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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

COVID-19 Update – Premier’s Remarks

Good afternoon Bermuda; and thank you members of the media for your attendance today.

I begin today’s press conference on a somber note. On behalf of the Government of Bermuda and the people of Bermuda, I express my condolences to the family and friends of the young lady who lost her life at the hands of a heartless murderer on Sunset Lane, last evening in Pembroke during the early hours of this morning.

It pained me to have to console another mother at the KEMH into the wee hours of the morning, along with the Minister of National Security, Renee Ming and Pastor Leroy Bean as a result of such a horrifically violent act.

I ask that all Bermuda keep the family in their thoughts and prayers. And I would also ask all of Bermuda to please, if you know something, say something to help to bring the perpetrators of this incredibly violent, and seemingly escalating crime matter to justice.

Today I am joined by the Minister of Health, the Hon. Kim Wilson, who will be first to give an update from her Ministry and then I will touch on general economic matters, matters relating to tourism before I take questions from the media.

Thank you Minister of Health for that comprehensive update. It is important to note we are still in the state of a Public Health emergency and the coronavirus is certainly a threat.

I would like to begin my comments today by speaking about our new normal and Bermuda's position and outlook. We call remember that we began physical distancing in March, and through shelter-in-place, and all of the other restrictions, Bermuda has been relatively successful in containing the impact of the coronavirus which has now taken more than one million lives worldwide.

As we sit here today in the last week in September, we are certainly at a different place but we have been able to safely and securely allow more tourists to arrive to help stimulate our economy and we continue to ensure we have testing available throughout the country.

Our public health strategy is to continually assess the results of tests, conduct contact tracing when a person tests positive, and to require the best behaviour that science and commonsense requires.

And so Bermudians and residents should be proud of the collective effort and discipline that has largely kept COVID-19 at bay. I say at bay because we have not eradicated it, nonetheless, we have not reached community transmission.

Whenever there is a new infection, Public Health officers quickly identify the flight the person arrived on and identify everyone they may have been in contact. This is why it is critical that everyone who visits restaurants or other public places accurately completes the contact tracing information. I truly wish that we did not have to remind people, but, the precautions that are in place will help to protect vulnerable members of our society in case of any outbreak.

Now I know it is tedious and I know that as time goes on with the small amount of cases people think that is no longer necessary. One thing that I will say as the minister responsible for technology in Government, we are trying to make that process easier.

Two young men from our coding boot camp that we hosted earlier this year, were engaged to complete an app that will simply allow restaurants and other liquor licenced establishments to scan the drivers' licences of persons who are coming in to record their information. This will make the entry of information a little simpler. This app has been demonstrated and we are going to make sure it goes to the Privacy Commissioner so it meets all necessary privacy requirements. The information that is scanned, is not going to be available to restaurants but it is only going to be activated by the Public Authority, if that is necessary.

Additionally, you would have heard earlier we spoke about our tests with COVID watch out of Stanford University and I know that is now being piloted and you would have seen on the Government of Bermuda's social media platforms, asking for people to respond to surveys on whether or not they would be wanting to use the Bluetooth contact tracing technology that is inherent in the COVID watch app.

Earlier this summer, as part of Bermuda's COVID-19 Response strategy, the Cabinet made the decision to purchase and introduce quarantine bracelets. The system is comprised electronic bracelets, purchased from a company in Hong Kong that is affiliated with the Hong Kong Government, and the Aqua app, developed by Hub Culture, a Bermuda based international business.

To properly implement this initiative, we hired eight persons, providing jobs for eight young Bermudians who were not working prior to us introducing this quarantine monitoring solution. They are being led by Superintendent James Howard from the Bermuda Police Service and Major Wayne Smith from the Fintech Business Unit and are called the Aqua Monitoring Team.

The bracelet is paired with a smart phone, and it uses Bluetooth technology and GPS to show the user's location and allows the team to see violations of the quarantine rules.

