

COVID-19: Socio-Economic Impacts

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What started as a local epidemic in China, specifically in Hubei Province's City Wuhan, has become a pandemic outbreak that puts the world in panic and fear. Now affecting 204 countries and territories, the novel coronavirus has infected 1,041,119 people and killed 55,203 people¹. During the past three months since the outbreak in late 2019, China had been currently standing on top of the infection and death toll list of coronavirus until March 27 when it was surpassed by the United States with New York City becoming the epicenter of the pandemic. Italy comes second on the list, and is followed by China, Spain and Germany in order of confirmed cases. Recognizing the severity of this novel coronavirus, World Health Organization on March 11 officially declared the disease as a pandemic, meaning that it becomes a worldwide phenomenon after having had announced it as a public health emergency of international concern on January 30.

The novel coronavirus was previously detected and reported as a disease that was transmitted from animals to humans originating from a Wuhan seafood market where wild animals such as rabbits, bats, and snakes were openly but illegally traded. It was believed that the first group of people that had been infected by the coronavirus are the group of sellers at Wuhan seafood market who had contacted with the animals. According to the study by virologists at the Wuhan Institute for Virology, 96 percent of the coronaviruses genetic found in human are found in the coronavirus genetic of bats (Reynolds, 2020). However, it was later found that

the virus could also be transmitted from human to human after the medical staff who provided medical care to the novel coronavirus-infected patient contracted the disease from the patient. That was when the human-to-human transmission started to grow at an alarming rate to where it is today.

After working relentlessly to identify the causes of the disease, WHO officially branded it as 'COVID-19', a short for Coronavirus Disease 2019. So far, it was only discovered that the COVID-19 borne from a virus called 'Sars-CoV-2', which is in the same virus family as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), which was also first detected in China back in 2002 (Reynolds, 2020). While the exact cause of the outbreak is yet to be identified, the COVID-19 has more than enough proved of its rapid and worrying growth of cases in more than 200 countries and territories as well as transnational repercussions. This outbreak is picking up very fast that some parts of this article might consequently fall out of date, specifically the number of infection cases and death toll and tangible impacts it has on the global and regional economy. In the following part of the paper, you will see how a non-traditional security like COVID-19 hugely impacts the security of the country, of the people, the relations among states and last but not least the functioning of the global and regional economy as well as those of individual affected countries.

❖ COVID-19 Socio-Economic Impacts

COVID-19 is now affecting anything and everything. The leaders of emerging economy grouping G7

¹ The numbers are updated as of April 3, 2020, 14:49 GMT by Worldometer.

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called this pandemic a “human tragedy and a global health crisis” (White House, 2020). It is undeniable that the COVID-19 has completely come to dominate over the world agenda and other priorities. As of March 16, as many as 125 countries have imposed travel restrictions – both full and partial – on inbound travelers from outside in an attempt to prevent the spread of imported infection cases (Craven, Liu, Mysore & Wilson, 2020). The international community, including the World Health Organization, International Monetary Fund and a number of relevant international bodies are ramping up their efforts in accordance to the changing phase of the disease. To support vulnerable countries, the United Nations has relatively launched a two-billion package to help reduce the burden that the government in those countries are dealing and taking part in the global fight against the COVID-19 (Rowling, 2020). Likewise, the United Nations, World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the G20, amongst others, have been urging developed nations to chip in further assistance by increasing more funds to help poor and least developed countries get through the crisis. The UN humanitarian chief asserted that “nobody will be safe until everybody is safe” (Rowling, 2020).

Orders of complete lockdown or partial lockdown in most affected areas of several countries in an attempt to curb the spread of the COVID-19 have forced businesses and social gathering spaces to closure. With the current lockdown and social distancing advices, businesses of all sizes are impacted either directly or indirectly. Temporary closures of schools, restaurants, pubs and other public spaces also mean temporary suspension of workers, employees, business operations and other economic-related activities. Some families are expected to face a loss of income as their workplaces begin to suspend the operation or even completely shut the places down. This is the case for business like stores, factories, restaurant and malls. Some businesses also see a heavy drop of

