National Responses to Covid-19 in Southeast Asia

Indonesia:
"Indonesia’s confirmed Covid-19 cases are rising extremely rapidly, and it now tops the region in terms of deaths from the virus. Indonesia’s response has been slow and rather piecemeal, with announcements of lockdowns in Jakarta and other metropolitan areas. Inconsistent guidelines, the lack of enforcement for self-quarantines, and the weakness of the national government’s communication strategy have meant that public awareness of social distancing remains a problem."

- **Border closures and entry bans:** On March 31, the Indonesian government announced a temporary ban on all foreign visitors. Land borders with Timor-Leste and all sea and land ports in Papua province have been closed.
- **Quarantine or lockdown:** Indonesia has declared the Covid-19 outbreak a “non-natural national disaster,” but implementation of quarantines and lockdowns has varied significantly based on locality.
- On May 4, President Jokowi announced a five-point plan to anticipate the second wave of the outbreak: (1) an evaluation of “large scale social restrictions” (PSBB) measures; (2) testing, contact tracing, and isolation targets to be set for provinces under PSBB; (3) stricter monitoring of migrant workers; (4) a social safety net for low-income families; and (5) a feedback hotline for the government on how it is handling the pandemic.
- On April 28, a Reuters study reviewing data from 34 provinces shows that more than 2,200 people died from Covid-19-like symptoms but were not reported, indicating the number of victims is far higher than official death toll of 773 to date.
- On April 24, the Transportation Ministry banned all non-cargo air travel until June 1. All non-logistics and non-medical supplies shipments are banned from leaving and entering all PSBB regions until May 31.
- On April 22, Jakarta extended its initial two-week PSBB measures until May 22; satellite cities in the greater Jakarta area will implement PSBB.
- Coordinating Maritime Affairs and Investment Minister Luhut Pandjaitan on April 21 announced that mudik (tens of millions of people returning to their home province at the end of Ramadan) would be banned effective April 24, with sanctions being enforced beginning May 7. In line with the mudik ban, Jakarta Metropolitan Police will operate blockades along Greater Jakarta borders beginning April 24 until after the end of Ramadan.
- On March 31, the government declared a “public health emergency,” whereby regional administrations will be able to impose stricter social restrictions, like closing schools, workplaces, and limiting religious and public gatherings.
- **Economic stimulus:** A first stimulus package worth $725 million announced in February 2020 provided fiscal incentives to support the country’s tourism, aviation, and property industries. The package also allocated $324 million for low-income households.
On March 13, the Indonesian government issued its second emergency stimulus package worth $8.1 billion, which includes exempting some workers in manufacturing from income tax and giving manufacturing companies a discount on corporate tax payments.

On March 31, President Jokowi introduced Indonesia’s third stimulus package worth nearly $24.6 billion (Rp 405.1 trillion). The package allocates $4.5 billion (Rp 75 trillion) for health care spending, $6.6 billion (Rp 110 trillion) for social protection, and $4.2 billion (Rp 70.1 trillion) for tax incentives.

The IMF lowered Indonesia’s GDP growth projections for 2020 to 0.5 percent from 5.0 percent in 2019. Indonesia now has a state deficit of $4.9 billion (Rp 75.4 billion) for Q1 2020. The Ministry of Finance is predicting a 4.6 percent growth rate for Q1 but expects it to drop to no higher than 2.3 percent in Q2 and Q3.

Philippines:
The Philippines has among the highest numbers of new confirmed cases per day in the region. Under President Rodrigo Duterte, the Philippine government has veered from dismissing the threat and abstaining from any restrictions on travel and tourism from China to an abrupt move to impose a lockdown on the entire island of Luzon, including Metro Manila, enforced by the military and the police. Duterte was granted “special temporary power” by Congress, which allows him to implement draconian measures that are creating extreme hardships, especially for Manila’s massive urban poor.

- **Border closures and entry bans:** All inbound and outbound commercial flights have been suspended to ease congestion at quarantine facilities; Philippines Airlines and Cebu Pacific have cancelled flights until May 15. Foreigners are banned from entry, with exceptions for foreign spouses and children of repatriating overseas Filipino workers.
- **Quarantine or lockdown:** President Duterte imposed an Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) on the main island of Luzon—home to about 60 million people, including Metro Manila—as well as for cities in Luzon, the Visayas, and Mindanao until May 15. The rest of the country is under General Community Quarantine (GCQ) until May 15.
  - On April 1, Duterte ordered the police and the military to shoot protesters violating these measures; the first case of police shooting a civilian for refusing to follow these restrictions was reported on April 4. Since the incident, Human Rights Watch has reported instances of law enforcement abuse in how these public health measures are enforced. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights called out the Philippines’ “highly militarized response” during the lockdown that led to the arrest of 120,000 people for violating the curfew.
- **Economic stimulus:** On March 17, the Philippines government announced the entire country will be placed under a “state of calamity” for a period of six months. The declaration enables national and local governments to quickly access relief funds.
  - On March 24, President Duterte signed into law Republic Act No.11469, granting him “special temporary power” for three months with a possible extension. Although he failed to get congressional approval to take over private companies and utilities, President Duterte can now tap into private hospital and ships, reapportion the executive department’s budget, and punish those disobeying quarantine orders and spreading false information. Duterte is required to report to Congress weekly about actions performed...
under the law. He will also have access to $5.36 billion from various government agencies to mitigate the potential economic fallout.

