule of Law indicator (Table 5).

Table 5: World Bank – Governance Indicators

| Rule of Law | |
|-------------------------|------|
| Ranking of Singapore | 10 |
| Score (Max 2.5 points) | 1.77 |
| No. of countries ranked | 212 |

HERITAGE FOUNDATION AND WALL STREET JOURNAL

INDEX OF ECONOMIC FREEDOM REPORT

The Index of Economic Freedom measured 185 countries (177 countries were ranked) across 10 indices of economic freedom.

In 2013, Singapore was ranked second to Hong Kong in the overall rankings, and scored a high of 90 points for the “property rights” index, a score that has been maintained since 1995.

The report also commented that Singapore has a strong property rights regime and maintains an efficient judicial framework that sustains the Rule of Law.

THE WORLD JUSTICE PROJECT

RULE OF LAW INDEX

The Rule of Law Index developed by The World Justice Project assessed countries’ compliance to the Rule of Law.

In the 2013 report, Singapore was regarded favourably, featuring in third position for an effective criminal justice system and fourth for accessibility to the civil justice system, among the 97 countries ranked.

NOTES OF APPRECIATION

"Thank you for the inspiring presentation on the Courts in Singapore."

Mohit S. Shah

Chief Justice, High Court of Bombay, India
15 May 2013

"It was a memorable visit of great interest."

Anthony Gates

Chief Justice, Fiji
31 October 2013

Appreciation for Ms Belinda Chng

Assistant Executive, Crime Registry,
Criminal Justice Division

"Belinda is an excellent staff - very patient, courteous and helpful. She is very knowledgeable too."

A court user

1 March 2013

Appreciation for Mr Peter Ong

Senior Language Executive, Chinese Language Section, Corporate and Court Services Division

"He is meticulous and conscientious in his work and he has helped me a lot. I am very thankful to him."

A court user

10 June 2013

Appreciation for Ms Sabrina Binte Mohamed Hassan

Library Officer, Strategic Planning and Technology Division

"She assisted me tremendously by accessing the archives and retrieving the necessary documents as well as contacting me when she had located them. Thank you."

A library user

11 June 2013

Appreciation for the Probate Section, Civil Justice Division

"I find the toolkit for probate and letter of administration very useful. In particular, I like the downloadable document template and forms. The part on fees is also very useful. I am grateful to you for your efforts in making legal proceedings easier to understand by the layman like me."

A court user

22 July 2013

Appreciation for Ms Jasmine Ng

Senior Mediation Officer, Maintenance Mediation Chambers, Family and Juvenile Justice Division

"She impressed me with her mediation skills. She started the meeting strategically such that the end result is a win-win situation. Thank you, Ms Ng."

A litigant

20 December 2013



ANNUAL REPORT

OUR PEOPLE

2013

OUR JUDGES AND STAFF

The Chief Justice with Judges and Staff





PRESIDING JUDGE, DEPUTY PRESIDING JUDGE & SENIOR DISTRICT JUDGES



Left ► Right

Former Senior District Judge (Civil Justice Division) Leslie Chew (retired in March 2014)

Senior District Judge (Civil Justice Division) Foo Tuat Yien
(formerly Senior District Judge, Family and Juvenile Justice Division)

Judicial Commissioner See Kee Oon, Presiding Judge of the State Courts

Deputy Presiding Judge of the State Courts Jennifer Marie

Senior District Judge (Criminal Justice Division) Ong Hian Sun

Senior District Judge (Family and Juvenile Justice Division) Valerie Thean
(appointed in March 2014)

A TRIBUTE TO JUDICIAL COMMISSIONER TAN SIONG THYE

Judges and staff bade a warm farewell to Mr Tan Siong Thye on 30 September 2013. After having spent close to 20 years of his legal service career at the Subordinate Courts, Mr Tan took on a new appointment as a Judicial Commissioner (JC) at the Supreme Court from 1 October 2013.

JC Tan was appointed as the Chief District Judge (CDJ) of the Subordinate Courts on 28 August 2008. Since his appointment, he had worked tirelessly to uphold the high standards achieved in the administration of justice.

When he took office as CDJ in 2008, there was a serious shortage of judges in the Subordinate Courts. JC Tan increased the number of judges to manage the Courts' huge caseload. Today, there are close to 100 judges in the Courts, a significant increase from the 70 in 2008. In addition, he introduced the centralised Pre-Trial Conference (PTC) model in the Criminal Courts. This resulted in a better use of judicial resources and paved the way for more trial courts. It also significantly reduced waiting times for prosecutors and lawyers.

