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INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (ISIS) MALAYSIA

# f focus



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**VOICES FROM  
THE REGION**



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### Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia


1, Persiaran Sultan Salahuddin,  
PO Box 12424, 50778 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

 [www.isis.org.my](http://www.isis.org.my)


 603 2691 5435

 603 2693 9366

 [info@isis.org.my](mailto:info@isis.org.my)

 Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia

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Muhammad Sinatra, Analyst  
Nursalina Salleh, Analyst  
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Design by Ridzwuan Rosli, Graphic Designer

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# A New Abnormal: Rethinking Security amid COVID-19

The last time Asia had to battle a coronavirus epidemic was when the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) emerged at the end of 2002 and raged through the first half of 2003. The first pandemic of the 21st century ultimately resulted in more than 8,000 cases across 26 countries with 774 deaths. These figures now seem inappropriately quaint compared to the ongoing ravage of COVID-19. At the time of writing, nearly 4 million people in more than 190 countries and territories have been infected. The global death toll stands at 260,000 and counting.

As countries grapple with crawling out of quarantine, three emerging trajectories demand our attention. First, effective responses beyond this immediate crisis will require a sobering assessment of national priorities and policies. Across many countries, COVID-19 has exacerbated latent structural inequities across economic, class and communal fault lines. Stay-at-home mandates have exposed the stratification of those who can comply without worrying about food, shelter, or childcare and those who can ill-afford that luxury.

Historically disadvantaged minority communities have also suffered disproportionately during the pandemic. Although the data is still evolving, one study shows that in the United States, African Americans account for 34 percent of total COVID-19 deaths in reporting states even though the community accounts for only 13 percent of the total population in those states. In the United Kingdom, official statistics show that those with Black ethnicity are four times more likely to die from COVID-19.

Even as refrains of “we’re in this together” are repeated, the virus has revealed ugly undercurrents of racism and xenophobia in many places. East Asians have been harassed and attacked from London to Los Angeles. In countries like Malaysia, foreigners,

*Will it be business as usual for security as countries across the globe continue to fight against COVID-19? What are the developments that have come to the fore, which necessitate a re-examination of domestic and regional security?*



**BY ELINA NOOR**



migrant workers and refugees have borne the brunt of toxic abuses, online and offline, and been conveniently scapegoated as a burden on society.

Moreover, as scientists suggest a direct link between human destruction of biodiversity and new viral diseases, economic growth priorities should no longer narrowly be focused on outputs but equally, if not more so, on the inputs and processes generating production. These include relational processes within society; that is, how we relate to each other as a nation, how we relate to others in our nation and how we relate to the environment. This is, in fact, a restatement of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015. Urgent political will is thus crucial.

Second, a pandemic that jumps borders compels a coordinated, international response. Yet, at both the regional and global levels, leadership and cooperation have been sorely lacking. The responses of ASEAN Member States have been nationally- rather than collectively-driven in managing COVID-19 even though the lessons of SARS underscored the importance of regional synchronisation.

Further, despite ASEAN's constant exhortations of being people-centred and people-oriented, the grouping's new normal has rather been business as usual in convening meetings and issuing statements as a show of response to this pandemic. But perhaps it is too much to expect inter-governmental bureaucracies to act nimbly.

Of greater concern is the strategic climate; specifically, the implications of deteriorating relations between the two largest powers on the rest of the world amid a global pandemic that may yet prove resurgent. The downward-spiraling blame game between the United States and

China, the shameless competition for diplomatic brownie points in rendering aid and assistance, and the United States' determined dismissal of multilateralism during an international crisis have all been spectacularly disappointing. The world expected better. It should now prepare for a very different reality, a future that may well harken back to a past of alignments, blocs, maybe even another Cold War.

Third and relatedly, there will be a pronounced overlap between conventional and non-conventional security challenges. This pandemic has highlighted just how much a non-traditional security issue can entrench and aggravate traditional security calculations of power dynamics and influence. Western demands for an investigation into the origins of – and lessons learned from – COVID-19, even as the pandemic continues to unfold, will only harden geopolitical divisions.

It is also clear from developments in the South China Sea that China will continue to literally push contested boundaries by way of intimidation, harassment and unilateral actions, even in times of widespread illness and death. Additionally, as technology continues to grow in importance and cyberspace becomes a more key domain of engagement, the intersection between conventional and non-conventional security issues will intensify and be mutually reinforcing.

If the souring US-China relationship persists or worsens, Southeast Asia will have to play an active, constructive role in preserving the region's peace, security and stability. If ASEAN is to live up to its aspirations of unity and centrality, member states must demonstrate leadership through decisive action on difficult issues. In some instances, this may even mean having to utilise the consensus-based mechanism differently from the past and invoking international legal

mechanisms when negotiations falter. As the security environment becomes more complex, it is no longer sufficient for ASEAN's calls to action to remain etched in rhetoric. An ASEAN in service of its community must actually act.

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Elina Noor is Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia





# Repairing Fault Lines Revealed by COVID-19

*While the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed fault lines in ASEAN integration and cooperation, there have also been indications of permanent disruptions and new adjustments as we transition into the post-lockdown, post-pandemic world. This presents an opportunity for policymakers to re-evaluate and strengthen systems and institutions to be more resilient and better prepared for the future.*



**BY JESSICA WAU**



Recent consumer surveys are revealing a shift in patterns of behaviour that could become permanent fixtures. More office equipment is filling up homes and hygienic habits are becoming ingrained as lockdown measures continue.

The year 2020 marks the midpoint since the launch of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 of “Forging Ahead Together”. There is an ongoing midterm review to assess ASEAN’s progress towards political cohesiveness, economic integration and social responsibility.

However, 2020 is also the year of COVID-19; therefore, the urgency for cooperation and “Forging Ahead Together” is made more salient. In recent special virtual summits, ASEAN leaders are cognisant of the need to “bolster national and regional epidemic preparedness”. Areas where ASEAN can make lasting positive impacts are healthcare, the resilience of supply chains and the use of technology.

The front-facing matter in the pandemic is an immediate test of healthcare systems in ASEAN countries. According to World Bank data, the global average of doctors per a thousand people is 1.5. Singapore far exceeds that with a statistic of 2.3 doctors. However, it is the opposite for many countries in the region with Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam and Indonesia having less than one physician per one thousand people. Given the desired integration of ASEAN, the first priority is to lay the groundwork for stronger healthcare systems across Southeast Asia.

Currently, ASEAN has a Mutual Recognition Arrangement on medical practitioners that is meant to standardise qualifications across countries. Yet, this has not been able to take off as certification and language barriers remain. Moreover, member states should also work towards having the same standards of testing and

reporting of cases. If healthcare systems are not up to standard, there will always be the risk of a re-importation of COVID-19 cases within ASEAN.

A second revelation of the pandemic is the fragility of supply chains. At the onset, an immediate impulse of many governments was to limit the movement of goods and people across borders. While drastic measures had to be taken to delay transmission of the virus, there were unintended consequences in disrupting the flow of essential goods including medical equipment. Some held on tightly to raw materials needed to make surgical masks which ultimately held up mask productions. Export restrictions led to tons of undelivered rice stuck in port containers about to spoil.

Over time, supply chains may be fine-tuned to a fault, leaving countries to scramble for alternatives when a crisis such as COVID-19 hits. ASEAN’s ambitions to increase economic integration must factor in building up the resilience of supply chains. Despite the possibility of redundancies in the system, it nonetheless provides a good opportunity to map out supply chains in the region.

Finally, the role of technology has proved to be central in responding to COVID-19 and will continue to be crucial in the future of regional cooperation in post-lockdown, post-pandemic ASEAN. The ability to hold videoconferences in the interim should not be taken for granted, especially when some countries are not as advanced in their technological infrastructure. We can also expect an increased reliance on contact tracing mobile apps, especially as countries begin to think about ways to ease lockdown measures and open up their economies in the safest way possible.

Furthermore, digital solutions are beginning to address the previous areas of strengthening supply

chains and raising the standards of healthcare in the region. For example, telemedicine has been an essential alternative for those who are unwell in quarantine. Data analytics and artificial intelligence will be able to assess where supply chains may be overconcentrated.

Conscious adjustments need to be made through the COVID-19 crisis in building up regional resilience. The ASEAN Community Vision 2025 contains aspirations for further consolidation, integration and stronger cohesiveness as a Community. In light of the current pandemic, common health standards will need to be ensured before member states can think about reopening borders and resuming integration efforts. And technology will be a key enabler. ASEAN’s interdependencies are important for the flourishing of the region and should be further strengthened. This will be key in the post-pandemic recovery process.