- On March 30, the government approved a $3.9 billion (P200 billion) social protection program for low-income families and health workers.
- On April 7, the Duterte administration announced a $610 million (P30.8 billion) "Bayanihan Grant to Cities and Municipalities" to assist local governments. The one-time grant will amount to one month of cities and municipalities’ internal revenue allotment. On April 13, the government approved a $1 billion (P51 billion) wage subsidy package intended to support about 3.4 million small business workers. Workers qualifying for the financial assistance will receive about $340 (P8,000) for two months.
- The IMF lowered the Philippines’s GDP growth projections for 2020 to 0.6 percent from 5.9 percent in 2019. JPMorgan downgraded the Philippines’ growth forecast to 0.9.

**Vietnam:**

*Despite limited resources and a bustling border with China, Vietnam has managed to contain the pandemic relatively well with its prompt and aggressive response, starting with early travel restrictions in late January and a local quarantine in mid-February. The Communist Party of Vietnam has shown its ability to mobilize society, enact aggressive containment and monitoring strategies, and communicate effectively with citizens, underpinned by its network of informants who surveil citizens and help enforce government restrictions. Vietnam is the first ASEAN country to incrementally lift lockdown measures.*

- **Border closure and entry bans:** All foreign visitors are banned, including all overseas Vietnamese. Vietnam banned all flights to and from China on February 1.
- **Quarantine or lockdown:** A national lockdown began April 1. Social isolation measures were lifted in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi on April 23 with some restrictions remaining for hospitality businesses. Schools and businesses have started operating again in Ho Chi Minh City.
- **With the issuance of Decree No. 19 on April 25, centrally-directed areas can now lift Covid-19 restrictions** only if the disease is contained and controlled.
- **Public gatherings of 20 or more people are banned, and non-essential public services are suspended. Those in public places are required to wear face masks.**
- **Other responses:** A decree preventing the spread of “fake news” was set in motion on April 15. Violators may be fined between $426 and $853 (VND 10-20 million).
- **Economic stimulus:** On March 3, Prime Minister Phuc announced a $1.16 billion (VND 27 trillion) fiscal package from the central contingency budget. The package includes tax breaks, delayed tax payments, and government spending on infrastructure in an effort to maintain a 6.8 percent growth target, according to state media. Vietnam has stopped exporting rice from March 24 to ensure national food security.
- **In early April, the government announced plans for a $2.6 billion (VND 60.9 trillion) fiscal package to support the most affected by the pandemic. Under the new package, monthly cash payments delivered until June will go to those displaced from jobs (about $76 per month), poor and near-poor households (about $42 per month), and those who “rendered services to the state during the revolution” (about $22 a month). For five months starting from April, the collection of value-added tax, corporate income tax, and
Land rent will be delayed for various businesses and households. This is estimated to be worth $7.6 billion (VND 180 trillion).

- The IMF lowered Vietnam’s GDP growth projections for 2020 to 2.7 percent from 7.0 percent in 2019.

**Thailand:**

*As Thailand slowly returns to a semblance of normalcy after five years of junta rule, Prime Minister Prayuth is now faced with a new crisis. Inconsistent policies about travel and quarantine, poor communication, and supply shortages have highlighted the government’s inability to promptly and adequately respond to the surge of Covid-19 cases, resulting in widespread criticism and frustration on social media in Thailand. Prime Minister Prayuth has responded with a clamp down on the press and social media reporting.*

- **Border closures and entry bans:** All borders were closed on March 22, and foreign visitors are banned. On April 16, the government announced that migrant workers would be allowed to stay in Thailand until November 30 without overstaying penalties. On April 20, Thailand reopened five border gates along the Thailand-Malaysia border. The ban on incoming flights has been extended from April 30 to May 31.
- **Quarantine or lockdown:** On April 15, Prime Minister Prayuth announced plans to gradually ease Covid-19 restrictions at the end of April due to a decline in new confirmed cases. Beginning on May 3, Thailand will ease restrictions on business operations and will allow certain businesses, including retail businesses, food services, and markets. The ban on the sale of alcohol was overturned on May 2, though a number of provinces will continue to enact the ban.
- **Economic stimulus:** On April 7, the government unveiled plans for a new stimulus package worth $58 billion (1.9 trillion bhat)—10 percent of GDP—$30 billion provided through bond issuance and the other $28 billion from the Bank of Thailand. Of this, $18 billion will be used for financial aid to workers, $12 billion for infrastructure and job investments, $15 billion for soft loans to SMEs, and $12 billion for the Corporate Bond Liquidity Stabilization Fund. This comes after the Thai government approved a stimulus package expected to inject $12.7 billion into the economy on March 10, including includes cash transfers, soft loans, and tax benefits. Ninety-two public-private partnership projects worth $3.3 trillion (1.09 trillion baht) are currently being planned to stimulate the economy.

