

# Announcement by Judiciary

The following is issued on behalf of the Judiciary:

The Judiciary today (February 21) announced that in view of public health considerations, all hearings of the courts/tribunals originally scheduled from February 24 (Monday) to March 1 (Sunday) will generally be adjourned to a date to be fixed. Despite the general adjournment, the courts will continue to handle urgent and essential hearings/matters during this period.

The continuation of the general adjournment from February 24 to March 1

The decisions to generally adjourn court proceedings and close court registries/offices and to extend the current general adjournment period until March 1 were made after striking a careful balance between public health considerations on the one hand and the public interest involved in the due administration of justice on the other. To minimise the risk of outbreak of COVID-19 in the community, every sector in Hong Kong, including the Judiciary, has its responsibility. In the case of the Judiciary, efforts are made to minimise the flow of people in court premises and avoid the gathering of crowds in confined areas such as courtrooms and registry areas as far as practicable. For this purpose, court hearings have been limited to those which are urgent and essential, and that in conducting such urgent and essential hearings, a whole range of preventive measures are being put in place, including reducing the number of public seats available in courtrooms. At the same time, the Judiciary has continued to deal with other urgent and essential business on paper during the adjournment period as and when required.

The general adjournment and its duration are unprecedented. The Judiciary recognises the impact it has on the daily operation and businesses of the courts, and the concerns it may have caused for court users and the public. During the past few weeks, the Judiciary has been constantly reviewing the scope of urgent and essential businesses, and making adjustments on a regular basis, bearing in mind that the longer the general adjournment has become, the more matters may become urgent and essential. As a result of the latest review, an updated list of urgent and essential matters will be effective from February 24. These would include fresh remand cases, urgent and essential criminal matters including bail-related and sentencing hearings, handing down of judgments for cases with urgency or great public importance, and other urgent applications to the courts. In addition, the courts will, as far as practicable, handle matters which can be dealt with by paper disposal.

Court/tribunal registries and offices will continue to be closed until March 1, except for providing support for the handling of the above urgent and essential court hearings/matters.

## Enhanced measures to support the handling of urgent and essential court businesses effective from February 24

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The Judiciary recognises that as the continued prolongation of the general adjournment, there is a need to enhance various measures so that more urgent and essential matters could be handled effectively. Such measures include the following:

(a) Judges and Judicial Officers will, as far as practicable and as permitted by law, pro-actively manage both civil and criminal cases which have fallen within the adjournment period and cases which are listed in the following two weeks on a rolling basis, and to give directions to parties concerned on paper;

(b) For civil cases:

(i) Judges and Judicial Officers will strive to deal with court businesses and applications, in particular interlocutory applications, by paper disposal as far as practicable; and

(ii) There will be greater use of electronic means (e.g. emails) for receiving documents from parties to facilitate paper disposal and avoid physical attendance at court premises; and

(c) For criminal cases where the presence of the defendant or an appellant is required under the law, urgent and essential cases will be identified under the proactive case management by the Judges and Judicial Officers, and would be suitably handled.

In coming up with the enhanced measures, the Judiciary has been in close communication with all relevant external stakeholders, including the Bar Association and the Law Society, and have taken their views and suggestions into account as appropriate. The Judiciary will continue to closely liaise with all stakeholders in working out any further arrangements. Any further enhancement measures will be announced in due course.

### Preparation for resumption

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The Judiciary is also actively preparing for the resumption of proceedings and the re-opening of court registries/offices for all levels of courts/tribunals when the public health situation permits. In working out the detailed arrangements, the following principles would be adopted:

(a) An orderly resumption of both registry businesses and court proceedings is of the paramount importance;

(b) A staggered and progressive approach is to be adopted to ensure orderly resumption; and

(c) Parties concerned, be they legally represented or litigants in person, will be given clear notifications and sufficient lead time for preparation of their cases, regardless of whether the hearings are to be re-‘fixed or proceed as scheduled.

In working out the detailed resumption arrangements, the Judiciary will continue to closely liaise with all relevant stakeholders. Once the arrangements are ready, public announcement(s) will be made at the appropriate time(s).

#### Enquiries and information update

For enquiries regarding general arrangements on the court businesses during the period, the following hotlines are being operated from Monday to Friday 10am to 1pm and 2pm to 4pm:

- General Information: 2869 0869
- Court of Final Appeal: 2123 0123
- High Court: 2523 2212
- Probate: 2840 1683
- District Court: 2845 5696
- Family Court: 2840 1218
- Lands Tribunal: 2771 3034
- Labour Tribunal: 2625 0020
- Small Claims Tribunal: 2877 4068
- Magistrates' Courts: 2677 8373

The Judiciary will continue to post updated information, including Daily Cause Lists, messages related to the Judiciary's arrangements arising from public health considerations, and advice to court users visiting the courts during the general adjournment period, on the Judiciary website ([www.judiciary.hk](http://www.judiciary.hk)). Court users are advised to check the website for updated information as necessary.

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## Transcript of remarks of media session

The Chief Secretary for Administration, Mr Matthew Cheung Kin-chung; the Secretary for Security, Mr John Lee; and the Secretary for Food and Health, Professor Sophia Chan, met the media this morning (February 21) before attending the meeting of the Legislative Council Finance Committee. Following is the transcript of remarks of the media session:

Reporter: Secretary, can you give us some of the latest updates regarding the

situation in Diamond Princess, especially regarding those close contacts when they return back to Hong Kong?

