

ANNOUNCEMENT BY SPEAKER
**MEASURES IN PARLIAMENT TO REDUCE RISK OF FURTHER SPREAD OF
COVID-19**
SITTING OF 25 MARCH 2020, WEDNESDAY

Honourable Members,

Today, Singapore is in the midst of tackling the COVID-19 threat. We are all working hard to keep all Singaporeans safe, pressing on with our efforts to mitigate the risk of local spread and to reduce the further importation of cases. We should remain on guard but never let COVID-19 paralyse us as a society. Now Parliament is our nation's law-making body. As parliamentarians, all of us have pledged to discharge our duties and serve Singaporeans to the best of our abilities. We must remain steadfast in carrying out these responsibilities effectively despite the challenging circumstances posed by COVID-19.

2 Nevertheless, it is equally important to protect everyone's well-being even as we conduct our proceedings. We must maintain our vigilance to do our utmost to comply with the necessary precautions as advised by the Government's Multi-Ministry Taskforce.

3 Hence, beginning today, we have implemented safe distancing measures for all honourable Members. During Sittings, Members are seated at spaced intervals, as you can see now, both within the Chamber and extending to the galleries at other levels. Members will also be taking their refreshments in separate groups to further reduce mingling. To complement the maintenance of good personal hygiene, the respective groups will further use separate restrooms.

4 These steps are aligned to the stricter safe distancing measures which the Taskforce had announced last week to prevent further spread of COVID-19 cases. Over the weekend, the Public Service Division further issued specific guidelines to intensify the implementation of safe distancing measures across agencies.

5 Let me assure Members that no matter where you are now seated, you can still make your speeches and present your impassioned ideas here in this Chamber. The microphones placed near you will duly capture and record your speeches. This is the first time ever that we have spread out the seats for Members in such a manner, and over two floors. Members of the public and media at the galleries will also be seated at spaced intervals. It will take some getting used to so thank you, honourable Members and everyone here, for your cooperation as we all play our part in being socially responsible.

6 As we cannot be certain how long COVID-19 will be with us, we will continue to monitor all advisories to see if further precautionary measures should be implemented for forthcoming Sittings.

7 Beyond Sittings, our measures in Parliament also extend to the staff here at the Secretariat and to all visitors to the House. Since early February, we have steadily stepped up the necessary precautions in line with all advisories issued. The measures include having the temperature of all staff and visitors screened before entry, requiring them to declare their overseas travel history, and maintaining a contact list for all visitors.

8 As the ongoing COVID-19 situation evolves, we have been regularly reviewing and updating business continuity plans. Our Secretariat workforce has been split into separate teams, with distancing measures rolled out for all staff. The measures include telecommuting, staggering working hours, splitting shifts and working from separate locations within the House. We have also reduced and set limits on the number of students for our educational tours of the House. We will do our best in ensuring that these adjustments do not compromise the quality of services and operations that remain available and uninterrupted to honourable Members and the public.

9 It is not business as usual as we deal with COVID-19. We will face varying degrees of inconveniences and disruptions to our daily lives, routines, and even our economy, which has a very real impact on all Singaporeans. Yet, we must take all precautionary measures seriously and fully comply with them to prevent its further spread.

10 We have done it before during SARS and H1N1, and such collective social responsibility by Singapore and Singaporeans is how we will ultimately prevail over the spectre of COVID-19. Let us also do this as Singapore (SG) United – by looking out for the most vulnerable amongst us, and supporting and encouraging one another in keeping ourselves, our families and friends, as well as our co-workers in Singapore safe.