- On April 2, Prime Minister Prayuth announced a national curfew starting April 3 prohibiting people from leaving their houses from 10 p.m. to 4 a.m., with exemptions for essential services. The army is helping enforce the curfew, and violators risk a $1,200 fine (40,000 baht). This follows the State of Emergency decree issued by Prime Minister Prayuth on March 26 that has been extended to May 31, granting sweeping powers to the government to restrict domestic travel, ban social gatherings, and censor the media.
- Schools will remain closed until July 1.
- **On April 14, the IMF lowered Thailand’s GDP growth projections for 2020 to -6.7 percent from 2.4 percent in 2019.**
- **On April 22, the government announced it will be borrowing $30 billion (1 trillion bhat) in bank loans and short- and long-term debt issues from the domestic market and from international agencies to finance measures to alleviate the impact of the pandemic.**
• On April 28, the cabinet approved a $154 (5,000 baht) financial aid package per month for three months available to the 8.4 million households registered as farmers.

Myanmar:
With its long, porous border with China, Myanmar’s paucity of Covid-19 cases, with the first cases only reported on March 23, likely results more from the lack of testing than from the absence of the virus. Myanmar’s underdeveloped health care system and the lack of a strong response mounted by the government underscore Myanmar’s unpreparedness to cope with the pandemic. The national government has not yet declared a state of emergency or instituted any nationwide lockdown.

• Border closures and entry bans: All northern checkpoint borders with China are closed except for goods and crew. India has closed its land border with Myanmar. Border crossings through Myanmar-Bangladesh border gates were restricted, except for trade flows, on April 13. Myanmar’s visa suspensions and flight ban have been extended from the end of April to May 15. This is the third time the ban has been extended.

• Quarantine or lockdown: On May 4, the Ministry of Immigration, Labor and Population released a list of essential businesses that will be prioritized when resuming operations; these include state-owned factories, water and electricity plants, clinics and hospitals, construction, and information and communications technology companies.

• Starting April 19, Yangon imposed a 10 p.m. to 4 a.m. curfew and a supplementary stay-at-home order on seven Yangon townships until June 18, excluding essential workers. Shan, Karen, and Kachin states and Mandalay, Sagaing, Ayeyarwaddy, and Bago regions have also adopted the curfew. Gatherings of more than five people, with exceptions for public servants, factory employees, and corporate employees are banned. Schools nationwide are currently set to resume June 1.

• In mid-March, the government formed a Covid-19 committee led by State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi to oversee the crisis response. On March 31, however, Myanmar’s military set up a separate task force led by the military-appointed first vice president, U Myint Swe. The task force includes other military-appointed members of the cabinet—the ministers of defense, home affairs, and border affairs—as well as the joint chief of staff of the defense forces and five civilian cabinet members. This military-led task force does not report to Aung San Suu Kyi and has arrogated broad powers to investigate Covid-19 cases, trace their close contacts and place them in quarantine facilities, and clamp down on the press and social media, including through arrests for “fake news” and “disinformation” that could cause “panic among the people.” As of April 22, the military is leading the response to the outbreak, securing quarantine facilities in main cities and ferrying medical supplies to remote regions.

• Other responses: Rights groups have reported that the Tatmadaw is escalating offensives against ethnic armed groups in Shan, Kachin, Chin, and Rakhine states. On April 21, an attack on a WHO team transporting tests from Sittwe, Rakhine to Yangon killed one person on the team and injured a health official, prompting the United Nations to call for an urgent cease-fire. UN Special Rapporteur Yanghee Lee said the Tatmadaw was conducting “war crimes” against minorities, emboldened by the significant political role it was granted to fight the pandemic.
Myanmar’s government and ethnic armed organizations have established a coordinating committee in a joint effort to fight Covid-19. Economic stimulus: On April 27, the government released a comprehensive economic relief plan outlining, among other things, new monetary policy, measures to boost private businesses and trade, and efforts to mitigate the economic impacts for workers and households. As of April 28, Myanmar is reportedly close to releasing a $2-3 billion stimulus package. A fund of nearly $70 million was previously established at the Myanmar Economic Bank to provide soft loans to affected business (particularly the priority garment and tourism sectors and SMEs). The Ministry of Health will receive $200,000 to buy laboratory equipment and medical supplies.

Malaysia:
Following initial nonchalance in responding to the outbreak, complicated by an abrupt change in government, Malaysia closed its borders and shut down non-essential businesses, schools, and religious services in mid-March. Armed forces have been deployed to enforce a partial lockdown with an increase in testing and contract tracing as confirmed Covid-19 cases continue to rise.

