

REMARKS BY MINISTER LAWRENCE WONG, CO-CHAIR OF THE MULTI-MINISTRY TASKFORCE ON COVID-19, AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE ON COVID-19 AT NATIONAL PRESS CENTRE ON 28 MAY 2020

Good evening. The Multi-Ministry Taskforce has announced and explained the framework for the re-opening of our economy and society over three phases. Let me now briefly sketch out what all of us can expect in the coming weeks.

The circuit breaker will end on the first of June, and thereafter we embark on Phase 1 which we have already announced and explained. Phase 1 alone will see about 75% of the economy resuming operations. Thereafter, we will continue to monitor the situation, particularly over the first two weeks of June. If the community transmission – if infection rates over these two weeks remain low and stable – then we will decide by the middle of June on whether we want to take the next step to move to Phase 2; and that means Phase 2 could happen before the end of June.

Broadly speaking, Phase 2 will entail the resumption of a wider range of activities, and we expect almost the entire economy to reopen by the start of Phase 2. The broad items that we are looking at for the resumption of activities in Phase 2 will include, for example, retail shops and consumer services. It will include dining-in at F&B outlets, but subject to a cap of 5 people. It will include the opening of sports facilities and more public venues, including stadiums and swimming pools. It will include allowing social interactions and family visits, again subject to this group size cap at 5 people.

There will be activities in higher-risk settings which we will have to look at more carefully. These are typically activities or venues with large gatherings of people, or close contacts of people in enclosed spaces. They will include places like museums, libraries, cinemas and theatres, religious functions. They will also include venues like bars, pubs, clubs and discos. All of these venues and settings, based on our experience and overseas experience, have had instances where there have been cases of transmission in such settings. So, we want to take a more cautious approach for activities in these areas to resume.

What we will do is, we will begin conversations and discussions with businesses and organisations across these different settings on the safeguards and safe management measures that will be needed. Subject to these measures being in place, we will then discuss with the entities on the precise timing of when they can resume activities within Phase 2. They may not all resume at the start of Phase 2; but if they have the safeguards and precautions in place, they could resume later but still within Phase 2.

In parallel, while we talk about reopening of these activities in our community, we are also continuing with conversations and work on reopening our borders - establishing travel bubbles with countries where the virus situation is under control and having safe green lane travel arrangements with specific countries. The idea is to have clear protocols in place that would include testing of travellers from one country to Singapore and vice versa. With these testing protocols in place, we can have assurance that the traveller is free from infection and then essential travel can then resume; step-by-step, depending on the countries that we have established these green lanes, or travel bubbles, with. That's work in progress.

The conversations and discussions we're having with countries vary; some (are) at more advanced stages, some we're just starting. As and when we are ready, we will announce more

details on any particular country for which we have reached (an) agreement (with). This will allow essential travel to resume. Particularly for businesses that are based here in Singapore, where their staff and employees need to have some travel around the region, I think this is going to be an important measure that will allow not only business to resume, but jobs to continue. We can then ensure that Singaporeans can continue to work not just in Singapore, but in places where they need to travel for work.

Having these arrangements does not mean we will allow mass market travel. That will take a bit longer. The arrangements I've just described refers to essential travel, subject to all the arrangements and safeguards as I've just described and the travel bubble that we will work out with respective countries. It's not for mass market travel, which I think will take a lot longer to resume. Not just in Singapore but also internationally.

So those are the things we are working on now and we thought it would be useful to share with Singaporeans, to give everyone a clearer sense of what to expect over the coming weeks, both in terms of the reopening Phase 1 and then subsequently (moving) to Phase 2 before the end of June, possibly, as I said, depending on the situation and the assessment of our community transmission in the first two weeks of June.

We are also working on easing of travel restrictions and resuming travel with specific countries. As we do all of these things, we can expect activity level to rise and therefore I want to reiterate what Minister Gan said just now – it is even more important for everyone to take responsibility of their actions. Because with more activities, the likelihood of transmission rises, and we have to be prepared that there will be more cases. So, it is all the more important for us to stay vigilant, to be socially responsible and to do all the necessary things that each individual has to do. Do not just rely on government measures or government rules, all of us have to do our part as individuals – uphold high standards of personal hygiene, wear a mask when we are out, see a doctor if we are ill – all these basic precautions that we have been talking about since the start of the outbreak.

Businesses, too, have to take responsibility – put in place safe management practices in their workplaces, ensure that their work settings are safe, not only for their employees but also for their customers. And we certainly hope that businesses will step up. For those that are unable to resume operations immediately after the circuit breaker, use this period – use the next few weeks – to put in place all the necessary precautions and measures that you can in your work premise, and make it safe for your employees, as well as your customers. This is absolutely critical in order for us to be able to resume safely.

As we prepare ahead for Phase 1 and later Phase 2, we will continue, of course, to be vigilant and take prompt enforcement action. Businesses must be aware that if a case were to emerge in their workplace setting, if clusters were to emerge later, they run the risk of having their entire outlet, business or shop closed for quite a while. So this should give every incentive for businesses to take responsibility and to do their part to put in place all the necessary precautions and safeguards so that they can resume and reopen safely.

I hope this provides a better sense of what everyone can expect in the coming weeks. The situation is uncertain; it is fluid; many things can change. But we have put out as much information as we can on the things that Singaporeans can expect in the coming weeks ahead.

So that everyone has a clearer picture of what we will be embarking towards – starting with Phase 1 and then moving on to Phase 2. Thank you.