Some things will not be the same when the pandemic is over. Although life will eventually resume as normal, there will be permanent disruptions and new adjustments. This is an opportunity. The necessary policies and changes implemented in the present can have a lasting positive impact on the ASEAN Community in the future.

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Jessica Wau is Assistant Director (ASEAN) at the Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA)

# Has the Pandemic Disrupted Vietnam's Chairmanship of ASEAN?

The COVID-19 pandemic is testing Vietnam's ability to lead ASEAN in 2020 as its Chair. In mid-November 2019, Hanoi was ready to host about 300 meetings in 2020, including the ASEAN Summits scheduled in April and November. It introduced the theme "Cohesive and Responsive" and identified five key priorities to pursue in line with the ASEAN Community Vision 2025, in addition to those set by previous chairs.

Three important meetings by ASEAN's Foreign, Defence and Economic Ministers held in January, February and March respectively, promised a good start for Vietnam's Chairmanship. It should be noted that these meetings agreed with the theme, five key priorities as well as the timetable for activities in 2020.

The pandemic, however, seriously impacts the context of Vietnam's Chairmanship. The ambitious agenda, which has been significantly influenced by geopolitical and geo-economic imperatives, now faces a situation in which non-traditional security has come to the fore. In this regard, pandemics and other non-traditional security threats have complicated the traditional security landscape, as well as the policy choices of ASEAN and its member states.

At the same time, the pandemic seems to have reinforced unfavourable conditions for multilateralism generally and ASEAN specifically. The pandemic exposed the unpreparedness and ineffectiveness of multilateral institutions and mechanisms, and prioritised national, unilateral responses when collective, multilateral actions were needed to manage the crisis. Of equal importance, it intensified, rather than reduced, the Sino-US strategic competition and the resulting competing modes of alignment. It also created added opportunities for China to exert its presence and influence in the region through more assertive moves, including those in the South China Sea.

Furthermore, the pandemic severely impacts ASEAN's ability to conduct business as usual. International and

*COVID-19 has compelled Vietnam to recalibrate some of its agendas and priorities as ASEAN Chair this year. What are the pressures faced by Vietnam and how has it responded to this challenge?*



**BY NGUYEN VU TUNG**





regional travel restrictions, impositions on social distancing, and the imperatives of fighting the pandemic have made many physical meetings impossible. The ASEAN-US Las Vegas Summit and the first ASEAN Summit respectively scheduled in March and April, were cancelled.

In other words, the pandemic has put more pressure on Vietnam in its capacity as ASEAN Chair to shore up the organisation's cohesiveness and responsiveness.

Nevertheless, Vietnam has shown a high level of responsiveness to lead ASEAN through this difficult time by promoting digital diplomacy. At Vietnam's initiative, online meetings are now welcomed and have become the new normal of conducting ASEAN business. Most ASEAN officials were quick to adapt to more sophisticated digital means of communication.

At the same time, Hanoi has worked hard behind the scenes to bring all parties together from various time zones, building consensus on matters related to not only meeting schedules, but also agendas and statements. Throughout March and April, all the events – including the ASEAN Coordination Council (ACC) meeting, ASEAN-EU Foreign Ministers Meeting, ASEAN-US Senior Official and Foreign Ministers Meetings, Special ASEAN Summit and Special ASEAN Plus Three Summit – were convened online. Vietnam's Prime Minister and Foreign Minister also made phone calls to their ASEAN counterparts. These virtual events led to the scheduling of more online meetings among ASEAN Member States and Dialogue Partners.

The significance of online meetings is multifold. It shows ASEAN's ability to adjust its schedule and quickly respond to the new situation. Fighting the pandemic was prioritised. As early as 14 February, Vietnam issued a Chairman's Statement on ASEAN Collective Response to the

Outbreak of Coronavirus Disease 2019. All the above-mentioned online meetings have been COVID-19 related, designed to foster regional cooperation not only in the public health sector, but also along ASEAN's community-building action plans in new contexts influenced by the pandemic.

Of equal importance, these meetings help to boost ASEAN cohesiveness in addressing important regional matters, especially in coping with the pandemic and forging a common stance on new developments in areas such as the South China Sea. The conduct and content of these meetings have also helped ASEAN maintain not only its visibility and proactiveness, but also its central role in the network of regional institutions. In other words, under Vietnam's Chairmanship, ASEAN is scoring rather well in responsiveness and cohesiveness.

Still, in the remaining months of 2020, it will be more difficult to move beyond conducting virtual diplomacy. The agreements reached at meetings, virtual or physical (when the pandemic is hopefully over in a couple of months), must be translated into actual implementation, which can be more challenging in the context of the pandemic and its aftermath. National prioritisation on economic recovery, intensification of Sino-US competition, lesser resources and appetite for multilateralism, and restricted international travel represent major hurdles for ASEAN's community-building process, which may enter a protracted post-COVID-19 phase under Vietnam's Chairmanship.

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Nguyen Vu Tung is President of the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam (DAV) and Vietnam's ambassador-designate to South Korea

# Navigating Through the Storm: What Does COVID-19 Mean for Indonesia's Regional Agenda?

*Indonesia is facing difficulties to suppress the number of COVID-19 infections due to limited medical equipment, infrastructure and human resources. With a depressed state capacity on one hand and President Jokowi's unique foreign policy outlook on the other, Indonesia might be forced to shift some of its international agendas as the pandemic rages on.*



**BY ANDREW W MANTONG**

Since the first case of COVID-19 was announced by President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) on 2 March 2020, Indonesia has recorded over 16,000 positive cases with fatalities measuring beyond 1,000. These figures meant that Indonesia has the highest fatality rate among ASEAN Member States and the second highest in terms of total confirmed cases at the time of writing.

Due to limited capacity for testing and tracking, some have suspected that the numbers may be higher. Media and analysts have pointed out several weaknesses in the way Indonesia has tackled the ongoing pandemic.

A slow response – even denial – from central government at the initial stage of the pandemic exacerbated the complicated hierarchical relationship between central and local governments. Meanwhile, a limited number of hospital beds as well as testing kits, labs and human resources indicate that the country has an inadequate healthcare infrastructure to deal with COVID-19.

Today, some metropolitan cities including Jakarta are implementing a strategy called *Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar* (Large Scale Social Distancing), almost similar to Malaysia's Movement Control Order (MCO), albeit less restrictive. However, various discussions among officials as well as citizens today also indicate that the discourse is shifting away from lockdown measures to easing of restrictions. These give rise to speculation that Indonesia could follow the steps of Sweden, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands by heading towards herd immunity.

This shift is arguably due to the massive fiscal burden suffered by the government today as poverty levels predictably soar to above 10 percent. By mid-April, more than 2 million Indonesians had reportedly lost their jobs, while the Indonesian Chamber of Trade and Industry argued that 15 million Indonesians have probably lost their source of income if numbers of informal sectors are included.

What do these circumstances mean for Indonesia's international standing? The COVID-19 pandemic





has exposed one of the most endemic problems faced by the Indonesian government: state capacity. Prior to the pandemic, Indonesia was well known at the global stage for its achievements made since *Reformasi* in terms of democratic consolidation, the ability to minimise the risk of disintegration and solid macroeconomic policies. Indonesia obtained a bigger profile as one of ASEAN's founding members, a key actor in regional security, its position in the G20 grouping, its increasing activism in the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and its growing agenda in the South West Pacific and Indian Ocean regions.

Today, however, as analysts and commentators express their concerns over slow responses and ineffective leadership of the Jokowi administration, *longue durée* factors do matter in shaping the real foundation of Indonesia's capacity. For foreign policy, these circumstances may further demonstrate the tensions between Indonesian aspirations and institutions, which have been apparent since Jokowi took office in 2014.

Jokowi inherited a structure of governance from previous administrations. Indonesian democracy has been relatively consolidated albeit the remaining problems of political party roles, institutionalisation and the unfinished business of civil-military relations despite its promising economic growth. His perception on foreign policy is rather distinct: his take was that the previous administration's foreign policy was more dedicated towards image building and less towards boosting up state capacity.

