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**PRESS STATEMENT BY PENANG HILL CORPORATION (PHC)
GENERAL MANAGER, DATO' CHEOK LAY LENG DATED 19
MARCH 2024, IN RESPONSE TO PROF. DR. RAMASAMY'S SOCIAL
MEDIA POST REGARDING WATERFALL CAFE**

Penang Hill Corporation (PHC) wishes to clarify following the recent social media post from Prof. Dr. Ramasamy on the "victimisation" of Anantha Raj, owner of Waterfall Cafe, Penang Botanical Gardens.

Over the years, PHC has received countless complaints and feedbacks from the public as well as other agencies about the unregulated operation of the jeep service and the jeep drivers driving dangerously along the Jeep Track. As the custodian of Penang Hill, PHC is responsible for ensuring the safety, comfort and smooth traffic flow for the visitors at Penang Hill. To achieve this, PHC has implemented a traffic policy which amongst others, regulates the vehicles that are permitted to access Penang Hill via the Jeep Track.

The Penang Hill Corporation (Road Traffic Control) Regulations 2022 which was gazetted on 31 March 2022 only allows vehicles with permits to access the Jeep Track. This regulation applies to everyone including the jeep drivers who ferry passengers to and from Penang Hill.

Even prior to the implementation of the regulation, PHC had, in November 2021, informed the jeep drivers of the proposed centralised jeep service system. Since the implementation of the regulations in June 2022, PHC had tirelessly invited all the existing jeep drivers including Anantha Raj and the three (3) drivers under his wing to join the other jeep service drivers under a centralised jeep service system. PHC had even funded the construction of a booth for the use of the jeep service operators under the centralised system.

The goal is simple: to ensure that the jeep service provided is regulated and operates in an orderly and fair manner. By granting permits only to registered jeep service providers that adhere to PHC regulations, we can maintain a structured and safe environment for users and visitors. It prevents unregulated proliferation of jeep service providers, which could potentially compromise the safety of Jeep Track users and residents.

PHC has continued to organise numerous engagement sessions and issue reminder letters to Waterfall Cafe over the past 2 years in which the group has remained adamant in not joining the centralised jeep service system. In the initial stages, the strong resistance displayed by Waterfall Cafe had even led to the delay of the full implementation of the centralised jeep service system even though numerous meetings were held to iron out the issues.

After imposing numerous deadlines, PHC had set 31 December 2023 to be the deadline for Waterfall Cafe to join the centralised jeep service system. Despite Anantha Raj has given his written confirmation on 24 December 2023 to PHC that Waterfall Cafe will cooperate and join the centralised jeep service system, to-date they have never honoured their promise.

PHC had called for yet another meeting on 6 February 2024 with the jeep drivers including Anantha Raj and the group to join the centralised jeep service system.

Despite Anantha Raj and his group agreeing to join the centralised jeep service system effective from 1 March 2024 at the said meeting, eventually only one (1) driver cooperated and joined the system. Anantha Raj and the remaining two (2) drivers had again deliberately failed to do so to-date. Despite PHC giving the final invitation to Waterfall Cafe to join the centralised jeep service system, they have repeatedly ignored the deadlines imposed and refused to cooperate.

As the coordinating agency, PHC was left with no choice but to terminate the access card of Anantha Raj and the two (2) drivers. This was informed to Anantha Raj at the 6th February 2024 meeting,

whereby PHC had clearly stated that failure to join the centralised jeep service system on 1 March 2024 will result in termination of the access card.

On an entirely separate matter, the Penang Hill Cable Car project has long been in the pipeline for Penang Hill. The project which aims to alleviate the status of Penang Hill and the Penang Botanic Gardens will see several enhancements carried out at the said areas.

Engagements were carried out with the affected stakeholders to amicably resolve the matter and to achieve a win-win situation. Notwithstanding the substantial arrears in rental owed by Waterfall Cafe to the state, the state government through the Penang Northeast District Land Office had also offered reasonable alternatives to Waterfall Cafe to relocate from the site and continue conducting its business. However, without hesitation, they have rejected the offers for a spot inside the new to-be-constructed multistorey car park complex as well as a temporary site during the construction of the Penang Hill Cable Car system for them to operate. The state's good gesture and empathy was rejected without any reasonable grounds.

On 19 June 2023, Prof. Dr. Ramasamy as the then Deputy Chief Minister chaired a coordination meeting with Anantha Raj on behalf of Waterfall Cafe together with Penang Hill Jeep Service Association and PHC, in which the meeting decided that Waterfall Cafe should be relocated to another place to give way to the Penang Hill Cable Car project and that the Waterfall Cafe must clear out their pending rent of the property [673C (Pusat Informasi)]. Unfortunately, Anantha Raj failed to adhere to both of these stipulations agreed upon by Prof.

The state through one of the excos had organised a meeting with Anantha Raj on 15 March 2024 to discuss on the centralised jeep service issue as well as the relocation of Waterfall Cafe. Regarding the joining of centralised jeep service system, Anantha Raj has made unreasonable and unfair conditions which are not acceptable to PHC and the Penang Hill Jeep Service Association. On the relocation of Waterfall Cafe, the state has graciously extended the deadline to June

2024 whereby Anantha Raj shall revert to the district office with his relocations plans by end of March 2024.

The state government has always placed the people's interest as utmost priority. However, the state enforcement agencies must have the liberty to carry out their statutory duties independently in order to uphold fairness and ensure order in the system.

Thank you.

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About Penang Hill Corporation

Penang Hill Corporation was established in 2009 through an enactment passed by the Penang State Legislative Assembly. Its main focus is to manage the funicular system, undertake the development of socio-economy and infrastructure in Penang Hill and promote the Hill as a major ecotourism destination, in its vision to make Penang Hill the Hill Resort of Choice in Malaysia and the region.

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