revenue even if they are still open for business as people are quarantining or isolating themselves at home, which very much limits their expenses on a big number of non-necessities. Continuous revenue loss will turn into bankruptcy, which also results in more and more unemployment. The status of unemployment will then force people to cut down people’s spending, which leads to the drop in tax revenue for the government while the expenses on unemployment benefits increase significantly. In this connection, several governments have issued a stimulus package to help the people go through this difficult time. The Senate of the United States, in particular, has voted to deploy a two-trillion emergency stimulus to aid the staggering economy on 25 March 2020, and the stimulus bill was signed by the President two days later (Pramuk, 2020). Similarly, Canadian government has introduced an emergency package worth of C\$52 billion (USD36.62 billion) on Wednesday (Ljunggren, 2020) to cope with the COVID-19 crisis in the country. Many other countries including the United Kingdom, Poland, India, Malaysia, Japan, South Korea, Singapore and even Cambodia with about 114 cases², among many more across the globe, have done their parts in saving the life of their people and their economy with the emergency relief packages as well. These stimulus packages will help subsidy the loss of revenues that businesses face while also providing income-incentives to workers and employees that have lost their jobs during the quarantine. The stimulus package, however, is very much more challenging for least developing countries that are fighting the coronavirus with little budgets while also trying to keep the economy stable.

Unemployment also means that the economy is functioning below its capacity and is inefficient (Pettinger, n.d.). They are all highly interconnected and interdependent that when a collapse of one economic activity leads to the shock of another, and at the end of the day, the whole economy will be stagnant. According to the statement made by

² Updated as of 03 April 2020, according to the Official Statement from Cambodia’s Ministry of Health.

the IMF Managing Director, Kristalina Georgieva, after a conference call with finance ministers and central bankers of the G20, the global economic recession caused by the COVID-19 pandemic will be worse than that of the global financial crisis in 2008 and 2009 (KBS World Radio, 2020). According to Georgieva, emerging economies and markets will suffer the most in such case while big and developed economies will cope with the blow better. In this connection, Georgieva pledged that the developed nations will help the low-income countries during this hard time by contributing more funds so that everyone can get through this crisis. A similar finding by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) highlights that the COVID-19 pandemic could cost the globe between USD77 billion to USD347 billion, which translates into about 0.1 – 0.4 percent loss of global GDP (Himel, 2020). An economic forecast by a group of experts share a similar ground, by claiming that large-scale quarantines, travel restrictions and other types of social distancing measures may result in a sharp fall of people's spending behaviors, at least until the end of second quarter of the year (Craven, Liu, Mysore & Wilson, 2020). Unless there are proper measures to cushion the shock COVID-19 outbreak has on the economy, it will affect every level of the society where no one can be excluded and escape the consequences. The effect of COVID-19 will be felt at every part of the world and simply by everyone.

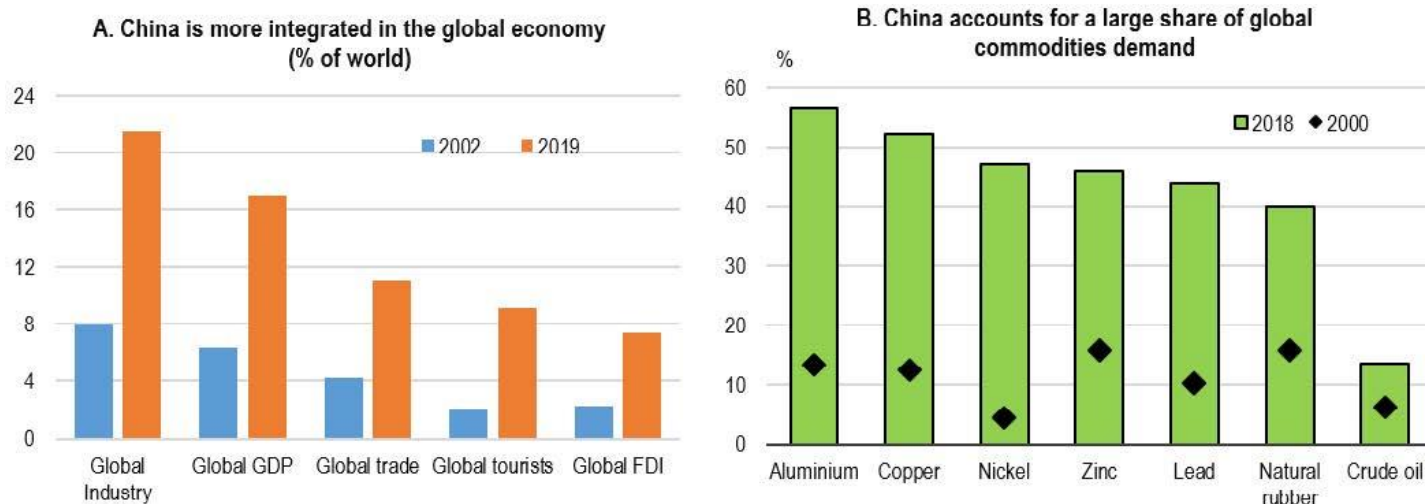
Although ADB's paper brief, published earlier this month, stated that two-third of the stated economic impacts will be borne by China (Abiad et al., 2020), the effect will be felt at every part of the world because China contributes the largest supply chain to the world. The outbreak of the unprecedented disease COVID-19 has exposed the vulnerability and inflexibility of countries and companies that heavily depend on limited sourcing partners. Disruption of the supply chains also led to temporary factory or business closures since they could not produce their production to supply the