He was initially more concerned with inequality, bothered by the fact that national markets were not fully connected and integrated. He also saw problems in tax ratios and possibly the unanswered promise of Indonesia's demographic bonus. Moreover, in an interview with some of his advisors back in 2015,

they indicated that the President was concerned about how Indonesia can "graduate" from a "donor-receiver" to becoming a self-reliant country. In the case of this pandemic, it translates into the state providing sanitation, treatment and basic compensation for its disadvantaged subjects.

Foreign policy and strategic discourses were then set under some key rubrics such as "down-to-earth diplomacy" and "the Global Maritime Fulcrum (GMF)". Coherent within these ideas is that a strong, stable and well-connected Indonesia is key for national security and regional stability. The idea was criticised by various experts and pundits that an inward-looking Indonesia is bad for the country, contrarian to its aspiration to attract more investment, and would eventually undermine ASEAN. By the time he resumed power in the second term, the agenda of economic diplomacy was elevated as the main rubric of foreign policy with specific objectives such as continuing to ensure the inflow of investment, boosting cyber connectivity and accelerating human resources development.

This is not to say that Jokowi's choices of foreign policy and strategy are the best for Indonesia. However, the management of its diplomacy and the implementation of the GMF indicate a coherent view of Jokowi's outlook: that the vital interest and core values of Indonesia's policies are economic. Foreign policy has been more about foreign economic policy.

The dominance of an economic outlook has also been consistent in the way the President filters information and discerns facts as well as trends regarding COVID-19. These include preparing a stimulus and recovery plan for the tourism sector to endure the pandemic as one of the main initial responses. It was also apparent in the way Jokowi designed Indonesia's policy towards people mobility across regions, and it will arguably

determine whether and how the administration will carry on with lockdown strategies in the near future. Malaysia's decision to ease off the MCO will arguably create a strong learning effect for Jokowi on how to proceed with managing the pandemic especially on economic terms.

With all of this in mind, poor state capacity and tendency to filter problems based on economic measures mean several things for Indonesia's regional and global position after COVID-19.

First, the immediate agenda would be to ensure the availability and access to medical equipment and infrastructure, as well as the protection of Indonesians abroad. Testing and tracking limit Indonesia's capacity to deal with COVID-19 as the President is still disappointed that the number of daily tests is far below the target, while national labs suffer from extremely limited kits and human resources to accelerate testing.

Second, as some of Indonesia's initiatives on multilateral channels have demonstrated, the next main interest for Indonesia is future access to vaccine along with the continuity of international distribution of goods and supplies. Global redistribution of medical goods will be critical to Indonesia. As the current trend of great power competition has indicated, especially over the debate on global health regimes and vaccine development, there may be challenges to Indonesia's geopolitical outlook.

Throughout 2019, Indonesian diplomacy had been devoted to promote an ASEAN vision of the Indo-Pacific. Indonesia expects to foster a region where the United States and China will remain benevolent in furthering their agenda under several principles such as inclusiveness, openness and transparency. On the issue of public health, with experiences from the SARS outbreak, Indonesia and other ASEAN Member States once played an

active role in managing regional powers through various multilateral tracks, such as the ASEAN Plus (through which China, Japan and South Korea were engaged) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) (through which the United States was engaged). Today, the Trump administration shows that an inclusive Indo-Pacific might probably be a wishful thinking as Washington is moving away from its traditional role in providing global and regional public goods. Therefore, Indonesia's agenda may someday leave the Indo-Pacific as a neglected multilateral agenda at best, especially if Jakarta sees the ASEAN Plus Three platform as a more viable option to deal with the pandemic.

However, this does not mean that Indonesia's position in managing great power relations will tilt the balance to the East instead. Lessons from SARS show that ASEAN-led institutionalisation of various regional initiatives, such as the establishment of a regional task force and surveillance mechanism, suffered from poor and unevenly-distributed healthcare capacities within countries and across the region.

If the trend persists, bilateral measures will become the more relevant *modus operandi*. As the Trump administration withdraws financial resources from the World Health Organization (WHO) to other agencies, some unilateral platforms such as USAID Global Health Security (GHS) in Indonesia might become more instrumental. While Jokowi probably seeks to save the tourism, manufacturing, retail and commodity sectors as the next main agenda, bilateral deals with President Trump will be more likely without any references to the regional agenda, such as the one conducted recently to open a new industrial estate in Java. At the same time, Jakarta continues to ensure assistance and cooperation from Asian countries such as China and South Korea in ensuring medical supplies are available for

day-to-day healthcare.

Therefore, despite the endemic structural problems at both the national and international levels on public health, it is premature to assume that COVID-19 will become a game changer or a moment of reflexivity. The pandemic should be a reminder that effective and creative leadership is important at every level, especially when it comes to long-term outlooks. The pandemic relates to broader issues of social and ecological problems that demand a strategic reorientation at every level. However, it remains a hard task for Jokowi as it does for the region.

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Andrew W Mantong is Researcher in International Relations, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Indonesia



# The Philippines and the “New Normal”

The existential threat that is the COVID-19 pandemic immediately rose to the top of the global security agenda. In the Philippines, the first case was reported on 30 January 2020 and increased steadily by the start of March through local transmission. President Rodrigo Duterte placed the country under a state of public health emergency on 8 March, but placed Metro Manila under a community quarantine from 15 March to 14 April that was later extended to 15 May. The lockdown entails restrictions on people's movement (strict home quarantine and social distancing) and travel, as well as the closure of major business establishments.

The police and the military have been tasked to enforce the quarantine and to deal with violators accordingly, thereafter prompting the United Nations to express concerns over the Philippines' “highly militarised response”. Despite these measures, the number of cases in the country is now upwards of 9,000 with over 600 deaths. With the pandemic yet to reach its peak, it remains to be seen if the Philippines' response works best to contain the outbreak and flatten the curve of transmission.

What is certain is that once the lockdowns are lifted in various parts of the world, life will take on a different kind of “normal”. In this “new normal”, there are two aspects that have the potential to impact the Philippines' foreign policy.

First, the pandemic casts a spotlight on the significance of non-traditional security issues. The COVID-19 pandemic definitively exposes the arbitrariness of the line that divides “high politics” from “low politics”. Indeed, the way that the Philippines securitised the virus is evidence that pandemics are now seen as clear and present dangers. This is not unprecedented considering that other countries responded the same way to the “war” on HIV/AIDS, SARS and

*The struggle against COVID-19 in the Philippines is expected to be extended, with the peak of the pandemic yet to be reached. How then would the “new normal” influence the nation's foreign policy?*



**BY CHARMINE  
MISALUCHA-WILLOUGHBY**





H1N1. The breadth and depth of the COVID-19 phenomenon, however, exposes that containing its spread is hinged on the underlying but critical role of biosecurity and food security.

For the Philippines, the “new normal” demands better healthcare facilities and more subsidies for the agricultural sector, which can minimise supply chain disruptions and thereby ensure safety nets in the provision of public goods and access to social services. The “new normal” likewise requires better cyber infrastructures and capacities to allow access to technologies for different groups in society.

Thus, non-traditional security issues illustrate that at best, highly militarised responses are effective only in the short-term. In the long run, this national security response is more difficult to sustain than an incremental but directed move towards a more developmental response. Moreover, securitising the pandemic – or any issue for that matter – is steeped in politics and the exercise of power, and so the longer it is in effect, the harder it will be to maintain.

The prominence of COVID-19 notwithstanding, the “new normal” still retains the Philippines’ traditional security concerns. Amid novel coronavirus concerns, tensions in the South China Sea sparked anew with China’s deployment of a survey ship in April 2020. This came on the heels of other activities, including the sinking of a Vietnamese fishing boat on 2 April, deploying the aircraft carrier Liaoning on 13 and 28 April, and naming features in the contested waters on 20 April.

While the United States has around 1 million cases of COVID-19 and 64,000 deaths, it must also grapple with the politics of the 2020 elections. In short, although it is business as usual in great power competition, the Philippines’ foreign policy is

inevitably impacted by the US-China relations, not least because of Duterte’s policy has oscillated from balancing to hedging to bandwagoning. The Duterte administration must inevitably craft a response to temper expectations amid stalled Chinese projects because of the pandemic. At the same time, the country’s alliance with the United States, which was derailed a bit following a cancelled visa issue in February 2020, needs to be brought back on track. This delicate balancing act needs to be done in cognisance of the upcoming 2022 presidential elections.

