

1. MOVING FORWARD TO LIVE WITH COVID-19

On 24 Mar 2022, PM Lee addressed the nation on the COVID-19 situation and announced an easing of restrictions from 29 Mar onwards. Here are the key points:

- The battle against COVID-19 for the past two years has been a tough fight, and we have reached a major turning point where Singapore would be making a decisive move to living with COVID-19.
- Businesses and essential workers kept the economy going, adapting to the changing safe management measures and supply chain disruptions. Their grit, resourcefulness and resilience helped protect livelihoods and prepared us to emerge stronger from pandemic.
- Healthcare workers enabled us to maintain some form of normalcy in the past two years, making tremendous sacrifices to stay at their posts and perform their duties.
- The key to our response has been the trust that Singaporeans have placed in the government, in the medical authorities, and in each other. Through **everyone's collective effort**, Singapore's **healthcare system remains resilient** and held up even while under considerable stress at the peak of the Omicron wave.
- We will **continue adjusting our strategy** as we move towards living endemically with the virus. With the steps taken to move towards COVID-19 resilience, everyone should still play a part and exercise personal and social responsibility.

“Throughout our journey, we have kept faith and supported one another. This solidarity remains crucial as we tackle fresh challenges ahead.”

— Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong in a speech on the COVID-19 situation in Singapore on 24 Mar 2022

From 29 March 2022



Group Sizes

- ✓ Permissible group size for social gatherings will be increased from 5 to **10 persons** for mask-off activities (no maximum group size for mask-on settings)
- ✓ Maximum number of unique visitors per household will be increased to **10 persons at any one time**



Mask-wearing

- ✓ **Required** for indoor settings, **optional** for outdoor settings



Safe Distancing

- ✓ **Mask-on settings:** Safe distancing will not be required between individuals and groups
- ✓ **Mask-off settings:** Safe distancing will continue to be required



Workplace Requirements

- ✓ **75%** of those who can work from home will be allowed to return to the office



Cessation of Rostered Routine Testing (RRT) Regime

- ✓ RRT will not be required for all sectors



Capacity Limits

- ✓ For larger settings/events with >1,000 pax that are mask-on, a **capacity limit of 75%** will be imposed
- ✓ For smaller settings/events with ≤ 1,000 pax, **no capacity limit will be imposed**



Food and Beverage (F&B) establishments

- ✓ If all diners are fully vaccinated, groups of up to **10 persons** will be allowed to dine-in
- ✓ For hawker centres and coffeeshops, groups of up to 10 persons can dine-in **only** if full vaccination-differentiated SMMs (VDS) checks are implemented
- ✓ F&B establishments without full VDS checks may allow **groups of up to 5 fully vaccinated persons**
- ✓ Restriction on sale and consumption of alcohol after 10.30pm **will be lifted**

Infographic: Gov.sg

[Sources: ST, CNA, 24 Mar; PMO, 24 Mar; Gov.sg FB, 24 Mar]

2. EVERYONE HAS A PART TO PLAY FOR SINGAPORE'S NATIONAL DEFENCE

On 23 Mar 2022, Dr Ng Eng Hen, Minister for Defence, spoke about how Total Defence is essential to protect Singapore's sovereignty and way of life at the annual Total Defence Awards ceremony.

In his speech, Dr Ng highlighted how the **collective efforts of people** in Singapore formed the **strongest defence against COVID-19** which cannot be easily broken. Despite the fear and uncertainty brought about by the pandemic, **Singaporeans have stood together** to mount a Total Defence against COVID-19, ensuring that we protect both lives and livelihoods.

Total Defence remains of paramount importance for Singapore's safety, security, and sovereignty. It is a critical means by which we rally Singaporeans in the face of traditional and emerging threats confront us as a nation.

“ In Singapore, all six pillars of Total Defence went into action... Individuals, community groups and businesses stepped forward to reach out to groups which needed assistance, including migrant workers, underprivileged school children, and elderly who live alone. Total Defence in Singapore against COVID-19 saved lives and kept Singapore united and strong.”

— Defence Minister Dr Ng Eng Hen in a speech on 23 Mar 2022

Throughout the years, Singaporeans have stepped up to support each other to keep morale high in solidarity. Against the backdrop of the Russia-Ukraine war, many Singaporeans have shown their **support for Total Defence** in Straits Times forum letters.