The initiative began on Monday August 31 and the decision was made to place bracelets on anyone who arrived in Bermuda without a negative COVID-19 pre-test. Working closely with the Ministry of Health, the Aqua Monitoring Team ensures that everyone who was in quarantine comply with the rules and stayed at home until they complete their quarantine period, obtain a second negative COVID-19 test and were cleared to end their quarantine by the Ministry of Health. To date, 521 persons have been assigned bracelets and as of Tuesday, September 29, 160 persons continue to be actively monitored.

The programme is doing well and is now being expanded by the vendor to Hawaii. This was the intent of the Government of Bermuda's overall technology strategy, that companies would test ideas in the Bermuda ecosystem and once achieving proof of concept, and be able to market them in larger jurisdiction throughout the world.

I am delighted to see this aspect of Government's technology vision realized, especially as it relates to the coronavirus. Hub Culture, a Bermuda company, introduced this solution to Bermuda and now that the world knows it works, they will market it to the global marketplace.

As part of this deal, Bermuda gets a rebate on all bracelets purchased after our initial order, including any future bracelets that we purchase as well as bracelets that are purchased by other jurisdictions, such as Hawaii. Bermuda has proved itself to be a global leader and this solution is helping make sure we protect persons and persons can enforce their quarantine. This is vital to ensure our economy can continue to remain open.

It is key to note that this contract that was signed as we had successfully demonstrated and as it was used in other jurisdictions, the Bermuda Government will actually get money back from this. So this is certainly something that will be a win win situation.

Moving to tourism I'd like to discuss the Fairmont Southampton's closure and the impact this has on Bermudian employees.

I believe having a large number of redundancies, in fact that's a technical term, because it's having a large number of persons who will no longer be working, is one of the biggest challenges facing any Government; and in a year of multiple and severe challenges, we will listen, plan, execute and then also overcome this one.

The Bermudians who were employed there, are homeowners, mothers, fathers, bill payers and tax payers who have made a career serving people...service with pride. For them and their families, we cannot allow the uncertainty of employment income to become the certainty of poverty.

The Minister of Labour ensured the Collective Agreement was adhered to, and the Bermuda Industrial Union stated the hotel complied with the provisions. While that is admirable, following terms of a contract is the legal requirement; that does not mean the staff are comfortable or secure about their futures. Having spoken with my colleagues and technical officers, between now and the reopening there are ways that Bermudians can act and react to the closure.

The renovation is a construction project and we know that the hotel was purchased in December 2019 and was slated on January 2, 2021 for that renovation. The closure has happened earlier due to the coronavirus.

During the construction phase and in regular time, there are several hotel workers who supplement their income during the off-season by doing masonry, carpentry or general labourer tasks; they can and should enhance their skills and perhaps attain full-time employment at the site for the renovations.

Those who are already in the construction industry will have an advantage on experience and skillset, but a project this large will require many workers with varying levels of experience.

As such I recommend those who are interested should contact Bermuda College and or Department of Workforce Development to determine if and when relevant trades are being taught, or apprenticeships offered, and make themselves available for their opportunities.

To ensure that all former Fairmont Southampton Princess staff have the ability to secure reemployment, I wish to advise hotel owners and those that are hospitality employers that given both the impact of COVID-19 on the industry and the hotel's closure all 2020 and 2021 work permit applications in the hospitality sector will be heavily scrutinized to ensure Bermudian hotel workers, particularly those with the experience delivering Bermuda's tourism product are employed first.

This Government will stand by the workers at the Fairmont Southampton.

The Government acknowledges the proposed \$100 million investment and it is essential that Bermudian employees must be the primary beneficiaries during the renovation and once the hotel reopens.

It is said that “Luck is when preparation meets opportunity”; I implore Bermudians impacted by the closure to do the things that may make themselves lucky.

Moving on to more items regarding tourism. In terms of arrivals and air capacity we are safely welcoming more visitors, but are still well below our airline capacity and in October we will be operating at only about 36% capacity

In July we had 5,438, available seats that doubled in August to 12,122; we are anticipating approximately 17,000 seat capacity in October. While that figure is the highest since March, it is still 64% below our October 2019 arrivals.