Hence, the attendant issues of the “new normal” require fundamental changes from the Philippines, although whether these changes are feasible is more of a question of political will. The country ultimately needs to develop resilience by improving its governance capacities. This, in turn, can lead to the refinement of its foreign policies and the enhancement of its international relations.

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Charmaine Misalucha-Willoughby is Program Convener at Asia Pacific Pathways to Progress, and Associate Professor in International Studies Department, De La Salle University, Manila, the Philippines



# Thailand's COVID-19 Crisis and Prospects

*Thailand has seen a lot in recent years – coups, curfews, demonstrations, violence in the streets and forced airport closures. But the second largest economy in ASEAN has encountered nothing like COVID-19, and its impact will be far reaching, beyond the immediate healthcare and economic concerns.*



**BY THITINAN PONGSUDHIRAK**

From social distancing and heightened hygiene concerns to lockdowns and curfews, Thailand has suffered from the coronavirus pandemic like most other countries in the world.

During the peak of the pandemic in March and April 2020, there was nowhere to run, but also no need to hide. As long as people stayed away from other people as much, as far and as long as they could manage, they were supposed to be out of the virus' way. This pandemic has also seen the large-scale movement of tourists, students, expatriates and migrant workers abroad, whom have scrambled to catch the last means of transport home before borders shut and travel came to a near halt. This has resulted in the lowest number of foreigners in any host country, an unprecedented phenomenon in modern globalised times.

Yet it has not meant globalisation has stopped or reversed, or even slowed. True, borders have come up, trade has gone down and

global economic integration will be hindered dramatically. Travel and tourism will take many months to return to the numbers and patterns prior to COVID-19. But in other ways, globalisation has become lopsided, neither reversed nor stopped. Transport of all modes has been dealt a major blow, whereas communications have made huge strides to the point that it has become somewhat substitutable for transportation. Thanks to the Internet and media technologies, the virtual world is now a much bigger part of the physical world. Working remotely in place of in-person work may be a legacy after COVID-19 is brought under complete control.

After almost three months of lockdown since late March, quarantine and other stringent social distancing measures around the world, the mood is shifting and in need of policy recalibration. First, the draconian anti-virus measures appear to be working. To date, global numbers have steadied on a downside trend, while recoveries look promising.

Second, after so long under self-isolation, many have grown tired of confinement and lockdown fatigue. Third, detrimental income effects are kicking in. Those with salaries are more secure, but countless millions, who live from one pay cheque to the next, or from the cash-driven informal economy in much of Southeast Asia, need their jobs back.

It is akin to extinguishing the virus by undermining the people's livelihood, and thereby squeezing their lives. People are not just kept away from friends, jobs and other activities but they are not allowed to earn an income. Government relief money, in cases like Thailand, appears inadequate for subsistence over the months ahead. Thus, the pressure will continue to build for a partial and gradual resumption of life and livelihood, of jobs and income, while precautions like social-distancing and hand-washing remain in place. Most countries that went into lockdown would have let up, reopening and restarting parts of

their economies and societies, with vigilance and precautionary procedures.

For Thailand, the coronavirus is a godsend for the government of Prime Minister Prayut Chan-ocha on the one hand and a hot potato on the other. The crisis has effectively muted dissenting voices from youth movements and civil society, and potentially whitewashed and covered up corruption scandals, such as unaccounted face masks. Previously controversial cabinet members have sat out quietly. While the Prayut government initially appeared incompetent, Thailand's medical professionals have been thrust into the limelight as public health technocrats, shoring up government credibility.

Yet the COVID-19 crisis has exposed Thailand's outdated

bureaucracy and sheer ineptitude of government leaders, from ministers of public health and education, right up to the Prime Minister. Subsidy schemes from a massive 1.9 trillion Baht (USD 60 billion) fiscal stabilisation package, equivalent to 12 percent of the GDP, have been mishandled, running up Thai public debt to nearly the legal limit of 60 percent of the GDP. Many Thais are upset, with their frustrations reaching back even before the pandemic hit. However, they have been kept down and at home by the virus and accompanying lockdown regulations, thus limiting any opportunities to publicly demonstrate their displeasure.

Thailand is on course for a sharp economic downturn, which will bring further hardship to many Thais. Coupled with political tension, government mismanagement and political

incompetence, it is likely to lead to further social discontent and confrontation.

This crisis should be taken as an opportunity to undertake longstanding and necessary bureaucratic reforms, constitutional amendments, economic policy overhauls, education upgrading and so forth. But instead, the coronavirus is more likely to be a crisis within crises that seem unavoidable for Thailand to reach a new normal in which it can move forward again.

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Thitinan Pongsudhirak is Director of the Institute of Security and International Studies, Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand





# Cambodia's COVID-19 Responses: Preventive and Responsive Measures

*Cambodia has been doing relatively well in its fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. However, more regional and international cooperation is needed, especially since the struggle does not seem to be abating soon.*



BY CHARADINE PICH

13 February 2020 marked a historical humanitarian moment in the decision of the Cambodian government to allow the *Westerdam* ship to dock at the Sihanoukville Port. The Dutch-American cruise ship had previously been denied entry into Japan, the Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand and Guam – out of the fear that the COVID-19 virus was on board. The World Health Organization (WHO) highly appreciated the decision and praised it as an ideal example of an international solidarity amidst the hard time we are facing together.

So far, Cambodia has 122 infected cases with 121 recoveries, leaving only one still hospitalised as of 12 May. A majority of these were imported cases. At the time of writing, Cambodia has reported zero new cases for the last few weeks. This is a positive development, although the WHO still considers Cambodia to be at high risk of community transmission. As a result, the government has warned the public to remain vigilant and to exercise extra caution.

Cambodia has never been placed in a mandatory lockdown before. What are some of the government's policies and responses that can enable it to contain the virus' spread? What are some of the collaborative efforts with external partners to assist Cambodia in fighting this pandemic? What are the implications and setbacks?

## Prompt measures and responsive policies

When the COVID-19 infection rate spiked in early March, the government ordered the closure of schools, universities and entertainment areas as well as limited social gatherings. Although the country attempted to maintain a business as usual scenario, people were urged to stay home and avoid unnecessary outings. Additional measures include suspending foreign visas, declaring a state of emergency, cancelling new year celebrations, ordering a temporary restriction of

movement and allocating more economic resources to the health sector.

So far, the government's proactive policies have proven to be effective in containing the spread of the virus as well as curbing the social panic. As the saying goes, prevention is better than cure. As of 3 May, more than 12,304 tests had been conducted, according to the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) of the Ministry of Health (MoH). The government has also gathered different resources to execute its responsive measures including the US\$20 million of World Bank credit as well as donations of medical supplies and protective equipment from China, Japan and Vietnam. Moreover, the Jack Ma Foundation and Alibaba Foundation of China donated 20,000 test kits to Cambodia, as well as other medical equipment. Additionally, France has just committed EUR400,000 to support three research projects on COVID-19 pandemic in Cambodia.



Following Prime Minister Hun Sen's announcement on 1 April to donate his seven-months' salary (worth around US\$17,000), other officials have followed suit and that has seen a dramatic increase in state budget reserve allocated to fight the pandemic. The crowdfunding campaign collected a large sum of donation from the wider public and private sector alike, signifying a large-scale social solidarity as one "Khmer family".

## **Cambodia and regional responses: Cooperative efforts and the loopholes**

On regional platform, a Special ASEAN Plus Three Summit on COVID-19 was conducted on 14 April via video conference. The joint statement issued a call for closer cooperation on the early-warning systems for pandemics and disease outbreaks, securing adequate funding and the exchange of best practices in the joint fight against this pandemic crisis. Indeed, we are facing the imperative to balance between

national leadership and international solidarity, national boundary and borderless sentiment, as well as national sovereignty and regional collaboration.

During the recent ASEAN virtual summit on COVID-19, Prime Minister Hun Sen urged ASEAN Member States to provide support to each other including the sharing of resources, techniques, medical equipment and supplies. Cambodia also supports the establishment of a COVID-19 ASEAN Fund.

We are cognisant of the fact that the pandemic is not showing signs of abating anytime soon. Cambodia has been equipped with necessary supplies and medical frontliners, although their quantity would not be sufficient in the case of a larger-scale outbreak. That is why the MoH and relevant key agencies have tried their best to prevent a second wave of outbreak.

Nevertheless, a more proactive regional response is needed. There ought to be a strong leadership in this regard whereby serious

initiatives and key project implementations are being rolled out such that ASEAN as a whole can come together as one. There is a shortfall in "we vs them" scenario where countries are forced to close borders to contain the spread of the virus.