“Let us not reply on others to defend us. When push comes to shove, only we Singaporeans can defend ourselves... It takes you and me to defend this land of ours, because this is home, truly.”

— Lee Teck Chuan, ST Forum (26 Mar 2022)

“Russia's invasion of Ukraine has shown how any state can be vulnerable. The events have also highlighted the importance of all the pillars of Singapore's Total Defence concept, not just military defence... We must work together to ensure we are ready for anything at any point in time.”

— Primary 6 student, Avishi Gurnani, ST Forum (21 Mar 2022)

Recognising the Efforts of Past and Present NSmen

NS55 campaign. On 26 Mar 22, Senior Minister of State for Defence, Mr Zaqy Mohamad announced the start of the year-long NS55 campaign on the sidelines of his visit to a mobilisation exercise at Maju Camp. The theme of NS55 ‘Generations of Strength’ reflects the collective resolve and dedication of our national servicemen across generations who have contributed to the defence and security of Singapore, and inspires Singaporeans to continue building a stronger Singapore.

As a token of appreciation to our past and present national servicemen for their contribution to the defence and security of Singapore, an NS55 Recognition Package comprising S\$100 worth of digital credits and a free one-year Safra or HomeTeamNS membership will be digitally disbursed. .

“ It is quite clear to us that as a country, the sole responsibility of defence and making sure we protect our sovereignty – that's our own... This mindset is something that cannot be built overnight. We've spent 55 years in the making of (NS) and I hope when the time comes, the need arises, Singaporeans are ready to defend the country.”

— Senior Minister of State for Defence, Mr Zaqy Mohamad, during a mobilisation exercise at Maju Camp on 26 Mar 2022

[Sources: CNA, 14 Feb; ST, 19 Mar; ST, 21 Mar; ST, CNA, TODAY, 26 Mar; MINDEF, 23 & 26 Mar]

3. PM LEE HSIEN LOONG'S VIEWS ON THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

PM Lee Hsien Loong went on a working visit to the United States (US) from 26 Mar 2022 to 2 Apr 2022, his first under the Biden administration. In Washington DC, PM Lee had a bilateral meeting with President Joseph (Joe) R. Biden Jr, and separate meetings with US Vice President Kamala D. Harris and other Cabinet Secretaries, as well as with senior members of the US Senate and House of Representatives. He also participated in a dialogue at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). In New York City, PM Lee met with United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, industry and financial leaders and other prominent US personalities.



At the meeting with US President Biden, both leaders **reaffirmed the robust, enduring and multi-faceted Singapore-US partnership, as well as a shared commitment to a stable, rules-based global order and welcomed new areas of cooperation**, including (a) the renewal and expansion of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to Deepen Cooperation on Infrastructure Development, (b) the establishment of the US-Singapore Cyber Dialogue, and (c) Singapore’s signing of the Artemis Accords to join the US-led international agreement that sets out guidelines for responsible space exploration.

During the trip, PM Lee made comments on the Russia-Ukraine conflict. These are the key points:

Singapore’s Principled Stand

- Singapore is a staunch supporter of international law and the UN Charter, which prohibits acts of aggression against a sovereign state. And this is why we have strongly condemned the unprovoked attack by Russia on Ukraine.
- The sovereignty, political independence, and territorial integrity of all countries, big and small, must be respected. The unprovoked military invasion of a sovereign country under any pretext is unacceptable. We cannot condone any country arguing that another country’s independence is the result of “historical errors and crazy decisions”.
- Singapore’s actions to constrain Russia’s capacity to conduct war against Ukraine are based on the principles that are fundamental to our survival and existence as an independent sovereign nation.
- The sanctions mark a “big step” for a small country like Singapore, and the hurdle is even “higher” for the country to impose sanctions on its own.
- In this case, as Russia’s invasion of Ukraine is “an egregious, flagrant and major violation of the international norms” and with a major consequence for the global order, including in our region, therefore, Singapore took a strong stand to impose financial sanctions and export controls on Russia.
- We have upheld these principles, and voted in accordance with them at the UN, in successive crises over many decades, involving different countries.
- Singapore has taken a “clear stand”, such as when it opposed Vietnam’s invasion of Cambodia in 1978. We also took a stand against the US’ invasion of Grenada at the UN General Assembly in 1983.

