The East Asia National Resource Center, the Sigur Center for Asian Studies, and ESIA Research Present:

Pandemic Politics in Southeast Asia

Thursday, July 9, 2020
12:30PM – 1:30PM EDT
Benjamin D. Hopkins
Co-Director, East Asia NRC;
Director, Sigur Center for Asian Studies
Pandemic Politics in Southeast Asia

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JULY 9, 2020 12.30PM EST – JULY 10 12.30AM GMT+8
## Situation by WHO Region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Confirmed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Americas</td>
<td>5,915,551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>2,791,160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern Mediterranean</td>
<td>1,187,620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-East Asia</td>
<td>974,389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>369,928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Pacific</td>
<td>229,590</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: World Health Organization

Data may be incomplete for the current day or week.
Diverse region; heavy reliance on international trade, tourism, links

> Past experience with SARS an asset

> Political & cultural differences in handling of crisis; overall, region faring reasonably (~8.5% of global confirmed cases: WHO data 7.7.20 – this maps almost perfectly with % world population)

> Infrastructural / developmental differences explain some variation in effectiveness of responses

*No “silver bullet”: Each country has had weak/blind spots at different stages of pandemic

*Long-term issue; Serious repercussions for 1-2 generations at least
COVID-19 Cases per million (population)

- Brunei
- Singapore
- Laos
- Cambodia
- Malaysia
- Myanmar
- Thailand
- Vietnam
- Philippines
- Indonesia
- PRC
- USA

© Chart created by Julia M. Lau with data from CSIS’ citation of Johns Hopkins Univ. data as of June 29, 2020; national updates where available 7.7.20

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COVID-19 Cases, Deaths, Recoveries
Southeast Asia (as of July 7, 2020)

Chart created by Julia M. Lau with data available from WHO, Google, CSIS citation of JHU statistics; 1-7 July 2020
Evolving challenges

CAPACITY

Government support for & capacity of citizenry to adapt (e.g. telecommuting, education, retraining / training for new jobs); budget flexibility / capacity

CREDIBILITY

Trust in governance / leadership’s abilities to navigate crisis (cf. opportunistic administrations holding elections or enacting potentially worrisome regulations / states of emergency)

COORDINATION

Whole-of-government challenge = foreseeable but whose scope & degree of damage unprecedented (i.e. a “grey rhino” not “black swan”); revelations where government & populace is weak or ill-equipped
Singapore

**SARS** (2002-2004 outbreak) Death toll: 33 deaths (238 cases)

**Covid-19** death toll: 26 deaths; 44,800 cases (of which 40,429 discharged), or 0.06% (Jul 6, 2020)

**Initial indicators of progress / advantage**

*Size* 2nd smallest ASEAN-10 nation-state in terms of population

*Deep pockets* Monetary reserves mean welfare of citizens largely met (for now); 4 Budgets to deal with fallout but tough issues, almost S$100 bn to deal with crisis fallout

*Decisiveness + Detail-oriented* Relatively easy (note: not painless) to close workplaces, schools, shut down borders + control flows of people, trace infections, contacts; compliant populace
Singapore

Reasons for doubt / concern or oversight

- Huge oversight / blind spot: foreign workers’ dormitories

- Ethically / politically doubtful if helpful to separate “community cases” (i.e. citizens, residents) from foreign workers’ cases; creates xenophobic reactions

- Also questionable timing of General Election on July 10

- Tight spaces + population density - Singapore will be hard pressed to maintain societal discipline + social distancing, especially if foreign visitors are allowed back

- GDP forecast to shrink by 4-7% for 2020; deep drawing down of country’s reserves
Indonesia

Covid-19 death toll: 3,241 (of 66,226 cases), or 4.89%

Reasons for progress

Leadership President Joko Widodo sternly chastised Cabinet for initial response; leadership serious about threat now

Communications Death toll could be much higher if public health messaging not as clear

Individual responsibility

Reasons for doubt or concern

- Statistics may be highly inaccurate; large geographic spread + initial official denial / reluctance to acknowledge existence of Covid-19 in country complicates analysis of actual spread
Indonesia

Reasons for doubt or concern (cont’d)

- Officials unevenly qualified; Health Minister’s initial statement that virus spared Indonesia one example of unhelpful guidance / wishful thinking

- Economic concerns (tourism a big factor); Covid “baby boom” will exacerbate future trends (education, employment, poverty)

- Size & developmental status complicate containment: largest population in SE Asia, will likely have largest toll; educational/public health resources, & other challenges like reliable internet access for majority of population (which now lacks it) will exacerbate inequalities
Malaysia

Current Covid-19 death toll: **121** (out of 8,674 cases), or **1.39%**

**Reasons for progress**

Firm Movement Control Order (MCO) - extension until end August; prudent moves despite initial doubtfulness that population movement could be controlled (Hari Raya visiting, et cetera)

Mandatory 14-day self-isolation (now home quarantine) for all returning M’sians since April 3

Sound bureaucracy & ability to implement policies, relatively clear communication after initial “drink warm water” faux pas by Health Minister Dr Adham Baba
Malaysia

Reasons for doubt or concern

Economic repercussions (tourism revenue plunging, unemployment) potentially the most serious

Whether authorities can continue to contain Covid-19 when MCO lifts in end-August (or maybe this will be extended?)

Future foreign transmission, with large numbers of tourists from or M’sians traveling to Middle East region potentially returning to travel throughout peninsular M’sia, when tourism picks up in mid- to long-term; similar concerns for other regions like Europe, USA
Thailand

Covid-19 death toll: **58** (of 3,195 cases), or **1.82%**

**Reasons for progress**

Generally sound public **health** system, clear messaging

Strong **cultural** habit of public & individual hygiene

**Reasons for doubt or concern**

*Political* clampdown (declaration of emergency)

*Economic* repercussions, especially from loss of tourism revenue, probably the most concerning
Vietnam

SARS death toll: 5 (of 63 cases)
Covid-19 death toll: 0? 1? (of 369 cases)

Reasons for success

1st country to detect + contain SARS back in 2002-4 crisis; experience helped with Covid-19
Highly disciplined population, centralized government control

Reasons for doubt or concern

When tourism / travel sector reopens, foreign transmission likely to be main risk
Stats’ reliability slightly uncertain (e.g. differing reports on death toll), possible understating
Broader areas of concern

Psychological impact of Covid-19 & aftermath:
- domestic & other abuse / violence; most countries have reported rise in cases
- all potential sufferers across age and gender groups – particularly children’s, youth, women’s, elderly, working professionals’ mental health in the region

Economic repercussions, worsening inequalities:
- especially in developing ASEAN countries, status & situation of women & girls, many of whom have lost employment/educational opportunities already, due to Covid-19

Political opportunism & room for potential hardening of autocratic / authoritarian politics
Questions & Unknowns

2nd wave? Future pandemics? (e.g. bubonic plague!)

Vaccine?

Can all countries learn from small and medium countries?

Urgent need regionally to build up public health capacity, expertise & infrastructure

Post-Covid “known unknowns” + “unknown unknowns”

- e.g. domestic violence & child abuse statistics, extent of generational trauma (for today’s youth & children) - how this will reshape the region & int’l politics
Q&A

JULIA WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE FOLLOWING FOR THEIR KIND ASSISTANCE, READING RECOMMENDATIONS, SUPPORT & ADVICE IN THE PREPARATION OF THIS WEBINAR & HER JULY 9, 2020 PODCAST:


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