- Border closures and entry bans: Malaysia shut its borders to travelers on March 16, banning all visitors and barring residents from travel overseas. As of April 14, the government is allowing Malaysians in Singapore to return only if they are tested and placed in quarantine facilities.
- On April 18, the government reopened the Padang Besar checkpoint in Songkhla on the Thailand-Malaysia border.
- On April 16, Malaysia denied entry to a boat of 200 Rohingya refugees, using fears of spreading Covid-19 as an excuse. Human Rights Watch has asked Malaysia to adopt a system that fulfills fundamental human rights obligations and public health measures.
- Quarantine or lockdown: Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin enacted a “Movement Control Order” (MCO) on March 18, which has been extended three times, first to April 14, to April 28, and then to May 12. On May 1, Prime Minister Muhyiddin announced that starting May 4, under a Conditional Movement Control Order (CMCO), private tertiary institutions (but not entertainment, hospitality venues, schools, or religious gatherings) will be allowed to operate under strict standard operating procedures. Ramadan bazaars will remain closed, and there will be no public prayers in mosques; travel permits for the annual balik kampung (millions of people returning to their home villages at the end of Ramadan) remain suspended.
- The Malaysian Armed Forces, using personnel and drones, have been mobilized for detection and enforcement, resulting in the arrest of hundreds of MCO violators.
- On April 28, construction work on the East Coast Rail Link, which had been halted under the MCO, resumed with government approval.
- Economic stimulus: Three economic stimulus packages have been unveiled. The first one of $4.6 billion (RM 20 billion), launched by interim prime minister Mahathir on Feb 27 to cushion the blow of Covid-19, focuses on tourism and other industries. This includes nationwide electricity discounts of 2 percent for industrial, commercial, and domestic users, as well as a monetary assistance scheme for employees.
The second one, estimated at $53 billion (RM 230 billion), was unveiled by new Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin on March 27. The package includes $23.1 billion for businesses and $2.3 billion in direct cash payments for 4 million low-income households.

The third one, worth $2.2 billion (RM 10 billion), was unveiled on April 6. This includes wage subsidies, grants and loans for SMEs, and tax deductions, among other things. The combined value of the first two stimulus packages equals 15.5 percent of Malaysia’s GDP and is equivalent to 84.2 percent of the federal government’s original 2020 budget.

On April 14, the IMF lowered Malaysia’s GDP growth projections for 2020 to -1.7 percent from 4.3 percent in 2019.

Cambodia:

After downplaying the risks of the crisis and refusing to shut the country’s borders for several weeks, Prime Minister Hun Sen declared a state of emergency on March 31 and put forward a draft emergency law granting unfettered powers to his government, prompting an outcry from human rights groups. Hun Sen’s reluctance to act earlier likely stems from his desire to maintain a close relationship with China.

- Border closures and entry bans: All travel in and out of Phnom Penh will be banned; this measure excludes essential services and workers. All visa exemptions, visas on arrival, and e-visas are suspended until April 30. However, there have been reports of Chinese businessmen (between 60 and 100) entering the Kingdom daily. On March 17, Hun Sen ordered a 30-day ban on arrivals from Italy, Germany, Spain, France, the United States, and Iran.

- Quarantine or lockdown: All persons entering the country will be placed under quarantine for 14 days starting April 8.

- Other responses: On April 10, the Cambodian National Assembly passed a state of emergency law granting Prime Minister Hun Sen greater powers during the Covid-19 pandemic. The law “is intended to protect public order, security, people’s interests, lives, health, property and the environment,” said a Ministry of Justice spokesperson. Under the new law, the government has the power to monitor communications, social media, and restrict the distribution of information. The Constitutional Council of Cambodia approved the draft, which will now be passed onto the king for his signature. Under the “state of emergency,” the government has arrested at least 30 people arbitrarily between January and April 2020—12 linked to the dissolved Cambodian National Rescue Party—on charges of spreading “fake news” related to the outbreak, raising concerns around human rights and martial power granted to Hun Sen without oversight.

- Economic stimulus: As of March 30, additional fiscal resources for the health sector of around $70 million (around 0.2 percent of 2019 GDP) are expected. On March 9, Hun Sen announced the government has allocated between $800 million to $2 billion to address the economic impacts of Covid-19. Only “legally registered and formally verified” SMEs will receive benefits. 95 percent of Cambodian SMEs are informal businesses that are not officially registered.

Laos:

Laos, the most rural country in Southeast Asia, was the last country in Southeast Asia to report Covid-19 infections. The country’s almost non-existent health care system and weak governance
will be tested in the upcoming weeks as the number of cases increases, offset only in part by significant assistance it has received from China since early March.

- **Border closures and entry bans:** On March 30, the government shut down all international border checkpoints to stop passengers from exiting and entering Laos, effective until May 3. Returning Lao citizens are required to undergo a mandatory 14-day self-quarantine monitored by local officials.

- **Quarantine or lockdown:** On March 30, Laos issued a national stay-at-home order except for essential outings. The Lao government set up central, provincial, and district task force committees to implement the national lockdown policy. Provincial borders will remain closed until April 30, except with the approval of local authorities. Gatherings of more than 10 people are prohibited. Shuttle flights will be allowed for countries needing to pick up their citizens from Laos. On April 15, the national lockdown was extended to May 3. As part of the lockdown, the government has ordered the closure of private hospitals and clinics nationwide. Starting on March 19, schools, bars, entertainment venues, and major shopping centers were ordered to shut down for 30 days.

- **Economic stimulus:** On March 20, a preliminary 13-part stimulus package was approved during the cabinet’s monthly meeting. About $11 million (less than 1 percent of GDP) has been allocated for prevention and control. The government was expected to further discuss economic stimulus measures on Thursday, March 26.