What would the post-COVID-19 society look like in Cambodia? Will there be a change in the regional and international order? How would the future economies of scale and global supply chain be adjusted afterward? Would international institutions go through dramatic change, or would they stay the same? These are big questions that remain unanswered.

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Charadine Pich is Deputy Director of the Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (CICP) and Coordinator of the Global Center for Mekong Studies (GCMS-Cambodia Center, a Track Two think tank network of Lancang-Mekong Cooperation); she also serves as Advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Kingdom of Cambodia





# Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic in Laos

*Like many countries around the world, Laos is grappling with the impact of this global pandemic. While an effective government response seems to have mitigated the worst of its public health consequences, significant socio-economic challenges remain in the long-run.*



**BY EKTO VONGPHAKDY**

Since the outbreak of the disease in January 2020, COVID-19 has become the world's most pressing non-traditional security threat. The World Health Organization (WHO) has officially classified COVID-19 a global pandemic in the middle of March 2020 as the number of infections and deaths spiraled. By the end of April 2020, reports put infections at over 3,000,000 cases, with 200,000 deaths and close to a million recoveries.

Disrupted economic activities mean that global trade is expected to fall between 13 percent and 32 percent this year. Conversely, reports have also indicated that environmental readings have improved across the world due to less pollution generated by economic activities and transportation vehicles.

Despite its lockdown and travel restrictions, Laos has not been spared from the effects of this pandemic. Its first case was detected on 23 March 2020 and the total number of infections have

steadily increased to 19 as of 13 April 2020. Besides monitoring and managing the healthcare aspect of this pandemic, the Lao Government has had to give special attention to mitigate the economic effects on the livelihoods of its citizens and the wider economy.

The government has established the National Taskforce Committee for COVID-19 Prevention and Control to address the spread and impacts of COVID-19. Its missions are to serve as a focal point in managing the healthcare aspects of the pandemic, including the daily press conferences and updates. In addition, it studies the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on socio-economic development and works to address its resulting challenges. Moreover, Prime Minister Dr Thongloun Sisoulith has issued additional notifications, such as Order No. 06/PM on 29 March 2020, which details containment and prevention measures as well as the framework for a whole-of-government response to the COVID-19

pandemic. A consequence of this was the lockdown of the country for almost two months.

The government and the people have worked hand-in-hand in the struggle against COVID-19. The measures in place have resulted in both positive and negative impacts. On the positive side, the capacity of the Lao Government for decisive leadership, supplemented by the contribution of all relevant local stakeholders in managing the pandemic, has been noteworthy. There has also been cooperation with regional and international partners, like ASEAN, the WHO and the United Nations.

The lockdown has revealed that social order has prevailed in Laos. By following instructions to stay and work from home where possible, the risk of infections has been demonstrably minimised – resulting in a manageable rate of infections. Family members have more time for each other and people are increasingly self-sufficient. In addition, the



slowing down of human activities and traffic across the land and on rivers have seen a positive impact on the environment. Incidentally, less traffic has also meant less vehicle accidents across the country.

Nevertheless, there are also challenges that need to be addressed. The disruption caused by the lockdown to businesses and economic activity in both the public and private sectors has been severe. The National Economic Research Institute estimates that the GDP growth of Laos will decline from 6.1 percent in 2019 to 3.3 percent in 2020. Meanwhile, an estimation by the Asian Development Bank predicts the country's growth to be around 3.5 percent for the same year.

Education is another sector that has been severely disrupted. All schools have been closed and Laos lacks the technical capacity and resources to implement an effective e-learning system throughout the country. Parents

have now found themselves playing the role of teachers and trainers. The spread of COVID-19 has also restricted the celebration of several traditional Lao festivals and national events, such as the Lao New Year festival, wedding parties and sports competitions.

The National Taskforce Committee for COVID-19 Prevention and Control is planning to ease restrictions once it has ascertained that the local spread of COVID-19 is under control. Nevertheless, two phases will be decided. Phase One will see domestic traveling and most normal activities allowed, but closely monitored and evaluated for 30 days. If infection cases subside during Phase One, then Phase Two will kick in – all activities will be able to resume fully. The only exemption remains for travelers into Laos who must stay at self-quarantine centres provided by the government for at least 14 days.

Authorities will continue to remind people that even when the

lockdown restrictions are eased, they will always have to be mindful of good hygiene and other preventive measures until a vaccine is discovered. The risk of further outbreaks is highly plausible. Hopefully, the lessons learnt from this pandemic will be remembered and applied for future pandemics as well as other unexpected, major disruptions.

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Ekto Vongphakdy is Research Fellow in the Strategic and International Studies Division, Institute of Foreign Affairs, Laos





# Myanmar: The COVID-19 Situation Report

*Some have criticised Myanmar for its perceived lack of preparedness in dealing with the COVID-19 outbreak. But is this grounded in reality, and how effective are the current measures implemented by Naypyitaw?*



**BY SHWE YEE OO**

The COVID-19 positive cases identified on 23 March in Myanmar alarmed the population – the nightmare they had wanted to avoid had arrived. Shortly thereafter, supermarkets were filled with people panic buying. An outbreak had been feared and expected based on Myanmar's perceived lack of preparedness and its weak financial capacity. The people were doubtful that Naypyitaw would be able to manage the crisis effectively. Some had even remarked that authorities did not prepare, despite having enough time.

The immediate priority was to establish quarantine centres with sufficient capacity, and hospitals and schools became the first of these centres. Later, the government was able to add monasteries (courtesy of religious leaders), and certain hotels and hostels (with support from local donors) as supplementary quarantine centres. Despite this, Myanmar is still experiencing new admissions to quarantine centres daily and overall capacity, in spite of the above efforts, is now in question. Not limited to just quarantine centres, the management of hundreds of people potentially positive for COVID-19 has been a challenge. In hospitals, there are pressures on staffing, intensive care units, respirator capacity and personal protective equipment.

The second priority was to get enough test kits to test suspected victims as soon as possible. In the early days of the outbreak, Myanmar had to send sample swabs to Thailand for testing. By 26 March, the government announced that 40,000 test kits (donations from Temasek Foundation and USAID) were on their way. Even though there are now test kits in Myanmar, more manpower is needed to administer the number of tests required. The third requisite was to get all essential medical equipment for healthcare providers. In late March, Myanmar received ventilators from the same donors and on 8 April, Myanmar received a medical team from China bringing vital medical equipment. Up to the end of April, Myanmar had done 8,085 tests and had 151 positive

cases, 6 deaths, 3,078 suspected cases under investigation, and 42,636 people quarantined according to the country's Ministry of Health and Sports.

The government took appropriate action in the community. All of those who had contact with positive cases were traced, and wards and streets where positive cases were found had been ordered to close. The Stay-At-Home Order that started on 11 April was effective in the whole of Yangon, and continued until mid-May in 10 townships where most of the COVID-19 cases were found. People are recommended to reduce travels, adopt appropriate hygiene measures, and avoid crowds. All large gatherings have been banned or cancelled, including important occasions such as Myanmar New Year Festival and Armed Forces Day Celebration.

The government's Food Assistance Providing Programme was established for affected unemployed and daily paid workers during the lockdown period. Households that qualify for benefits were surveyed and listed by the administrative chief of each ward and village. Food was distributed but the amount was insufficient for big families. Many generous individual donors also came forward.

That said, the effectiveness and efficiency of the government's programme is still in question. A visa ban was imposed on visitors from badly affected countries, like Italy, France, Iran, Spain and the United States. Myanmar citizens coming back from a foreign country as well as domestically travelling through different states are quarantined for 21 days.

