

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 19 MAY 2020

Good evening. I want to start by first thanking all Singaporeans and residents of Singapore for working so hard over the past few weeks in helping us to bring the outbreak under control, and significantly reduce our infection rates in the community.

Because of all our collective efforts, we are now ready to exit the circuit breaker, and we can now start planning to resume activities safely and in a phased manner. You have all heard the detailed plans for Phase 1 from the respective Ministers. We are starting Phase 1 of the reopening in a very careful and calibrated manner. Many restrictions that are in place today will continue in Phase 1.

I know Singaporeans will be disappointed; many have been hoping that with the end of the circuit breaker, they will be able to go out freely, to socialise with their friends, to meet their families and relatives and even dine together. Unfortunately, all of these activities will have to wait, and I hope everyone understands why this is necessary. We have to do this in a very careful and calibrated manner, because we do not want to risk a flaring up of the virus again. And importantly, we do not want to sacrifice the efforts that all of us have put in over the past few weeks in controlling the outbreak.

Some businesses will not be able to reopen in Phase 1. They include retail shops, personalised services – all of these are not planned for reopening in Phase 1. They can start preparing for Phase 2, but in Phase 1, because of the risk we assessed, they will still have to remain closed. The assurance we would like to give to all of them is that the Government will continue to support these businesses and their workers as they are unable to reopen from 2 June onwards. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance will be announcing more details on the measures that the Government will provide next week in Parliament on 26 May. As I said, our assurance is that we will continue to provide support to these businesses that are unable to open.

We can expect to be in Phase 1 for a few weeks. We will need everyone to be patient and disciplined throughout this period of Phase 1. I can understand that we have been in the circuit breaker for some time. People have been disciplined so far but the feeling of being cooped up at home for a long period is starting to take its effect on people; and, there is a very strong desire to go out, to socialise, (and) to interact with your friends. But I hope we can all maintain our discipline for a while longer.

As I said, Phase 1 will take some time. We may have to continue with Phase 1 for a few weeks and continue with quite strict measures for quite some time more; because if we were to open up too quickly and allow all these social activities to restart, there is a risk that the virus will flare up and we might see many more cases and clusters forming. We do not want that to happen. We start in a controlled fashion in Phase 1, and if we are able to keep community transmission in a low and stable manner, (and) maintain control over the virus situation – both in the dormitories and in our community, then we will be in a position to enter Phase 2.

We call on everyone to do their part as we prepare for this new phase of reopening and as we enter Phase 1 of the reopening process. Stay disciplined, uphold personal and social

responsibility so that we will be in a strong position to eventually enter Phase 2 and have a broader range of activities resume safely at that point in time. Thank you.