**Singapore:**

*Singapore has been hailed as a global public-health model due to its early and aggressive response to Covid-19 and has managed to largely contain the virus through widespread testing; comprehensive contact tracing; and mandatory, well-enforced quarantines for those testing positive and their contacts and all returning travelers. Singapore has also relied on its technical capabilities to develop test kits as early as January, which it is now distributing to countries in the region, and on its world-class health care system. Yet despite its early success in containing the virus, Singapore had the most number of confirmed cases in Southeast Asia as of April 20, with an explosion of cases linked to foreign workers domitories.*

- **Border closure:** On March 22, the city-state barred all short-term visitors from entering Singapore. The only non-nationals allowed entry are work permit holders in "essential sectors" such as health care. Malaysians with a Singapore work permit will continue to be allowed to work in Singapore. Singapore banned the entry of all travelers from China on January 31. Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, South Korean, and Canada have agreed to resume cross-border travel to maintain supply chains.

- **Quarantine or lockdown:** On April 21, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Long announced that the “circuit breaker,” Singapore’s stay at home order, would be extended until June 1. Work permit holders were placed under a mandatory stay-at-home notice until May 18 because of the rise in the number of infection in the community. Following Prime Minister Lee’s May Day speech announcing the eventual “step-by-step” reopening of the economy, Singapore has decided to allow certain businesses to reopen, like home-based businesses and selected food retail and manufacturing firms, starting May 12.

- On April 5, Singapore imposed a quarantine on dormitories housing 20,000 migrant workers, most of whom are manual laborers from South Asia living in cramped
conditions. A task force lead by the Ministries of Health and Manpower has deployed special teams to bring supplies, food, and medical assistance to quarantined foreign workers.

- **Other responses:** The government introduced a bill on April 7 that would allow for temporary arrangements to hold safe national elections (which have to be held before April 14, 2021). These measures would include allowing voters to register without being present in-person as well as vote outside their electoral division. The bill will be discussed during the next parliamentary session in May.

- **Economic stimulus:** On March 26, Singapore unveiled a second stimulus plan, the “Resilience Budget,” worth $33 billion. The package is designed to assist hard-hit sectors, self-employed individuals, and cash payouts depending on income. This marks the second time that Singapore has dipped into its reserves—the first time being in 2009 during the global financial crisis (about $1 trillion). Singapore had first announced $4.4 billion of relief funding, the “Unity Budget” for workers and businesses through co-funding of business costs and tax relief on February 18.

- On April 6, Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat announced an unprecedented third round of support measures called the “Solidarity Budget” that follows the February “Unity Budget.” This includes one-off payments to Singaporeans, wage subsidies, and self-employed relief schemes. Singaporeans aged 21 and older will start receiving $424 (S$600) from April 14. Altogether, the government's response to Covid-19 will total $41.6 billion (S$59.9 billion), about 12 percent of the GDP. This is the largest, most aggressive stimulus package in Asia so far.

- On April 14, the IMF lowered Singapore’s GDP growth projections for 2020 to -3.5 percent from 0.7 percent last October.

**Brunei:**

*The Sultanate has implemented drastic measures to clamp down on travel, impose strict quarantine rules, and conduct extensive testing. Most cases in Brunei can be linked back to a large-scale religious event in Malaysia at the end of February.*

- **Border closures and entry bans:** From March 24, all foreign visitors are banned from entry. As of March 16, citizens, foreign residents, and green card holders in the country are barred from leaving without permission from the Prime Minister’s Office. Malaysia has closed its land border with Brunei.

- **Quarantine or lockdown:** Brunei reported a new Covid-19 case on April 18, its first since April 10. The government has prohibited mass gatherings, weddings, and sporting events. Schools are to reopen on June 2. Brunei issued iMSafe tracking bracelets to all Covid-19 patients currently under home quarantine and recovered Covid-19 patients on April 30.

- **Economic stimulus:** On March 19, the Brunei Darussalam Monetary Authority announced measures to alleviate the financial burden on sectors hit hard by the pandemic.

- On April 1, the Ministry of Finance and Economy announced additional steps in aiding SMEs and individuals affected by the pandemic, amounting to about $1.7 million in the form of deferment of principal or loan repayment and the exemption of fees and charges.

- On April 13, Brunei announced a special $400 monthly allowance for health care workers, including doctors, nurses, volunteers, hospital cleaners, and security guards.
ASEAN Response to Covid-19:

While the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has convened a series of meetings on how to deal with the pandemic, including with external partners such as the United States, China, and the European Union, there has been very little collective action to date. Diplomatically, the crisis has threatened ASEAN’s centrality in regional affairs, with the crisis causing the cancellation of several key ASEAN meetings, including the ASEAN-U.S. summit scheduled for March 14 in Las Vegas and the 36th ASEAN summit scheduled for April 6-9 in Vietnam, now rescheduled for late June.