However, there is progress that is being made that gives us further confidence in both our actions to battle the coronavirus and how effectively we communicated those actions to international markets, we do have new flights that are going to be launching service to Bermuda in October:

- Delta Airlines will fly to JFK airport three times a week on Mondays, Fridays, and Saturdays;
- American Airlines will fly to Miami three times per week. One flight will depart on Fridays, another will depart on Sundays, the third flight will depart on Mondays;
- British Airways, currently operating three times a week, will fly five times a week by the end of October and I have been told that the British Airways flight has been operating at high capacity, which is likely the reason this has been increased and that is due to the benefit of the excellent management of the pandemic and also tourists from the United Kingdom, who do come to Bermuda, are not required to quarantine back in the United Kingdom on their way home.
- Sticking with BA, earlier today it was announced that from 28 March 2021, British Airways will serve Bermuda from London Heathrow and no longer Gatwick Airport. Business groups and the BTA are in support, as Heathrow is a far more dynamic hub for onward connection to major European cities; allowing Bermuda to create connections in secondary European gateways.
And it is predicted that this will certainly help our tourism recover quicker from European markets. And certainly expanded as if it were to be compared to the flight at Gatwick.

I am proud that our COVID-19 protocols to date have been effective and we are creating global confidence in Bermuda and our ability to successfully manage the risks to residents and visitors. The fact that the Work from Bermuda programme has been so well received, with close to 400

applications, also attests to the balance we have struck between caution and commerce, between protecting lives and supporting livelihoods.

Now I will move onto the provisions for public school students for the rest of the week. I am sure that by now everyone, especially people who happen to watch YouTube knows that we are having a General Election on Thursday; as a result, all public schools are closed as they are polling stations.

Initially, some parents may have heard that schools were going to be closed on Friday as well, as that was the initial position. However, the Ministry revisited that decision in light of the three days lost to hurricanes Paulette and Teddy, the deep desire of teachers to capitalise on the return to face-to-face teaching, and to assist students to normalize the new teaching and classroom protocols.

The decision was also taken bearing in mind the disruption to parents' workdays every time a student has time off from school. Accordingly, schools will reopen as normal on Friday morning,

I wish to reassure parents, guardians, and the entire student population of one more vital element of schools and their use as Polling Stations. Every school is scheduled to be deeply cleaned and sanitised before school reopens on Friday; all cleaning will be undertaken according stringent protocols using approved products. And for the work they are executing to keep our children safe, we are grateful for the teams of custodians and cleaners who are committed to ensuring our students are taught in COVID-19-free environments; you have the government and parents' support, respect, and admiration.

Before I end, I would like to briefly address the concerns expressed earlier this week by persons, or a source as I will call it, from the Bermuda Fire & Rescue Service.

In July, the Minister of National Security Renee Ming, and I met with the Fire Services Association (FSA) new leadership team. The team consisted of:

Ms Nakia Pearson,
Mr Ryan DeSilva,
Mr Anthrun O'Brien, and
Mr Randy Elgersma

During that meeting, the team briefed the Minister and me on a number of operational matters, including emergency response in the pandemic. Also they relayed a number of concerns. After listening intensely, at that very meeting, I confirmed to the Bermuda Fire and Rescue representatives that the breathing apparatus was given Cabinet approval earlier in the year and has now arrived on island.

I also directed that capital funds that they were informed were frozen be unfrozen so that the other equipment purchases that they were advised were put on hold would proceed. I also confirmed with them at that very meeting that the training that they said was also going to be put on hold was authorized to proceed. We did our best to make sure that we alleviated the concerns at that time. There were concerns regarding training as there were new officers who had not had not been exposed to this training which meant they could not fully participate in the activities of the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service.

This Government has the utmost respect and appreciation for the members of the Bermuda Fire & Rescue Service. They are my family, they are my friends, and they are all of our colleagues' families and friends as well.

We recognise their commitment and dedication to the safety of the people of Bermuda. Their exemplary service during this pandemic and recent hurricanes is commendable and speaks volumes to the level of professionalism and support that these fine men and women give to Bermuda.

It is unfortunate that this issue become politicized in the daily newspaper but such is the season of which we are in. I hope, however, after Thursday we can move forward in a spirit of collaboration.

With that, I'm happy to take questions from reporters.