

**The Judiciary Administrator's Presentation
At the Special Finance Committee Meeting on 30 March 2004**

The Judiciary has the constitutional responsibility to administer justice fairly and impartially. Its role is to maintain an independent and competent judicial system which upholds the rule of law, safeguards the rights and freedoms of individuals and commands domestic and international confidence. In the financial year 2004-05, a total provision of \$981.1 million is sought.

High Court

2. The civil caseload in the High Court decreased by 6% from 42,133 cases in 2002 to 39,554 cases in 2003. The main factor was a reduction of 18% in bankruptcy petitions. Statistics for the first two months of 2004 indicate a continuing downward trend. Taking into consideration that the District Court has increased the financial limit of its civil jurisdiction from \$600,000 to \$1,000,000 since December 2003, I anticipate that the civil caseload of the Court of First Instance will drop in 2004.

3. The criminal caseload in the Court of First Instance fell by 22% from 433 cases in 2002 to 337 cases in 2003. It is worth noting that long cases (i.e. over 15 days) increased from 12 cases with 364 hearing days allotted in 2002 to 17 cases with 541 hearing days in 2003, representing an increase of 42% in the number of long cases and 49% in hearing days respectively.

District Court

4. The new limit of the civil jurisdiction of the District Court resulted in an 8% increase in caseload, but any long-term effect has yet to be seen.

5. To cope with the upsurge in caseload as a result of the increase of the civil jurisdictional limit, a Civil Running List has been introduced in the District Court since December 2003.

6. A two-year Pilot Scheme for the Reform of Ancillary Relief Procedures in Matrimonial Proceedings has been introduced in the Family Court since December 2003. The Pilot Scheme aims to encourage the parties to reach settlement and to reduce unnecessary costs, delay and stress during the proceedings.

7. The Pilot Scheme will be evaluated two years after its implementation.

Labour Tribunal

8. The number of claims filed at the Labour Tribunal eased by 9% to 11,263 cases in 2003 from the record high of 12,326 cases in 2002. The decrease in caseload, coupled with the enhancement measures introduced in the last few years (such as setting up an additional day court, adjusting the mix of callover and trial courts, and strengthening the number and quality of support staff), have improved the waiting time considerably and stabilised it within the target time.

Small Claims Tribunal

9. The number of claims in the Small Claims Tribunal surged to 113,381 cases in 2003, a leap of 25% over 90,815 cases in 2002. We have re-deployed resources to cope with the workload and managed to keep waiting time within target.

Resource Centre for Unrepresented Litigants

10. The Resource Center commenced operation on 22 December 2003. It receives an average of 20 visitors a day. About 60% of the visitors are parties to civil proceedings in the High Court or District Court. The rest are intended litigants who want to know the procedure for commencing actions.

11. The Resource Centre has published a series of pamphlets outlining the court procedures in the High Court and the District Court. They are supplemented by videos. Such reference materials are also available for public access on the Judiciary's website.

Information Technology

12. As a continuous effort to improve court services, the Judiciary keeps exploring areas in which automation could be used to provide the public with better access to justice.

13. We shall establish a case management system for the Obscene Articles Tribunal to improve its operation efficiency and allow the public to search for notices of classification made by the Tribunal more easily.

With that, all court registries will be provided with case management systems.

Conclusion

14. To make optimal use of resources, we have introduced a number of efficiency initiatives. The merger of Western Magistrates' Courts with the Eastern Magistrates' Courts already took effect on 2 January 2004. A number of Magistrates' Courts will be merged in the next few years. The process in promoting efficiency initiatives in the Judiciary is a continuous one. The Chief Justice has stated that despite budgetary constraints, the quality of justice must be maintained and cannot be compromised.

15. Thank you.