- On April 29, ASEAN tourism ministers held a special meeting to discuss the future of tourism and the industry’s recovery from Covid-19 in the region.
- The 29th Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Trade Negotiating Committee Meeting was held April 20-24. The representatives reaffirmed their intent to sign the agreement into law in 2020, their continued interest in continuing engagement with India, and the importance of RCEP in jump starting the global economy in response to Covid-19.
- ASEAN foreign ministers participated in an ASEAN-U.S. special foreign ministers’ meeting with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and ASEAN Secretary General Lim Jock Hoi.
- Vietnam organized an ASEAN Plus Three special video conference summit held on April 14. Among other things, the leaders agreed to strengthen the region’s early warning system for pandemics, explore the establishment of a Covid-19 ASEAN Response Fund, and enhance cooperation around regional food security, including through utilizing the ASEAN Plus Three Emergency Rice Reserve (APTERR).
- On April 7, ASEAN health ministers held a video conference on the Covid-19 response, focused on increasing cooperation. The health ministers agreed to enhance timely data and information sharing, strengthen regional cooperation, and coordinate cross-border public health responses.
- On April 1, ASEAN senior officials and the United States held a teleconference to promote coordination between the two sides in managing the pandemic. The event was co-chaired by Nguyen Quoc Dung and Assistant Secretary of State of the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs David Stilwell. Participants shared information, experience, developments, and provided technical assistance.
- On February 20, the foreign ministers of ASEAN and China met in Vientiane, Laos to discuss ways to tackle the public health and economic implications of the global pandemic. The 10 ASEAN countries and China agreed to step up cooperation in sharing medical and health information and best practices to enhance emergency preparedness and response, with the communiqué praising China’s response to the pandemic.

International Assistance to Southeast Asia: updated Friday, May 1.

China’s “Mask Diplomacy”

With Covid-19 largely contained domestically, the Chinese government has pivoted to providing assistance internationally, with Southeast Asian countries being a particular focus. Unlike in Europe, where China’s so-called “mask diplomacy” has generated criticism due to some faulty equipment and skepticism about China’s geopolitical intentions, China’s emergency medical
assistance has been welcomed by the governments of several hard-hit countries in Southeast Asia. Chinese aid typically consists of shipments of surgical masks, test kits, and other medical equipment, as well as dispatching medical experts. Handovers of equipment typically take place with great fanfare. In addition to the Chinese government, foundations linked to billionaire Jack Ma and state-owned enterprises have also engaged in large donations of medical supplies.

Assistance to Southeast Asia to date has included the following:

- **ASEAN**: China on April 21 donated 75,000 surgical masks, 300 bottles of hand sanitizers, and 35 infrared thermometers to the [ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta](#).

- **Malaysia**: Malaysia has been a particular focus for Chinese aid. The largest shipment of medical supplies arrived on March 28 and was received by Foreign Minister Hishammuddin Hussein. This donation followed three earlier installments of relief packages from the Chinese government and other Chinese entities, beginning on March 19, delivered by the Chinese embassy in Malaysia to medical personnel at Sungai Buloh Hospital. Despite this close engagement, Malaysian officials have expressed doubts about Chinese-made test kits. The accuracy of the first batch of Chinese-donated test kits has been questioned by Malaysian officials, and Malaysian hospitals are now considering test kits from Singapore and South Korea.

- **Philippines**: China’s first shipment of medical supply donations to the Philippines arrived on March 21. China sent a team of medical experts and a second batch of medical supply donations to the Philippines on April 5 followed by another one on April 27. Foreign Secretary Teodoro Locsin said "[China] is a model for what the rest of the world should be doing. Instead of blaming each other for what's happening, we should all start working together to help each other."

- **Indonesia**: On March 20, Indonesia sent a military aircraft to Shanghai to pick up 9 tons of medical supplies, and a consortium of Chinese institutions and ministries sent 40 tons of Covid-19 test kits and other medical supplies one week later. On April 4, President Xi Jinping committed to helping Indonesia fight the outbreak during a phone call with President Jokowi, reportedly saying that “we believe that with your perseverance, Indonesia will be able to defeat this [Covid-19] pandemic.” Indonesia’s Covid-19 taskforce obtained RNA isolation kits, PCR test kits, and a viral transport medium kit on April 26.

- **Laos**: From April 10-11, a team of Chinese medical experts shared anti-epidemic experiences and held training courses throughout Laos. The team provided 10,000 PCR kits, 10,000 KN95 masks, and 30,000 masks.

- **Cambodia**: On March 23, a Chinese medical team from Guangxi province delivered medical supplies including ventilators, medical masks, and test kits to Phnom Penh. On March 18, China sent medical supplies including detection kits, ventilators, PPE, and masks. China shared another shipment of “urgently needed” Covid-19 supplies, including testing kits and protective gowns, on April 26 at the request of Cambodia.
• **Myanmar:** On April 22, China provided 20 ventilators reportedly worth $400,000. Another 15 machines are due to arrive in the near future. On April 8, a 12-person Chinese medical team from Yunnan province arrived in Yangon for a 14-day visit, followed by another visit on April 24.

• **Brunei:** On April 23, China provided Brunei with medical supplies, including 100,000 N95 respirators and 1,000 surgical gowns. The Chinese Embassy in Brunei also donated $42,158 (BND 60,000) to Brunei’s Covid-19 Relief Fund.

Non-government Chinese aid:

Chinese non-government entities have also been active, most notably the Alibaba and Jack Ma foundations. On March 19, the two foundations announced they would send 2,000,000 masks, 150,000 test kits, 20,000 sets of PPE, and 20,000 face shields to Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Myanmar, and Thailand. On April 9, the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China donated medical equipment worth $117,500, including 150,000 face masks to Laos.