Secretary for Food and Health: Regarding the close contacts of the confirmed cases on the Diamond Princess cruise ship, earlier we learnt from the Japanese Government that they must be quarantined for 14 days after they have been in contact with the confirmed case. The Japanese authority will provide land quarantine facilities for these close contacts. The Department of Health does not think it is ideal for these people to continue to stay on the cruise ship given it has confirmed cases coming out every day. Therefore, it is not an appropriate quarantine facility. We have been working closely with our colleagues in the Immigration Department, through various sources, to urge the Japanese Government to provide land quarantine facilities to these close contacts of the confirmed cases. Up till yesterday, we have learnt from Japanese Government that we are able to take them back if we wish and that they can be exempted from quarantine in Japan. We have very quickly designed a plan for these close contacts of confirmed cases and work closely with our Immigration Department and Security Bureau colleagues so that we can take these close contacts of confirmed cases back to Hong Kong at the earliest convenience.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)

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## **Public service arrangement for Legal Aid Department between February 24 and 28**

To align with the special work arrangement announced by the Government, the Legal Aid Department (LAD) today (February 21) announced that the LAD offices will open from 9.30am to 1pm and 2pm to 4pm between February 24 and 28 to provide basic necessary and limited civil and criminal legal aid application and litigation services.

The following LAD offices will provide limited public services:

- Information and Application Services Unit (located on 25/F, Queensway Government Offices (QG0)),
  - Crime Section (located on 25/F, QG0),
  - Civil Litigation Section 1 (located on 26/F, QG0),
  - Civil Litigation Section 2 (located on 30/F, Revenue Tower, Wan Chai),
- and
- Costing Unit and Enforcement Unit (both located on 27/F, QG0).

For enquiries, please contact the following offices during the above office hours:

- Information and Application Services Unit: 2537 7717 (for civil legal aid services)
- Crime Section: 2867 3139
- Civil Litigation Section 1: 2867 3123
- Civil Litigation Section 2: 2594 7884
- Costing Unit and Enforcement Unit: 2867 3152

Members of the public may also contact the LAD for other enquiries through its 24-hour hotline (2537 7677), email ([ladinfo@lad.gov.hk](mailto:ladinfo@lad.gov.hk)) or fax (2537 5948).

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## GLD's latest service arrangement

The Government Logistics Department (GLD) announced today (February 21) that the provision of its Gazette service will continue and the GLD Collection Office on the 10th floor of North Point Government Offices will provide services for collection of Gazette fees on Monday and Tuesday from 8.30am to 1pm and from 2pm to 5pm until further notice. For enquiries, please call 2537 1910 between 9am and 6pm from Monday to Friday.

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## Transport Department to adjust limited service arrangement

To align with the special work arrangement announced by the Government yesterday (February 20) to reduce social contacts and the risk of the spread of the COVID-19 virus in the community, the Transport Department (TD) announced today (February 21) that the TD will continue to provide limited services to members of the public until further notice. The adjusted arrangements are as follows:

### Licensing and related services

Licensing Offices at Admiralty, Cheung Sha Wan, Kwun Tong and Sha Tin will continue to suspend walk-in counter services, but will process licensing applications submitted by applicants with scheduled appointments, by post or online (except for the direct issue of a full Hong Kong driving licence). Applicants who have made an online appointment for renewal of a full driving licence/vehicle licence or an application for an international driving permit

from February 24 to 28 can visit the Licensing Office concerned at the scheduled time.

To cater for service needs, the TD has increased the quota for online appointments for renewals of a full driving licence/vehicle licence or applications for an international driving permit from February 24 to 28, and the period opened for appointment has been extended from two weeks to eight weeks. Members of the public without prior bookings may submit applications by post or online, or via the drop-in boxes placed at each Licensing Office from 10am to 5pm from Monday to Friday. Those submitting an application by post or via drop-in box should put the completed application form, all necessary documents and the appropriate fee (by crossed cheque payable to either "The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region" or "The Government of the HKSAR") into an envelope. Original identity documents or cash must not be sent by post or drop-in box. Members of the public should submit applications to the relevant Licensing Office in accordance with the types of licensing services currently provided by them. The TD advised members of the public to submit applications after the TD's resumption of full services unless there are urgent needs.

Under the limited service arrangements, the TD will as much as practicable accord priority to processing renewal applications for licences/permits for which the validity period has expired or is about to expire. Upon receipt of the completed application form, all necessary documents and the appropriate fee, the TD will send out the licence/permit for which the application has been successful by registered mail as soon as practicable. If an application requires checking of an original identity document, or if necessary for other reasons, the TD will contact the applicant to make arrangements.

For enquiries, members of the public can contact Licensing Offices at the following numbers:

Hong Kong Licensing Office	2804 2636
Kowloon Licensing Office	2150 7728
Kwun Tong Licensing Office	2775 6835
Sha Tin Licensing Office	2606 1468

The Public Vehicles Unit, the Vehicle Records Office, the Driving Licence Records Office, the Driving Offence Points Office and the Cross Boundary Unit of the TD will continue to provide limited services under special work arrangements as implemented starting from February 10. For details, please refer to the press release issued on February 8.

([www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202002/08/P2020020800543.htm](http://www.info.gov.hk/gia/general/202002/08/P2020020800543.htm))

#### Driving test services

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Driving test (road tests) services, driving tests (written test Part A), taxi written tests and test appointment services will continue to be suspended until further notice. Affected candidates will be notified

individually for rescheduling of the test dates. Driving Test Centres are preparing for the gradual resumption of normal services. The TD will announce the latest service arrangements in advance.

#### Vehicle examination services

The Vehicle Examination Centres will continue to provide vehicle examination services for vehicles with an appointment from Monday to Friday.