

Lawrence Wong: It may take 4 to 5 years before Covid-19 pandemic ends

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Might take a while.

Minister for Education and co-chair of the Covid-19 Multi Ministry Taskforce (MTF) Lawrence Wong has said that the pandemic may last for another four to five years.

Wong was speaking at the 2021 edition of the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) annual Singapore Perspectives forum on Monday (Jan. 25).

"It may take four to five years"

In his 30-minute opening speech, Wong emphasised the uncertainties that Singapore will have to face in the next few years.

He said:

"There are still tremendous uncertainties ahead of us. And the bottom line is that we live in a shared world and no one is safe until everyone is safe. Of course, no pandemic goes on forever.

At some point in time that pandemic will pass, but it may take four to five years before we finally see the end of the pandemic, and the start of a post-Covid normal. What will this new post-Covid world look like? No one can tell."

Three resets

Wong subsequently shared his hopes about how Singapore can "reset" its future once the pandemic is over.

He focused on three main resets in his speech:

1. Fairer society
2. Greener Singapore
3. Stronger social solidarity

Fairer society

Wong said that addressing the widening gap between the "haves" and "have-nots" has always been at the top of the government's agenda.

The education minister also spoke about the importance of maintaining social mobility within Singapore through investments in preschools and equipping schools who have higher proportion of students from lower income and disadvantaged family backgrounds.

He also made note of the need for fundamental changes to Singapore's model of education, where learning would no longer be crammed into the first 20 years of an individual's, but instead sustained and updated throughout one's lifetime.

A greener Singapore

The next change Wong hoped to see was a greener Singapore, which he identified as an "existential emergency".

He pointed to some of the plans the government was undertaking, such as the development and implementation of renewable energy sources, phasing out petrol and diesel vehicles, and designing HDB towns with sustainable living in mind.

However, if Singapore continued to go green, Wong said that the nation would be able to position itself as a future hub for carbon trading and services in Asia, as well as service the region in the area of green finance.

"We are already one of the greenest cities in the world. But we must go further and build on what we have done to achieve greener growth and greener mindsets."

Strengthening social solidarity

Lastly, Wong called for Singapore to strengthen its social solidarity, which he labelled as a "silver lining" that the pandemic has presented to the nation.

Even before Covid-19 existed, Wong said that there were already "powerful forces chipping away at social cohesion," both in Singapore and other countries.

But he remains "confident" that Singapore can emerge stronger:

"I am confident that we will prevail and emerge stronger from this crucible. And I do not say this lightly.

I speak from my own conviction of seeing the best of Singaporeans over the past year, in the face of adversity and very tough conditions."