markets, which at times it could also lead to bankruptcy. For instance, a survey by German supply chain consultant, Kloeppel Consulting, indicated that 81 percent of companies based in Germany get their supplies from China (Tan, 2020). On top of that, it was reported that there is about 44 percent increase in companies using the 'force majeure' clause, a clause in the contract that is used when unforeseen circumstances prevent the party of the contract to fulfill its obligation (Tan, 2020). This was just the first wave of supply chain disruption amidst COVID-19 outbreak. Subsequent disruptions to global supply are followed by rising infection cases in South Korea and later was shifted west to Europe and the United States, where major industries such as automotive, electronics, medical supplies, pharmaceuticals, consumer goods and other products have become unfortunate industry and business victims of COVID-19. Big corporations like Apple, Microsoft, Nissan and JCB have also complained about the disruption that hit their factories in China (Brun, 2020). Correspondingly, 938 companies out of the Fortune 1000 companies throughout the United States have demonstrated that their tier 1 or tier 2 suppliers have been significantly affected by the virus outbreak (Brun, 2020). The impacts that the outbreak has caused are not just the supply chain hurdles but also a complete halt to the production process generated from the current travel restrictions and labor shortages due to the lockdown measures taken by many countries across the world. If the factories or enterprises are not flexible enough to look for alternative suppliers under a sudden change to the global supply chain order, they are bound to collapse. Interestingly, some companies are now having their hopes lightened up as China begins to gradually re-open the economy after a hard-and-quite-successful battle against COVID-19 in the country. However, experts are expecting that the situation will get worse before it can get better. The cost of supplies will be higher due to overtime and accelerated freight costs and related premium payments to buy up supplies and hold capacity

(PwC, n.d.). In a highly interconnected and interdependent world, what the academics called globalization, a small change in one place or country has a big impact on other places and countries, and

for this reason, states around the world shall act collectively in a unified effort to bring the crisis caused by COVID-19 under control, if not a complete end within a predictable time.

China Accounts for a Rising Share of Global Activity



Source: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

Tourism industry, one of the top revenue generators for the economy, is currently taking a huge hit from this pandemic effect. As countries continue to close their borders or impose travel ban and restrictions, at the least airline companies are grounded while hotels have their rooms mostly vacant. Contrary to the past two months or three when they were crowded and busy with people coming in and out without break, airports are now largely quite. Tourism industry, which accounts for about 10 percent of global GDP, is holding onto a collapsing ship. Up to 50 million jobs in the travel and tourism sector worldwide – or equivalent to approximately 12-14 percent of jobs worldwide – are now at risk of losing, 30 million of which would be in Asia, seven million in Europe, five million in the Americas and the rest in other continents, according to the report by World Travel and Tourism Council (Faus, 2020). The slump in tourism industry will take at least ten months to recover and get back to normal functioning, the report suggested. But this projection depends on how long the pandemic would last. The longer it lasts, the greater repercussion it has and

