

PM Lee's COVID-19 address in full : This is SG United, We are SG United.

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Mr Lee also underlined that the situation in Singapore remains under control and that the nation will not change its state of the disease outbreak response system (DORSCON) to "red"



Singapore , 12 March 2020

Here's the full address:

My fellow Singaporeans, good evening.

Five weeks ago, I spoke to you on our COVID-19 situation.

Much has happened since then. So it is timely to update you again, and share with you what we can expect down the road. I will speak about three aspects of the issue: medical, economic and psychological.

MEDICAL OUTLOOK

On the medical front, we continue to see new cases in Singapore. Most either have travelled overseas, or can be traced to imported cases. Each time we have been able to isolate them, do contact tracing, and quarantine the close contacts. So our numbers have not blown up. But neither have we been able to eradicate the virus, despite our best efforts.

At the same time, around us, the number of cases is rising rapidly. China's situation is stabilising, but new cases are emerging all over the world - in Europe, America, and the Middle East. Globally, the number of cases is doubling every 5 to 7 days. Hence today, the WHO declared COVID-19 to be a pandemic.

What does this mean? It means that WHO assesses that many countries will see full blown outbreaks, with sustained community transmission, like what has happened in South Korea and Italy. And unlike SARS, this outbreak will continue for some time – a year, and maybe longer.

The WHO named one key reason for the rapid spread: many countries had not taken the situation seriously enough – what the WHO called “alarming levels of inaction”. Here in Singapore, we have all along taken COVID-19 with the utmost seriousness. In fact, the WHO praised our efforts and held Singapore up as an example to emulate.

But we too face a serious situation. We expect more imported cases, and therefore new clusters and new waves of infection, this time coming from many countries rather than one or two. We have already imposed some travel restrictions, for example, for China, Iran, South Korea, Italy. We will have to tighten up further temporarily, though we cannot completely shut ourselves

off from the world.

What else must we do? First, because COVID-19 will be with us for a long time, there are baseline things that we must get used to, like practising good personal hygiene, adopting new social norms and discouraging large gatherings, and generally, maintaining some physical distance from one another. That is why we already scaled down community activities, especially for the seniors.

And we can do more in other areas. For example, at religious gatherings. In South Korea, the cases spread through the Shincheonji church group. In Singapore, two of our big clusters happened in church groups. And several Singaporeans who attended a big international religious gathering in Kuala Lumpur recently have caught the virus. The issue is of course not religion itself, but that the virus can spread quickly to many people in crowded settings, like religious gatherings and services. That is why Saudi Arabia temporarily stopped umrah pilgrimages; and the Pope live-streamed his sermons to avoid crowds on Saint Peter's Square. I hope Singaporeans understand that during this period we may need to shorten religious services, or reduce our attendance at such gatherings. Please work with your religious leaders to make these practical adjustments.

Second, we need to plan for a possible spike in COVID-19 cases. With very large numbers, if it happens, we will not be able to hospitalise and isolate every case like we do now. But we now know that the majority of patients, in fact 80% of them, only experience mild symptoms. The ones that are most at risk are the elderly, and those with pre-existing conditions like high blood pressure or lung problems. So with larger numbers, the sensible thing will be to hospitalise only the more serious cases, and encourage those with mild symptoms to see their family GP and rest at home – isolate themselves. This way, we focus resources on the seriously ill, speed up our response time, and hopefully, minimise the number of fatalities.

In the meantime, we are freeing up ICU and hospital beds and facilities, to create additional capacity to meet any surge in COVID-19 numbers. But rest assured, any Singaporean who needs urgent medical care, whether for COVID-19 or other illnesses, will be taken care of.

Besides medical plans, if there is a spike, we will also need additional social distancing measures. These will be temporary like suspending school, staggering work hours, or compulsory telecommuting. They will be extra “brakes”, to be implemented when we see a spike in cases. The extra brakes will slow down transmission of the virus, prevent our healthcare system from being overwhelmed, and help bring the numbers back down. After the situation improves, we can ease off and go back to the baseline precautions.

But let me emphasise this: the situation in Singapore remains under control. We are not going to DORSCON Red. We are not locking down our city like the Chinese, South Koreans or Italians have done. What we are doing now is to plan ahead for some of these more stringent measures, try them out, and prepare Singaporeans for when we actually need to implement them.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

As we consider these next steps, one major concern we have is the impact on our economy.

Our economy is taking a big hit. That is why we did the S\$4 billion Support and Stabilisation Package in the Budget last month to help businesses, workers and households tide over the immediate period. This has helped. But with things still unfolding, we knew we might have to do more. The situation is especially serious for some sectors – hotels, aviation, hospitality, and freelancers in the gig economy. But nobody has been spared. Everyone feels the impact, to different degrees.

So the Government is working on a second package of measures. We will help our companies with their costs and cash-flow, to keep them afloat through the storm. We will help our workers keep their jobs, and retrain during their downtime, so that when things return to normal, our workers will be the first out of the gate, and immediately productive. And we will give those who are retrenched and unemployed, as well as their families, an extra helping hand to see through this difficult period.

SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL RESILIENCE

I am sharing these plans with you to reassure you that we are on top of things, and thinking ahead. We anticipated the medical and economic consequences. I am confident that we can deal with them.

But what is also critical is the psychological aspect of this fight. Our frontline staff are working extremely hard to keep Singapore going - healthcare workers, immigration officers, civil servants, public transport workers, taxi drivers, cleaning staff. Singaporeans are cheering them on. The Government, for its part, has been open and transparent with our plans. When we made direct appeals to Singaporeans, for example, only wear face masks when unwell; or not to worry about our supermarkets running out of food or household items, people accepted our reassurances, and behaviour changed. I am

grateful that most Singaporeans are responding calmly and responsibly. Thank you for your trust and support.

Singapore's response has received international accolades. Underlying this is the social and psychological resilience of our people. What makes Singapore different from other countries is that we have confidence in each other, we feel that we are all in this together, and we do not leave anyone behind. This is SG United, we are SG United.

We will remain in this high risk state for some time to come. But if we keep up our guard, and take practical precautions to protect ourselves and our families, we will be able to keep our economy going, and carry on with our daily lives. In such a crisis, everyone has a part to play. I hope you will work with me and colleagues to keep our families safe, keep Singapore secure, and move forward together.

Thank you.

[Source : Prime Minister's Office Singapore](#)