Myanmar's economy had already been affected since the virus had spread to the southern part of China where trade with Myanmar is significant. Border trade had dried up, and Myanmar's main food exports to China were severely hit. Ministry of Commerce

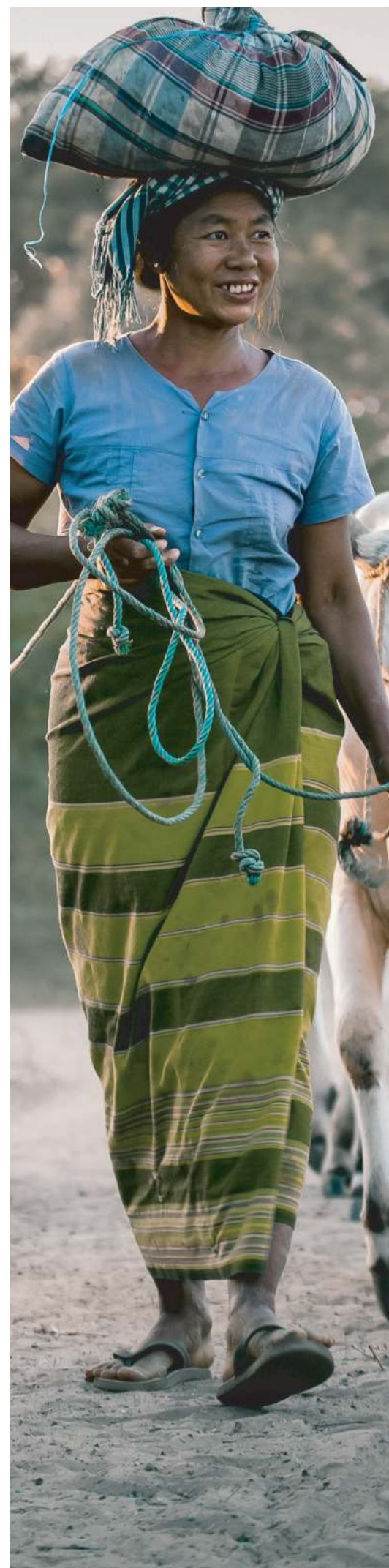
data indicates that Myanmar lost US\$8 million a day in border trade at the Muse border alone. According to the Confederation Trade Union of Myanmar, by 19 March, more than 10,000 workers from local garment factories across the country faced layoffs due to the heavy dependency of raw materials from China. In the Irrawaddy region, the lack of demand from China left 30,000 workers unemployed in the crab production business. The Ministry of Tourism forecasts that tourist numbers are likely to fall by 50 percent in 2020 on account of COVID-19.

The Central Bank of Myanmar reduced its interest rate from 9.5 percent to 8.5 percent effective 1 April as the economy slowed. On 18 March, the government announced a stimulus package including 100 billion Kyat (about US\$70 million) worth of loans, easing deadlines for tax payments and tax exemptions for Myanmar-owned businesses. The emphasis is on assisting mainly garment and manufacturing industries, tourism, and locally owned small and medium enterprises (SMEs). On 27 April, the government issued the "Comprehensive Economic Response Plan" for economic recovery. It includes strategies and action plans – a combination of fiscal measures and policy responses for improving the macroeconomic environment through monetary stimulus, promoting investment, easing the strains in the banking sector, lessening the impact on workers and households, promoting the healthcare system with increased government spending and increasing the COVID-19 contingency fund.

The new normal for Myanmar during and after the pandemic will depend on the effectiveness of these measures.

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Shwe Yee Oo is Research Assistant at the Myanmar Institute of Strategic and International Studies (MISIS) and currently a Pacific Forum Non-resident Fellow



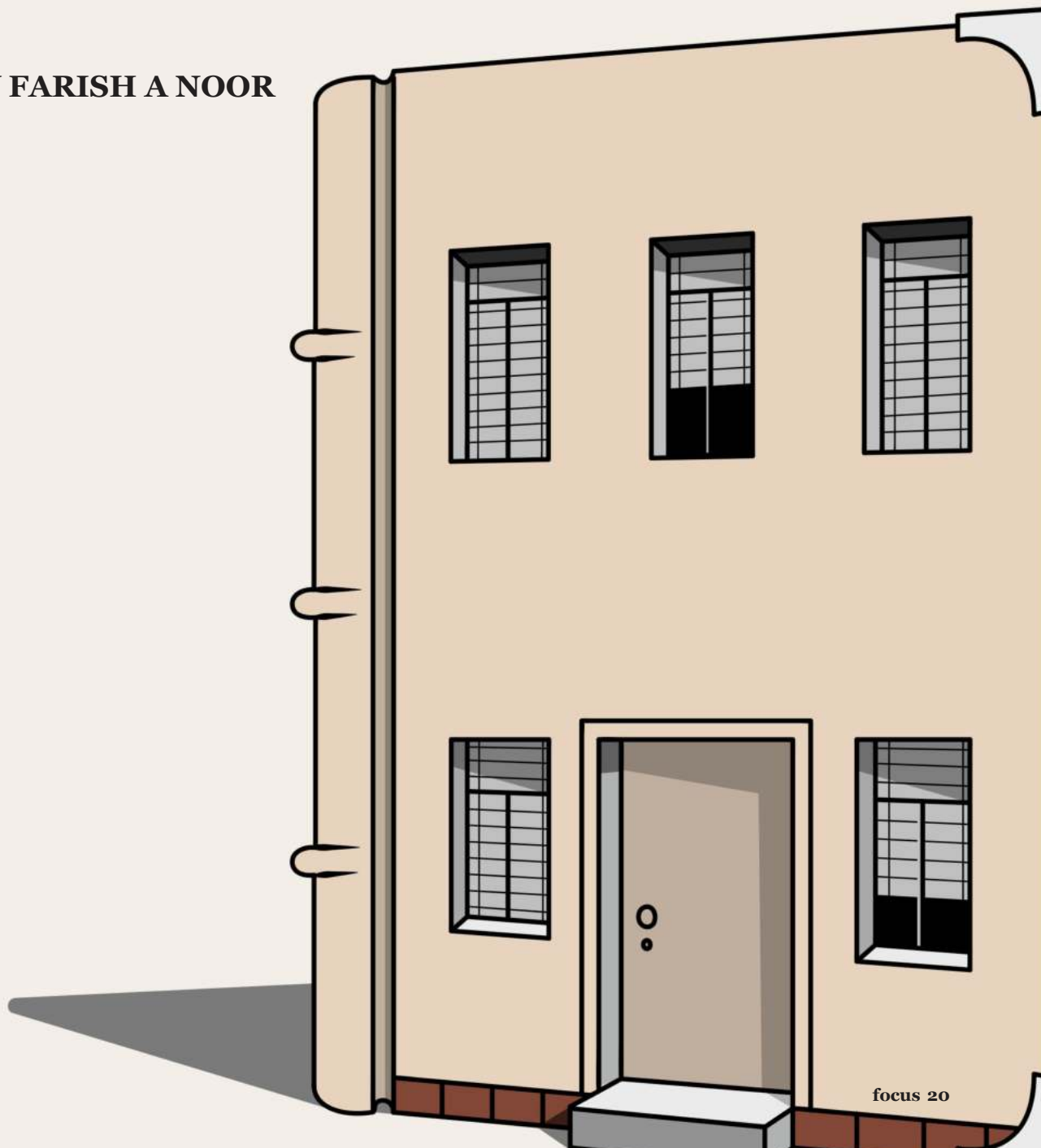


# Teaching in the Age of the “New Normal”

*State-mandated closures of learning institutions have brought conventional learning to a halt in an attempt to slow the spread of COVID-19. The need to ensure continuity of teaching and learning has propelled institutions of all levels of education to shift from brick-and-mortar classroom learning to virtual classes – but how will this affect universities at large?*



**BY FARISH A NOOR**



The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has caught many universities, polytechnics and institutions of higher learning by surprise. In a space of just a few weeks, countries all over the world began shutting their borders, restricted the arrival of foreigners and imposed lockdowns on their respective societies. All of this has had an impact on businesses and bureaucracies the world over; universities have also been greatly impacted.

The modern university today aspires to attain certain universal goals: to expose its faculty and student body to a wider international community; to encourage and promote inter-institution cooperation and collaboration; and to build an international faculty and student body that reflects the global realities of our interconnected world. In many parts of the world the evolution of the modern university has been in tandem with the process of late industrial globalisation. Consequently, the global impact of the COVID-19 crisis has also been felt at the university level.

As a result of the swathe of restrictions and controls that have been imposed by governments across the globe, many universities are now left wondering if the goal of creating such inclusive and globalised institutions are viable in the near future. This is particularly true for universities in some European and North American countries that have grown dependent of foreign students as a source of additional income. Now, with the prospect of further curbs on overseas travel looming over the horizon, there is the very real worry that student numbers will decline in a significant manner; some universities may well see a drastic drop in student enrolment for the next academic year. This does not bode well for the financial health of such institutions and the career prospects of their academic staff.