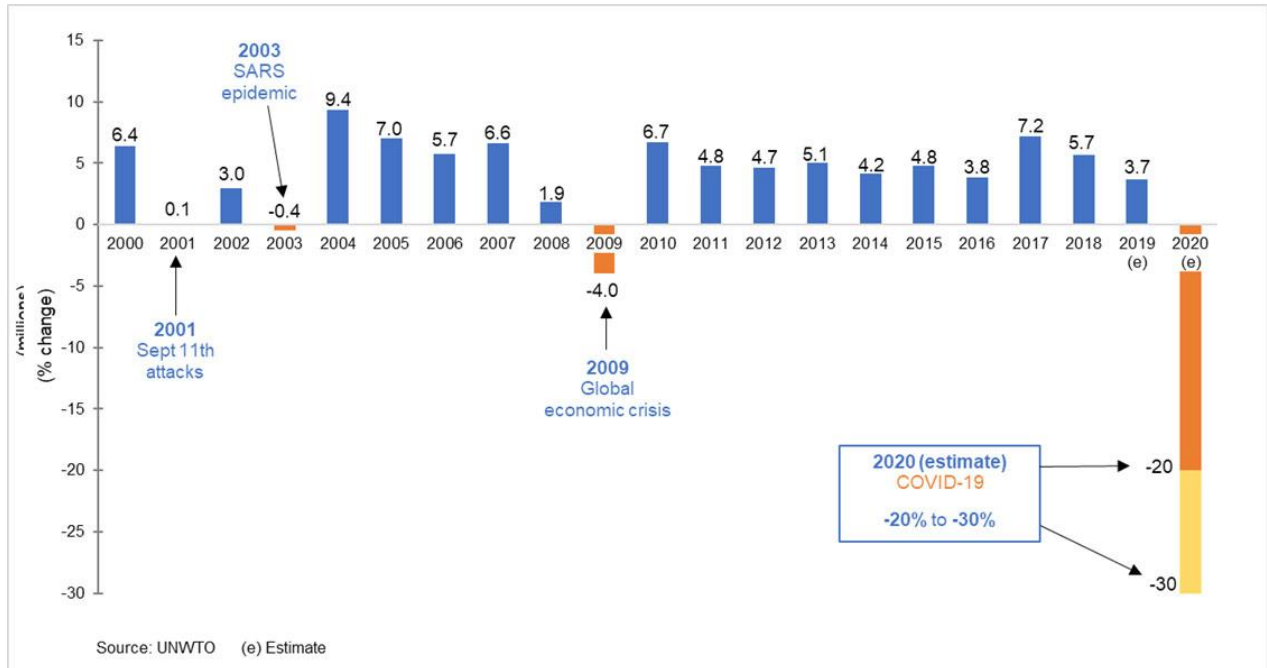
the more recovery time the industry will need. Prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, the 2020 forecast report by World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) revealed that tourism sector will see a growth of 3-4 percent (World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2020). Now that COVID-19 is at the spotlight, they have revised it to a negative point of 1-3 percent, which is equal to an estimated loss of USD30 to 50 billion in international tourism receipts (UNWTO, 2020). As mentioned earlier, it is very normal that economic activities are bound to be interconnected, in which a collapse of one will produce a domino effect to other economic activities. Responding to the economic recession at hand, Donald Trump urged businesses to reopen in the coming weeks, citing that “[w]e can’t have the cure be worse than the problem” (Breuninger, 2020). However, just some days after Trump’s announcement his plan to re-open the U.S. economy, American infection cases has experienced a very speedy and harsh increase from 35,000 of confirmed cases in March 23 to 245,442³ in April 3 – a rise of over 210,000 cases in about a week – putting the United States

³ The numbers are updated as of April 2, 2020, 06:51 GMT by Worldometer.

on top of the list of world's COVID-19 infection. The uncontrollable escalation in infection cases now makes Trump's economic recovery plan seems impossible. To make thing even worst, the U.S. as the world's largest economy and the top one of

COVID-19 cases has already started requesting for assistance from other countries around the world to provide the support from basic items such as facemasks and hand sanitizers to important things like ventilators for the fight against the disease.