In 2009, JC Tan led the Courts through a strategic reorganisation and overhauled the organisational and reporting structure, the first in more than three decades. Under the new organisational structure, each division is given greater autonomy to manage its operations as well as develop long-term strategies that are aligned with that of the organisation.

To improve the Courts' processes, JC Tan introduced several management concepts, one of them being *Kaizen*, which became a culture in the Courts. *Kaizen* is a Japanese methodology that eliminates unnecessary workflows in order to streamline processes and make them more efficient.

A firm believer in serving society, JC Tan transformed the ethos at the Courts to a service-centric one. The Service Relations Section was set up in 2009 to drive service excellence in the Courts and in August 2013, the Call Centre was launched to provide a one-stop enquiry service for callers.

Under JC Tan's leadership, the Courts leveraged on technology innovatively to enhance their administration processes. Various systems such as the Integrated Criminal Case Filing and Management System were introduced to better manage hearings and cases. With the end-users in mind, no effort was spared to ensure that the best possible benefits were reaped from these systems.

Recognising the gap in the assistance and resources available to the growing number of Litigants-in-Person (LIPs), JC Tan spearheaded the establishment of the HELP (Helping to Empower Litigants-in-Person) Centre to provide assistance to LIPs. This initiative led to the Subordinate Courts being conferred the prestigious United Nations Public Service Award in the category of "Improving the Delivery of Public Services" for Asia and the Pacific

region in 2012. Besides legal assistance, many LIPs require emotional and financial support. The Community Justice Centre (CJC) was set up in 2012 to expand the scope of services provided to LIPs. The HELP Centre is now part of the CJC.

The recognition that the Courts had gained, both in Singapore and overseas, during JC Tan's term as CDJ, is testament to his sterling leadership and unwavering commitment to realising the Courts' mission of delivering quality justice and excellent court services. Besides the United Nations Public Service Award, the Subordinate Courts received the coveted Singapore Quality Award (with Special Commendation) in 2011 and the World Class Award of the Global Performance Excellence Awards in 2013, both of which recognise efforts in business excellence and quality performance.

For his sterling contributions to the nation, JC Tan was conferred the Public Administration Medal (Gold) (Bar) in 2011.

Of his term with the Subordinate Courts, JC Tan said, "The task of serving and leading the Subordinate Courts appeared very daunting when I first took over. However, my colleagues had provided me much encouragement and inspiration. Together, we had scaled several peaks of organisational excellence. These achievements would not have been possible without the commitment, cooperation and dedication of the staff."

Paying tribute to his predecessor, Presiding Judge See Kee Oon said, "I am humbled and privileged to have inherited an organisation that is the envy of many jurisdictions. I wish to express my sincere gratitude to JC Tan Siong Thye for his leadership and guidance."



NATIONAL DAY AND SUBORDINATE COURTS AWARDS

National Day Awards

Public Administration Medal (Silver)

District Judge Tan Boon Heng

Public Service Medal

Pandiyan s/o Vellasami

Commendation Medal

Phua Thong Leng

Efficiency Medal

Teng-Soh Siew Foong

Zaini Bin Sojah

Long Service Medal (25 years of service)

District Judge P Siva Shanmugam

District Judge Shaiffudin Bin Saruwan

Suhana Bte Salleh

Mohamed Hatta Bin Abdul Razak

Wahidah Bte Somo

Zaleha Bte Ahmad

Subordinate Courts Awards

Long Service Award

District Judge Toh Yung Cheong

District Judge Kevin Ng Choong Yeong

District Judge Eugene Teo Weng Kuan

Norliah Bte Manijan

Court Administrator of the Year Award

Michael Chua Yak Ngee

Senior Assistant Executive

Civil Justice Division

Phebe Ang Wei Yi

Senior Executive

(Infrastructure Development)

Corporate and Court Services Division

Phang Tsang Wing

Assistant Director

(Organisational Excellence Unit)

Strategic Planning & Technology Division

STAFF EVENT HIGHLIGHTS



Chief District Judge's Cup (Captain's Ball)



National Day Carnival



Court Administrators Appreciation Day



Organisational Cohesion Day



Learning Day



Emergency Evacuation Exercise

This is an abridged version of the Annual Report 2013.
The full version can be downloaded from
the State Courts website (www.statecourts.gov.sg)
under Resources > Annual Reports.