Implications for Asia-Pacific

- The Russia-Ukraine war has implications for Asia-Pacific. There are potential flash points and contentious issues in our region, which if not well-managed, could escalate to open conflict. Countries with interests in the regions need to pursue all efforts to settle disagreements through peaceful means, so that we can avoid reaching the point of no return.
- It is important to keep open channels of dialogue between countries, including at the highest level. This will help to manage developments in order to avoid conflict and prevent misreading each other’s intentions. We also need to create inclusive constructs to bridge differences and encourage cooperation and interdependence in the Indo-Pacific, for example, the APEC Leaders’ Meeting (AELM), and the US’ proposed Indo-Pacific Economic Framework.

What it means for Singapore

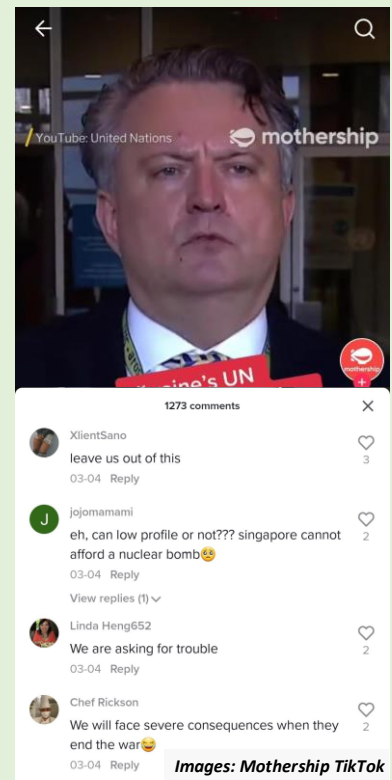
- The war is not over yet and both parties are not close to reaching an arrangement that would bring about peace. Military struggle will continue.
- For a small country like Singapore, we need to build up the country’s own defence and be well-equipped, and most importantly, to have the will to fight for one’s home.

“ This is my home, I am going to fight for it (and) if necessary, I’m willing to die for it. And it is that will to defend what is yours and to defend your family and friends that keeps the Ukrainians going, and that Singaporeans must have if we are going to keep ourselves safe in this world.”

— PM Lee at a doorstep interview with the Singapore media in New York City on 1 Apr 2022

Reports of Social Media Activity Aimed to Sway Singaporeans' Views on the Russia-Ukraine Conflict

- The media recently reported that there were **anonymous accounts on the video-sharing app, TikTok, attempting to sway Singaporeans' opinions over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.**
- Below a video showing Ukraine's United Nations Ambassador Sergiy Kyslytsya praising Singapore's diplomatic position as "brave as a tiger" on TikTok, almost every comment was critical of Singapore's decision to implement sanctions on Russia. Other comments belittle the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) to give the impression that it is hopeless for Singapore to take an opposing position to a big nuclear power. Many of the accounts also seem to be targeting a regional audience by using Malay.
- MHA, who has been monitoring closely for possible hostile information campaigns (HICs) directed at Singapore, has noticed TikTok accounts that repeatedly voiced opinions to convey a misleading impression of widespread local opposition to the Singapore government's position on the conflict. **While there are no detected coordinated HICs for now, MHA has flagged out the suspicious accounts to TikTok for review** as the accounts have characteristics that suggest that they might be inauthentic. TikTok has since completed the review and said that no action will be taken against the users as they do not violate the guidelines. The accounts also do not appear to be of foreign origin.
- MHA advised Singaporeans **to check the authenticity and credibility of information they come across and exercise discretion** when deciding whether or not to spread it further. For example, the flagged TikTok accounts usually lack personal information. They use a TikTok assigned username with a string of numbers, and have no followers yet follow a high number of accounts.
- **The public is encouraged to rely on reputable, identifiable and institutional sources for information, and cross-check information we get from elsewhere against such sources.**



[Sources: ST, 17 & 25 Mar]

4. THE "FIVE FRAGILITIES" OF THE WORLD AND HOW COUNTRIES CAN NAVIGATE THROUGH THEM

On 9 Mar, Senior Minister and Chairman Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS), Tharman Shanmugaratnam gave a speech at the IMAS-Bloomberg Investment Conference organised by the Investment Management Association of Singapore (IMAS). He said that we are facing a combination of risks and fragilities that is without a precedent in the last three quarters of a century. These are the "five fragilities":

Ukraine

- The Russia-Ukraine conflict represents a rupture in the system of international rules that govern global stability, and the sovereignty and territorial integrity of nation states.