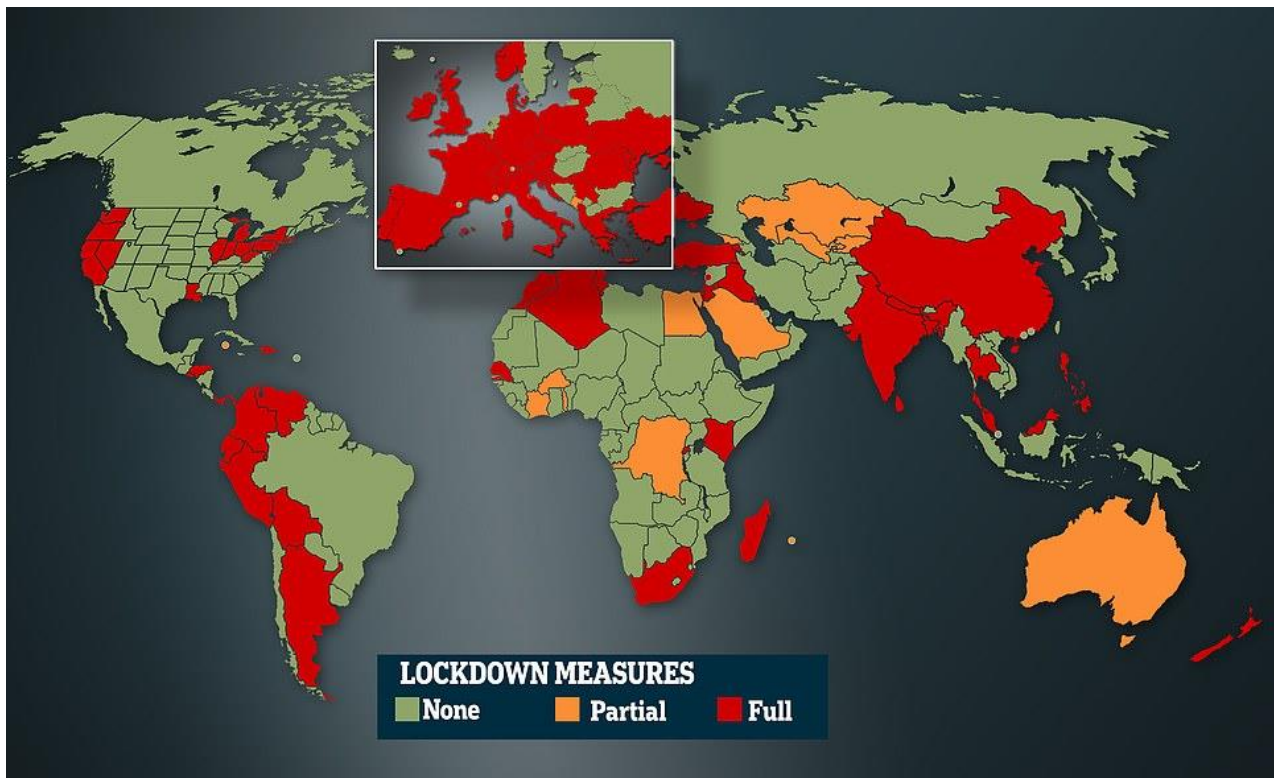
2020 Forecast – International Tourist Arrivals, World (%Change)



Source: The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)