Assistance from the United States:

On April 7, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced an additional $225 million in assistance for response efforts to Covid-19, in addition to the $274 million announced in late March. So far, $18.3 million in new funding will go to countries in Southeast Asia. However, unlike China’s “mask diplomacy,” Pompeo made clear that due to the urgent domestic need presented by the Covid-19 outbreak in the United States, shipments of critical medical supplies such as protective gear will not included in this assistance. Instead, the funding will be used to train medical workers, boost screening capabilities, and bolster national health systems. When making these new pledges, the State Department has emphasized the United States’ long-standing leadership on global health, citing the approximately $3.5 billion in assistance over the past two decades, far exceeding that of other any other donor.

Pledges have included:

• **Philippines:** $8.8 million for Covid-19 aid, building on more than $582 million in health assistance and nearly $4.5 billion in total assistance over the past 20 years. During an April 19 phone call, President Trump and President Duterte discussed cooperation between the United States and the Philippines against the outbreak.

• **Indonesia:** $5 million for Covid-19 aid, covering testing and visits by technical experts, building on more than $1 billion in health assistance and more than $5 billion in total U.S. assistance over the past 20 years. On April 24, President Trump promised President Jokowi an unknown number of ventilators during a phone conversation between the two leaders.
• **Thailand**: Approximately $2.7 million for Covid-19 aid, including testing and medical supplies, building on more than $213 million in health assistance and more than $1 billion in total U.S. assistance over the past 20 years.

• **Laos**: Approximately $3.5 million for Covid-19 aid for testing and supplies, plus deliveries of protective equipment and visits of technical experts. This builds on nearly $92 million in health assistance and more than $348 million in total U.S. assistance over the past 20 years. Medical equipment provided by the U.S. government thus far includes 440 protective goggles, 1,500 surgical gowns, 220 face shields, disposable biohazard bags, aprons, N95 masks, gloves, and sanitizer.

• **Cambodia**: Approximately $4 million for Covid-19 aid, encompassing risk communication, community engagement, and laboratory support in response to the pandemic. This builds on more than $730 million in health assistance and more than $1.6 billion in total U.S. assistance over the past 20 years.

• **Myanmar**: Approximately $7 million in Covid-19 aid for testing and medical supplies, plus deliveries of protective equipment and visits of technical experts. This builds on more than $176 million in health assistance and more than $1.3 billion in total U.S. assistance over the past 20 years.

• **Vietnam**: Nearly $4.5 million for Covid-19 aid, testing, and visits by technical experts. This builds on more than $706 million in health assistance and more than $1.8 billion in total U.S. assistance over the past 20 years.

• **Malaysia**: $200,000 for Covid-19-related humanitarian and health assistance as of April 20.

Singapore’s “Test-kit Diplomacy”:

*Singapore, partly through the Temasek Foundation, was the first Southeast Asian country with excess capacity and ability to deliver aid to neighbors. “From a foreign policy point of view, we now have test kit diplomacy. What we need to do as a world is to share best practices, to rapidly develop test kits, vaccines, antivirals,” said Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan on March 10.*

- **Malaysia**: On April 1, Singapore donated 5,000 Universal Transport Medium swabs, a critical component in fast acting test kits, to Malaysia.

- **Philippines**: On April 1, the Temasek Foundation donated 40,000 test kits and 2 ventilators to the Philippines. On March 25, Singapore sent 3,000 test kits and a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) machine for processing tests to the Philippines.

- **Vietnam**: On March 30, the Temasek Foundation presented 10 ventilators to Vietnam to support the country’s treatment of Covid-19 patients. The foundation said it will supply 10 oxygen generators to Ha Noi and 10 to Ho Chi Minh City in the near future.
• **Brunei:** Singapore sent 3,000 test kits and a PCR machine for processing tests on March 25.

• **Indonesia:** On April 2, Singapore sent medical supplies to Indonesia, including 30,000 test kits, 5 PCR machines, and more than 1,000 sets of PPE. On March 13, Singapore donated 50 sets of PPE and 2 ventilators to Batam city mayor Muhammad Rudi. On April 8, an Indonesian navy vessel was sent to Singapore to collect supplies to manufacture 210,000 liters of hand sanitizer for use in the city.

• **Myanmar:** On March 4, Singapore sent 3,000 diagnostic tests and 2 PCR machines to test for Covid-19 to Myanmar.

**Assistance from Vietnam:**

*Vietnam has extended aid to regional and international partners since early April after ramping up its domestic production of medical supplies. On April 30, Vietnam started exporting domestically made and WHO-approved Covid-19 test kits. Having already received orders from 20 countries, Vietnam is reportedly one of five nations with ready-to-export kit. The government suspended the export of drugs used to treat the virus to ensure sufficient preventive and curative supplies for Vietnam.*

• **Laos:** On April 3, Vietnam sent nearly 5 tons of Covid-19 related medical equipment worth $304,000 to Laos, including test kits, 340,000 face masks, and PPE.

• **Cambodia:** On April 7, Region 7 of the Vietnam People’s Army provided medical supplies and equipment, including 50,000 face mask, 1,000 sets of PPE, and 1,000 liters of hand sanitizer to units of the Cambodian Royal Army. The group also provided 30,000 face masks and $21,450 in assistance to Vietnamese Cambodians in the area. On April 3, Vietnam donated 390,000 face masks.