## Even the “new normal” has its silver lining

Notwithstanding the challenge that faces universities all over the world today – notably the problem of maintaining student numbers – in terms of teaching praxis, the COVID-19 crisis has significantly altered the manner in which teaching is conducted and the relationship between teachers and students in particular. At present (May 2020), face-to-face teaching has been stopped in many universities in Asia and Europe, forcing lecturers to opt for social media platforms, such as Zoom, Messenger, Microsoft Teams and so on. Different platforms have different capabilities and some may be better suited for classes with student numbers around 10 to 30. However, for all intents and purposes, it would be futile to use these platforms for large lectures that involve hundreds of students.

The same platforms have, however, allowed lecturers like myself to maintain contact with their students on a regular basis and come to replace the conventional lecturer-student consultation that used to take place in the confines of the lecturer’s office. One advantage of this new mode of communication is that it has allowed lecturers to have more flexible consultation hours and has made it easier for students to approach their lecturers – who previously were only available on campus at set times and dates.

Another advantage of such platforms is that they allow lecturers, like myself, to conduct pastoral care in the form of both formal and informal meetings, discussions and consultations with students who may themselves be feeling the pressure of lockdowns and consequently have other worries on their minds. In my own case, almost half of my students happen to be foreigners who have left their homes and families and

are now unable to go back home due to air travel restrictions. Confined as they are in their dormitories and told that they should not engage in group activities, such as cooking and eating together in the campus halls, loneliness and isolation have become real issues to be addressed and dealt with. Here is where social media has proven to be invaluable to lecturers who are concerned for their students’ mental health and well-being. Through various social media platforms, I have been able to conduct not only classes online, but also organise informal gatherings, such as having virtual dinners together with students. The fact that their lecturers are now there for them to reach out to means that individual foreign students no longer feel as isolated as before. This has actually improved rapport between the teaching staff and the student body. Ironically, it took a crisis like this one to facilitate better, more regular contact between staff and students. In my own case, I have resolved to maintain this form of regular virtual contact even after the lockdown has been lifted and the crisis is over.

## The post-COVID university of the near future

Though many hope that the present crisis will abate in a few months, analysts have warned that in the future the possibility of a similar crisis, or worse, cannot be discounted. The global communicative architecture that has been created – which brings together cheap and fast cross-boundary travel, mass movement, urbanisation, reliance on cheap foreign labour, and so on – all point to the possibility of yet another pandemic in the years to come.

The university of today will have to adapt and prepare for such contingencies in the same way that governments have to prepare for



the worst-case scenario. In the global age that we live in which competitiveness is linked to success and prominence, universities will have to think of new ways to maintain and possibly increase student numbers as well as the intake of foreign students in such challenging times. This is due to the fact that the diversity of the student body as well as the intake of foreign staff and students count as factors that determine university rankings. How is this to be done if students are less able to move around the globe and study overseas?

One of the takeaway points we have learned from this crisis is that the functionality of a university does not depend on how large or beautiful its campus is, but on how well it has laid out its communication architecture. The universities that have come out at the top are the ones that were best prepared to make the rapid switch from face-to-face teaching to online teaching and virtual classes/lectures – although this is easier for the humanities and less so for the hard sciences, which still require labs and facilities on site. In the decades to come we may well see more and more

universities opting for such an approach, with more capital being invested into online resources and platforms of communication that are efficient and secure.

Consequently, the traditional view of universities as large complexes of learning – dotted with huge auditoriums, lecture halls, conference centres and crowded with students – may give way to sleeker, more streamlined and less cumbersome institutions that allow for flexibility in teaching and learning. This may also include the virtual enrolment of foreign students who may not have to physically travel abroad to a foreign university and instead undergo the entire degree virtually in their home countries.

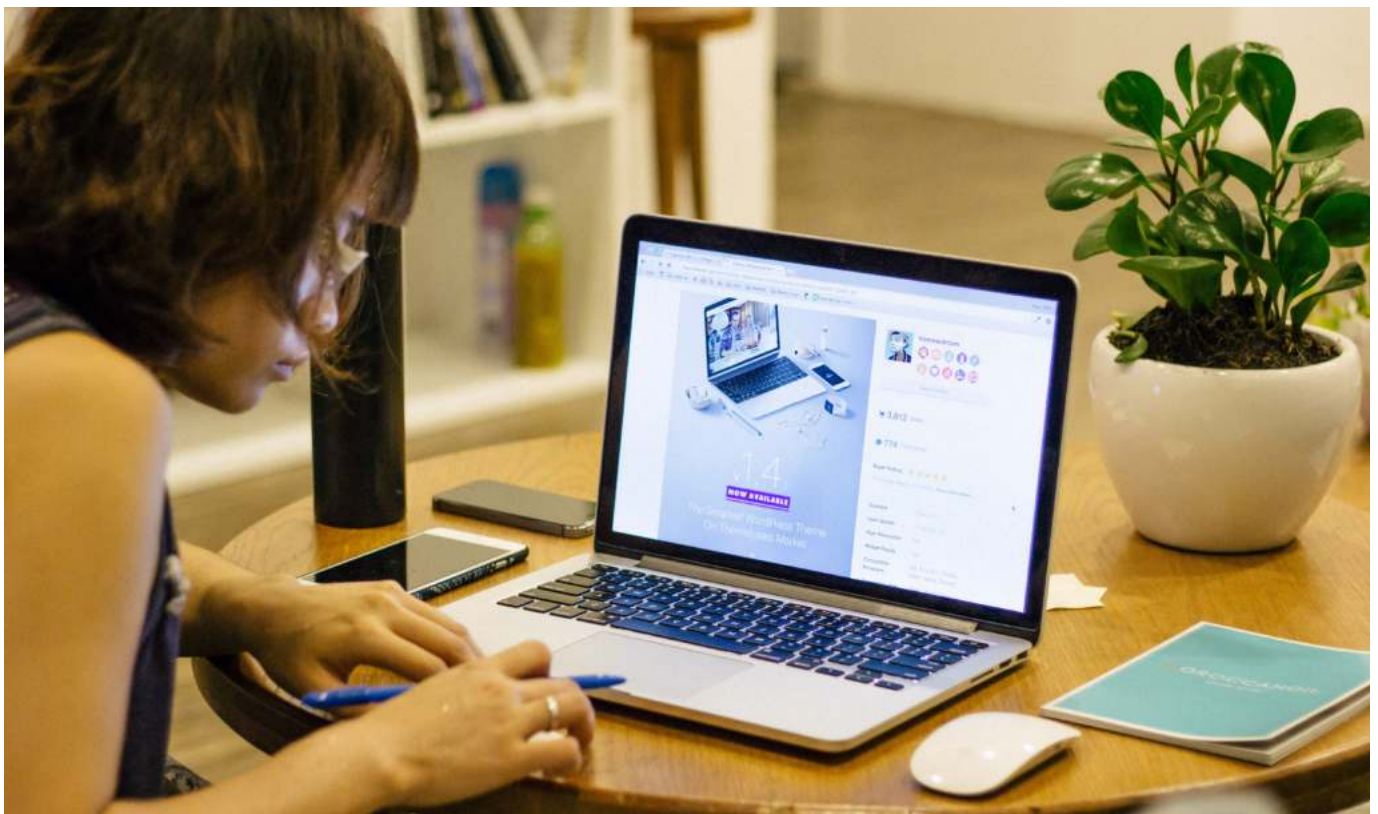
Universities can and should also cut down on large conferences that bring together scholars when all of that can be done virtually. This will also reduce carbon emissions as fewer people need to travel thousands of miles away only to present a paper in a space of thirty minutes. Over the past few months, I have virtually attended several conferences overseas online – this was less taxing on my body and the environment too. As

a result, I have resolved not to fly overseas for conferences any longer as such travel has proven to be patently unnecessary.

Should such changes take place, the traditionalists among us need not worry too much about the fate of the university now and in the future. After all, universities are fundamentally places of learning and research, and such work takes place in the domain of the mind. Should the universities of the future grow increasingly minimalist in size and appearance, this only reminds us of the fact that what makes a university a place of genuine learning is the spirit of enquiry and research, which is cultivated by the teacher-student relationship first and foremost – and the buildings in and around the universities are merely the structural accoutrements to what is, in the final analysis, a mental endeavour.