Inflation

- Beyond Ukraine, higher-for-longer inflation and slower growth are now very likely for the world. We will have to deal with a broader set of shocks not only to oil prices, but also to the prices of food and other industrial products. The Russia-Ukraine conflict and sanctions are further disrupting supply chains that were only beginning to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Governments will have to deal with the social and political implications from addressing inflation pressures.

Climate

- The climate crisis is becoming more urgent. It is no longer possible to make adjustments to tackle climate change without taking energy security into consideration, especially with the Russia-Ukraine conflict.
- In the short term, the world will rely increasingly on fossil fuels to provide for energy security and search for new sources of fuel. While we experience these short-term trade-offs between energy security and sustainability, we need to redouble our efforts to make the longer term transition to cleaner energy and a sustainable future.

Global Health Security

- The risks of pandemics have been accentuated by global warming, the loss of biodiversity, deforestation, and increased human incursions into the natural world. Pandemics are happening more frequently and can be as severe or even more severe than COVID-19. It will require a massive collective effort, both within societies and globally, to become better prepared for the next pandemic.

Less Inclusive Growth

- We face less inclusive growth, both within and across countries. The impact of geopolitical instabilities, higher food and energy prices and slower growth, climate change and pandemics will hit the poorest and most vulnerable countries the hardest, and make it harder for developing countries to converge with the developed world. The last time we saw sharp food price increases was in 2008, when the Arab Spring happened. Social stability is affected and civil wars can erupt when food is scarce.

SM Tharman said that governments globally must address this “perfect long storm” in the following areas:

- **Geopolitical stability.** Stronger international rules of law or norms, more effective systems of deterrence and increased defence spending will be needed to preserve geopolitical stability.
- **Energy security and pandemic security.** There will be a need for increased spending to maintain or improve energy sustainability, social inclusivity and health security. Countries will need to invest in or strengthen global commons and do so earlier.
- **Innovation.** In climate change, there is a scope for innovation in storage and discovering new renewable sources, and in more efficient fossil fuel energy generation. Countries can also tackle carbon emissions through climate finance initiatives such as carbon taxing and pricing.
- **Durable system of multipolarity.** We need to avoid polarisation, for example, alternative payment and financial systems, and trade and economic systems. This will raise costs across the board without conferring greater security. This can be achieved with a new US-China understanding, and requires fortifying the international organisations such as International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and World Trade Organisation (WTO), and new global health mechanisms.

[Sources: MAS, 9 Mar]

“ We must fortify multilateralism, and the rules of the game to ensure that global stability is preserved, and that might is not right. Global stability is like oxygen for the international economic system. You don’t realise you need it when you have it, you realise how badly you need it when you don’t have it.”

— SM Tharman at the IMAS-Bloomberg Investment Conference on 9 Mar 2022

Dealing with Rising Costs in Singapore

- In his speech, SM Tharman explained how stagflation, a situation where an economy faces the twin challenges of slow economic growth and joblessness, and rising inflation, has become one of the world’s greatest concerns.
- At Parliament on 4 Apr, Minister for Finance Lawrence Wong said that inflationary pressures have been building up as countries try to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Bottlenecks in global supply chains and transportation, as well as labour shortages due to the tightening of manpower regulations during the pandemic have caused prices to increase.
- Due to the geopolitical tensions associated with the Russia-Ukraine conflict, food and energy prices have increased. It is now likely that global inflation will be higher for longer.
- The government has anticipated some of the risks, and taken actions through both monetary and fiscal policies. To help Singaporeans cope with rising costs, the government will bring forward the implementation of the 2022 Budget measures for households and businesses in Singapore.
- This is not the first time that Singapore has had to deal with such challenging external economic conditions. Other than the oil crises of the 1970s, there was also the 2008-09 Global Financial Crisis, and the on-going COVID-19 pandemic.
- Minister Wong said that we should not let this become a blame game or think that if Singapore were to lie low and remain silent on the Russia-Ukraine war, we could enjoy lower oil prices. While we cannot do much to change the external conditions, we can continue to keep a faith with one another, as we have done during the pandemic – looking out for each other, helping those in need, and never waiver from the conviction that we will always have each other’s backs.



[Sources: MOF, 4 Apr; MAS, 9 Mar]

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