• **Indonesia:** On April 5, Vietnam’s Ministry of Science and Technology sent 500 diagnostic test kits to Indonesia.

• **Myanmar:** On April 10, Vietnam presented $50,000 as a symbolic gift of support during the Covid-19 pandemic.

• **United States:** On April 8, Vietnam donated 450,000 protective suits to the United States, with 450,000 more suits to follow in the near future. The delivery drew praise from President Trump on Twitter, who expressed thanks to “our friends in Vietnam.” On April 16, Vietnam announced it is donating 250,000 made-in-Vietnam face masks, including 50,000 sent directly for use at the White House, reportedly worth at least $100,000. Vietnam, on April 29, presented 420,000 medical masks to the U.S. ambassador to Vietnam, Daniel Kritenbrink, on behalf of the American Red Cross.
• **China:** On February 8, Vietnam’s Ha Giang province border guards donated 1,000 face masks and 20 sanitizer containers to the Yunan Border Guards as a symbolic gesture. Two weeks later, the Department of Military Medicine within Vietnam’s Ministry of National Defence supplied unspecified “medical equipment” to China’s Ministry of Defence in a more formal ceremony. On March 8, border guards at Dien Bien province gifted 10,000 face masks to their Chinese counterparts.

• **Europe:** Vietnam on April 7 donated 550,000 masks to France, Germany, Italy, Spain and Britain.

• **Russia:** On April 13, Vietnam donated 150,000 made-in-Vietnam antimicrobial face masks. On March 27, Vietnam’s Department of Military Medicine gifted unspecified military medicine to the minister counsellor of the Russian Embassy.

• **Japan:** Japan received made-in-Vietnam face masks reportedly worth $100,000.

• **Sweden:** Vietnam gifted more than 100,000 face masks to Sweden on April 21.

**Assistance from Japan:**

*Japan, traditionally a major donor in Southeast Asia, has been slower than China to respond to Covid-19 with new funding so far.*

• On February 14, the government of Japan announced it would donate 222,000 sets of PPE to Cambodia, the Philippines, Laos, and Mongolia. The equipment was drawn from a stockpile by the Asia-Europe Foundation financed by Japan’s contribution.

• Japanese foreign minister Toshimitsu Motegi on April 1 pledged to provide at least $1.8 million (200 million yen) in aid to Vietnam to combat the virus. Japan gifted 4,680 isolation gowns, 6,100 gloves, 6,000 N95 face masks, 13,200 surgical gowns, 27 goggles, and 240 bottles of hand-rub alcohol to Laos and donated $20 million to Cambodia’s Covid-19 response.

• The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) on February 7 announced it was providing Covid-19 testing reagents to the National Institute of Hygiene and Epidemiology of Vietnam, equivalent to approximately 14 million yen in total. JICA announced on February 25 it would send Covid-19 primer and testing reagents to the National Health Laboratory of Myanmar, worth approximately 400,000 yen in total.

**Assistance from South Korea:**

*South Korea has begun to pivot toward international assistance with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs announcing on March 27 that the United States, the United Arab Emirates, and Indonesia were “on its priority list for exporting quarantine supplies, such as coronavirus test kits.” As of March 26, 47 countries have issued requests for the import of South Korean-made Covid-19 tests.*
On April 8, South Korea committed to provide $500,000 in “varied forms of assistance” to Indonesia. On April 19, Indonesia received 50,000 test kit reagents with an additional 495,000 reagents expected in the coming weeks. South Korean conglomerates pledged to donate 50,000 sets of PPE and PCR test kits each. CJ Corporation donated $255,000 worth of rapid test kits and hand sanitizers to medical facilities and ride hailing workers. The Philippines received over 50,000 test kits from South Korea between March and April.

Assistance from Taiwan

Taiwan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs on April 14 announced that it was sending 1.6 million surgical masks to New Southbound Policy countries, including Australia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore and Vietnam. Taiwan donated 70,000 surgical masks to Myanmar with more expected to arrive in May, over 300,000 face masks to the Philippines, 200,000 face masks and 15,000 PPE to Thailand, and 100,000 face masks to the Singapore Red Cross.

Assistance from the European Union

ASEAN: The European Union on April 27 announced the mobilization of $378 million (€350 million) in funds to ASEAN countries in support of pandemic response efforts.

Assistance from the World Bank:

In early April, the World Bank approved $20 million in credit to support Cambodia’s pandemic response, $18 million in assistance to Laos to help the country strengthen its health system and response capacity, $7 billion in loans to Indonesia in partnership with the Asian Development Bank and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, a $50 million emergency loan for hospital improvements and public health emergency preparedness to Myanmar, and a $500 million loan to support the Philippines’ Covid-19 response and recovery.

Assistance from the Asian Development Bank (ADB):

In mid April, the ADB approved a $1.5 billion loan to support Indonesia’s response to the Covid-19 pandemic and a $200 million loan to assist the Philippine government in providing cash subsidies to households affected by the pandemic.

What We are Reading:

- Sana Jaffrey, “Coronavirus Blunders in Indonesia Turn Crisis Into Catastrophe,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 29, 2020,