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Farish A Noor is Associate Professor at the S Rajaratnam School of International Studies and the School of History (SoH), Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore



# Steps Towards Easing of MCO



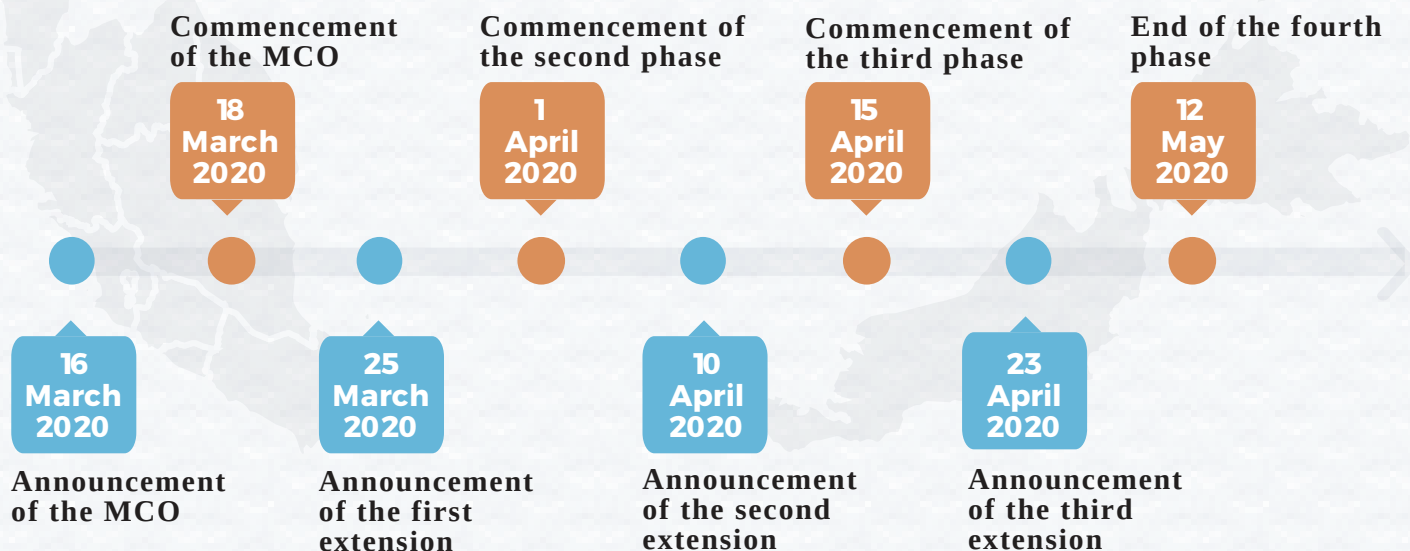
## QUICKTAKE

The Movement Control Order (MCO) in Malaysia has been in place for six weeks after three extensions by the Government. There remains no definite termination point in sight yet, despite its current period set to last until 12 May 2020. At the same time, the number of infection cases in Malaysia also seems to be declining, triggering the conversation on ending the MCO. As we ease into its fourth phase, some thought and analyses should be given to how the transition period from the MCO to the new normal would look like.

BY ZARINA ZAINUDDIN, PUTERI NOR  
ARIANE YASMIN AND MUHAMMAD SINATRA



### A Brief Timeline



### Supplementary Rules of the MCO



Ban on interstate travel



One person per car



10 km-radius limit for travel



8am - 8pm operating hours for essential services



Harsher punitive action for violators

### Socio-Economic Costs of the MCO

Increase in xenophobic attitudes

Economic losses of RM2.4b per day

Lack of access to online-based education system

Financial strain from the stimulus package (RM260b)

Stress, depression and anxiety

### Six Criteria to Lift the MCO

Border control must be maintained



Social distancing must be retained



Health system must be improved



The needs of high-risk groups must be addressed



The public must adhere to the new social norm



Vulnerable areas and communities must be identified





# Ending the MCO – What to Consider?

According to Director-General of the WHO, "Every country should be implementing a comprehensive set of measures to slow down transmission and save lives, with the aim of reaching a steady state of low-level or no transmission". However, there are key points that need to be considered before formulating such measures.

## Leaders say...



**"It is precisely because the figures give rise to hope that I feel obliged to say that this interim result is fragile. We are on thin ice, the thinnest ice even"** – Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany



**"We are opening up the economy, but we're not opening up people's social lives"** – Jacinda Ardern, Prime Minister, New Zealand

Source: Business Insider Malaysia, World Economic Forum

## Differentiating Between

### Post-MCO

- To last from 2 to 4 weeks
- Dependent on Malaysia's domestic situation
- A crucial period to avoid further lockdowns

### Post-COVID-19

- To last from 6 to 12 months
- Dependent on global situation
- Resurgence of the pandemic could influence the situation in Malaysia

## Why is there a reluctance to discuss the lifting of the MCO?

Lifting the MCO at an inappropriate time could lead to another outbreak

**Deadly Resurgence**

**Undetermined Measures**

We have yet to specifically determine control measures that must remain in place post-MCO

While the spread of COVID-19 accelerates very fast, it decelerates much more slowly

**Slow Deceleration**

**Public Participation**

The public must be given the power to manage their own measures in controlling the infection rate

## If Malaysia lifts the MCO...



Which non-essential services should be opened up first and why?



How long should we maintain practicing physical distancing?



Will Malaysia continue to ban interstate travel and close its international borders?



Will curfew remain in place?



When will schools and universities reopen?

## Should Malaysia lift the MCO soon?

Based on the experience of **Singapore** and the emergence of new cases in **Selayang** and **Petaling Jaya**, there remains the need to be vigilant and continue aggressive testing, especially on communities that have been left out thus far



# Looking Ahead: What Should the Transition Strategy Cover?

The post-MCO period is critical, as it is a litmus test on whether the lessons learned and culture formed during the MCO have become a habit observed by all members of the society.



## Domestic Politics

- Managing the stability of Malaysia's political landscape
- Ensuring the quality and implementation of policies in the transition and post-MCO periods



## Social

- Managing public expectations and pressures, especially if control measures are prolonged
- Preventing a sudden resurgence before the vaccine is discovered
- Conferring capacity to the people to continue control measures (e.g. physical distancing)
- Ensuring equal access to e-learning platforms
- Continuing the management of social problems during the MCO, such as mental health issues and xenophobia



## Environment

- Encouraging the society to be more environmentally-conscious
- Reducing carbon emission, such as by popularising the use of public transport
- Imposing a stricter rule to ensure environmental compliance



## Economy

- Opening economic activities in green zones to mitigate more losses in income and employment
- Financing of economic recovery given low price of commodities and constraints in government revenue
- Improving digitalisation of industries as a future source of growth



## Security

- Ensuring the society's compliance rate in the post-MCO period
- Enhancing contact tracing measures, such as using phone applications or cooperating with digital companies
- Mobilising forces and resources efficiently in case there is a sudden resurgence of infection
- Ensuring a degree of personal privacy, especially as testing, contact tracing and quarantine measures are ramped-up



## Foreign Relations

- Seeking solutions for issues impacting other countries, such as continued border closure, foreign workers and students, and others
- Accommodating APEC's agenda to reflect the issues raised during the pandemic



# Selected

## Publications



### ***The Race Against a Raging Virus***

ISIS Focus 3/2020, no. 12  
Kuala Lumpur: ISIS Malaysia



### ***The Crisis of Our Time***

ISIS Focus 2/2020, no. 11  
Kuala Lumpur: ISIS Malaysia



### ***Testy Ties, Testing Times***

ISIS Focus 1/2020, no. 10  
Kuala Lumpur: ISIS Malaysia



### ***Malaysian Reforms: Change or/in Continuity?***

ISIS Focus 1/2019, no. 9  
Kuala Lumpur: ISIS Malaysia



### ***Southeast Asia's Democratic Conundrum***

ISIS Focus 2/2018, no. 8  
Kuala Lumpur: ISIS Malaysia



### ***The Redrawing of Regional Architecture***

ISIS Focus 1/2018, no. 7  
Kuala Lumpur: ISIS Malaysia



### ***Trial By Fire: The Testing of Asia-Pacific Security Relations in 2017***

ISIS Focus 3/2017, no. 6  
Kuala Lumpur: ISIS Malaysia



### ***America First***

ISIS Focus 2/2017, no. 5  
Kuala Lumpur: ISIS Malaysia



### ***Can the Rohingya Be Saved?***

ISIS Focus 1/2017, no. 4  
Kuala Lumpur: ISIS Malaysia

