

**DELIVERED REMARKS BY MANPOWER MINISTER JOSEPHINE TEO AT MTF PRESS CONFERENCE ON 1 JUNE 2020**

Good evening.

**Significant progress in recovery operations of migrant worker dormitories**

By today, **around 40,000 migrant workers would have been cleared of Covid-19 infections** and will be ready to get back to work.

- About 12,000 of them are essential workers that have already moved out of the dormitories into other short-term accommodation previously. They have been tested, cleared and have continued to work.
- More than 20,000 workers have recovered and have been re-housed at various temporary sites.
- Another 8,000 are workers living in all the dormitories. These workers have either tested negative, or were tested positive but have fully recovered and discharged, and living with fellow workers who have also been cleared of the virus in the dormitories.

This is the composition of those 40,000 migrant workers who have been cleared of Covid-19 infections and they can all resume work.

At the same time, the Inter-agency Task Force (ITF) will be giving the first batch of 60 dormitories “cleared” status from tomorrow. This first batch consists 3 purpose-built dormitories, 57 factory-converted dormitories and construction temporary quarters.

What does it mean to say that a dormitory has been “cleared”? It means that every block in the dormitory has been cleared, and every resident in those blocks have been cleared of Covid-19 infections.

This is very remarkable progress made by the ITF to get us onto the recovery phase.

- In order to facilitate the safe return to work for the workers, the ITF has **first enhanced the medical support for migrant workers**. We have started on a **programme of systematic and regular testing** and **enhanced health surveillance**, to enable early detections of infection, subsequent re-infections and minimise the risk of widespread transmission.
- The ITF also worked with dorm operators and employers to put in place a series of **Safe Working, Safe Living** and **Safe Rest Days** measures.

In the months ahead, to properly manage the safe resumption of work, the MOM, ITF also worked with DSTA and GovTech to create new technology solutions.

- One of these is the **new Access Code feature on the SGWorkPass app**. Almost all of our migrant workers have downloaded the SGWorkPass app.
- This new Access Code feature will allow workers, employers and dormitory operators to have clarity about who can exit the dormitories to work.
- You need to have a green code showing up on the SGWorkPass that states that you have met all the conditions, which includes your employer having been granted approval to resume

operations to resume work, and the dormitory that you are living in is also cleared. These conditions must be met in order for the worker to be able to resume work safely. The SGWorkPass app with this new Access Code feature will give clarity to all the parties involved.

- All these efforts will go a long way to protect the health of migrant workers, as well as other workers and the community at large.

### **We are now also planning ahead for the longer term.**

At the start of the outbreak, I had said that we will look into how we could improve and raise the standards in migrant worker dormitories.

The dormitories allow the migrant workers to be in the company of friends, cook eat, relax and even pray together.

Given our land constraints, dormitories are also a practical approach to housing some of our migrant workers. This is unlikely to change.

What will need to change, however are specifications, as well as the management of the dormitories including the daily living habits of the dormitory residents.

**Changes will be necessary to better protect the workers from widespread transmission, and to strengthen the resilience of the dormitories against pandemic risks**, such as those posed by Covid-19, something that we have never experienced before.

Minister Lawrence Wong will talk about how much more dormitory capacity we are planning for, both in the short- and longer-term.

In particular, the building up of temporary dormitories in the short term presents us with an **opportunity to pilot new standards**, and test things out, before we decide on the specifications of the permanent new builds. We have outlined the new specifications that will be piloted in the media release.

In testing out these new specifications, let me emphasise a few points:

- a. Our overall aim is to strengthen resilience against pandemic risks. So it is not just that we try and reduce the risk of widespread transmission, but **how we can respond more effectively** when there is an outbreak. These two objectives have to be met.
- b. We should work on the assumption that the risk will always be present in a dormitory just like in any household. A dormitory will always be a big household. You can make sure fewer people share the same room or other facilities, but **there must also be discipline in the practice of hygiene and segregation**. On luxury cruise ships and even aircraft carriers, the virus can spread easily. In those settings, you don't have many people sharing room arrangements. In aircraft carriers, certainly the discipline level will be quite high. So we must be under no illusion that any specifications on their own will get the job done.
- c. This is why the pilot is **not just about the new dorm specifications** – that is actually the easy part. It is **about how safe living practices can be made a new way of life** in the dormitories, where the residents can cook safely, eat safely, relax safely. The dormitories will also have to be managed differently, with operators helping to **instil a higher degree of discipline**, on

inter-mixing and ensuring tight isolation of infected workers if and when that happens, for example.

We will work closely with the dormitory operators, as well as employer groups in the Construction, Marine and Process, Manufacturing sectors on the quick build dormitories.

As this is a pilot, we expect it to be an **iterative process with refinements** as we go along.

Through the pilot, we will also **assess the effectiveness, scalability and sustainability** of the new standards.

At the end of the day, these are necessary steps that we have to take to keep the workers and community safe, and to allow Singaporeans to be able continue to benefit from the migrant workers' contributions.