World Map of Countries Undergo Lockdown During COVID-19 Pandemic

*As of March 25, 2020



Source: Daily Mail

Nevertheless, the U.S. is not alone with this impact. Among many countries that are heavily affected by COVID-19 pandemic also include major world economies like Italy, Spain, China, Germany, and France also see historic drops in their annual GDP growths, resulting from containment and preventive measures to curb the spread of the coronavirus. European countries are now experiencing a deep economic recession, somewhat worse than what they had experienced during the height of the global financial crisis between 2007 and 2009 (Jackson, Weiss, Schwarzenberg, & Nelson, 2020). Meanwhile, German Council of Economic Advisers' special report to the government suggested a expected shrink of 5.4 percent to the Germany's economy in the worst case scenario (Deutsche Welle [DW], 2020). Despite the fact that this recession data may already seem extreme, German Economic Institute (IW) predicts an even more negative projection by at least 10 percent contraction on the country's economy (Deutsche Welle [DW], 2020). In Italy, likewise, only a reverse growth can be pinned. The REF Ricerche, a research consultancy based in Italy, has forecasted that the coronavirus pandemic consequence will generate a drop of about 8 percent on Italy's GDP by the first half of 2020 (Duddu, 2020) while experts anticipated a slippery road of Britain's economy for the first time since 1980 (Klayman, 2020). In a globalized and interconnected world, nevertheless, this sudden pause of economic activities and an unexpected drop of GDP among major world economies, as argued earlier, generates a negative domino and spill-over effect on our regional and global economy. Iran case can be an example. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, the combined impacts from the U.S. crippling sanctions and from COVID-19 have pushed the country into a devastated situation. As the state ordered closures of non-essential businesses and imposed stay-home commands to the general public, the Iranian people and businesses are unlikely to hold out until the pandemic comes under control. It was reported that the Iranian leader, Hassan

Rouhani, has appealed to the IMF for USD5 billion loan to put the economy back in order (Vahdat, 2020).

Home staying and business closures do not only have an economic impact, but it also harms social welfare and mental health of the people almost everywhere. As countries are imposing lockdown between at least 2 weeks to 2 months, people are bound to be bored or stressed out. The quarantine is affecting the people physically and emotionally. A study by King's College London revealed that quarantine could possibly cause post-traumatic stress, confusion and anger (Allmandou, 2020). It was reported that 90 percent of those mishandlings are linked to COVID-19 pandemic. The study further suggested that long-term quarantine can result in alcohol abuse and a number of other dependency symptoms. This assertion corresponds with the report of a three folds increase of domestic violence in Jiangzhou, a city in central Hubei, if compared to the same period last year (Zhang, 2020). This is not only the case for developing countries, advanced nations like France is also experiencing a concerning rise in domestic violence during lockdown as well. According to France's Interior Ministry, domestic violence across the country went up by 36 percent since the lockdown on March 17 (Domestic violence cases jump 30% during lockdown in France, 2020). Financial difficulty during this dire situation additionally fuels the severity of their mental health. Prior to the lockdown and full-scale quarantine, the COVID-19 has already infiltrated into psychological welfare of the people. The COVID-19 panic-buying has left those more susceptible to the infection, particularly the elders, and more prone to contract the diseases since the food supply and other necessity such as protective masks and hand sanitizers were all cleared and almost out of stock at places. Panic- buying should not and cannot be used to justify disaster preparation. They are completely two different things that at times contradict each other. Disaster preparation is when people stockpile a fair amount of items to get through some unanticipated events, such as flood

or even hurricane. But in this case, people are not certain as to when it will end, so as the psychologist explained, people panic buy an excessive stockpile of essential needs as much as they can afford because they at least want to take control over the situation (Lufkin, 2020). What makes the disaster preparation and panic-buying during crisis situation here is that during the event of a disaster, such as flood or hurricane, people at least have some clues when the situation is coming to an end while panic-buying in the crisis situation, such as COVID-19, people have no clue about when it gets back to the ordinary day that they can buy anything from anywhere with any amount and at any time. Another expert believed that such behavior of panic-buying is driven by low trust in the authority and even the government to handle the crisis (Lufkin, 2020). Steven Taylor, a professor and clinical psychologist at the University of British Columbia suggested that excessive portray of stockpiling on social media will prompt other people to do the same before they realize it. "If everyone else on the Titanic is running for the lifeboats, you are going to run too, regardless if the ship's sinking or not," he added (Lufkin, 2020). Such behavior will, in turn, result in price gouging and supply shortages.

With such unexpected surging demands that lead to stock clearance in stores, third-party retailers in Amazon, eBay, Walmart and Etsy overcharged the prices of hand sanitizers, face masks, hazmat suits and other medical and essential products for daily living. Facemasks, for example, are sold at a price that is almost 6 times higher than the normal price (Palmer, 2020). In addition to the massive increase of price, some sellers also make unsubstantiated health claims about the coronavirus claiming that their products can kill the virus, or selling fake products to the fearful customers. Moreover, as manufacturing workers are working hard around the clock to fill in the missing supply, nobody is going to purchase it at later stages because most of the people who can afford to buy the products already have it all stocked up for themselves and

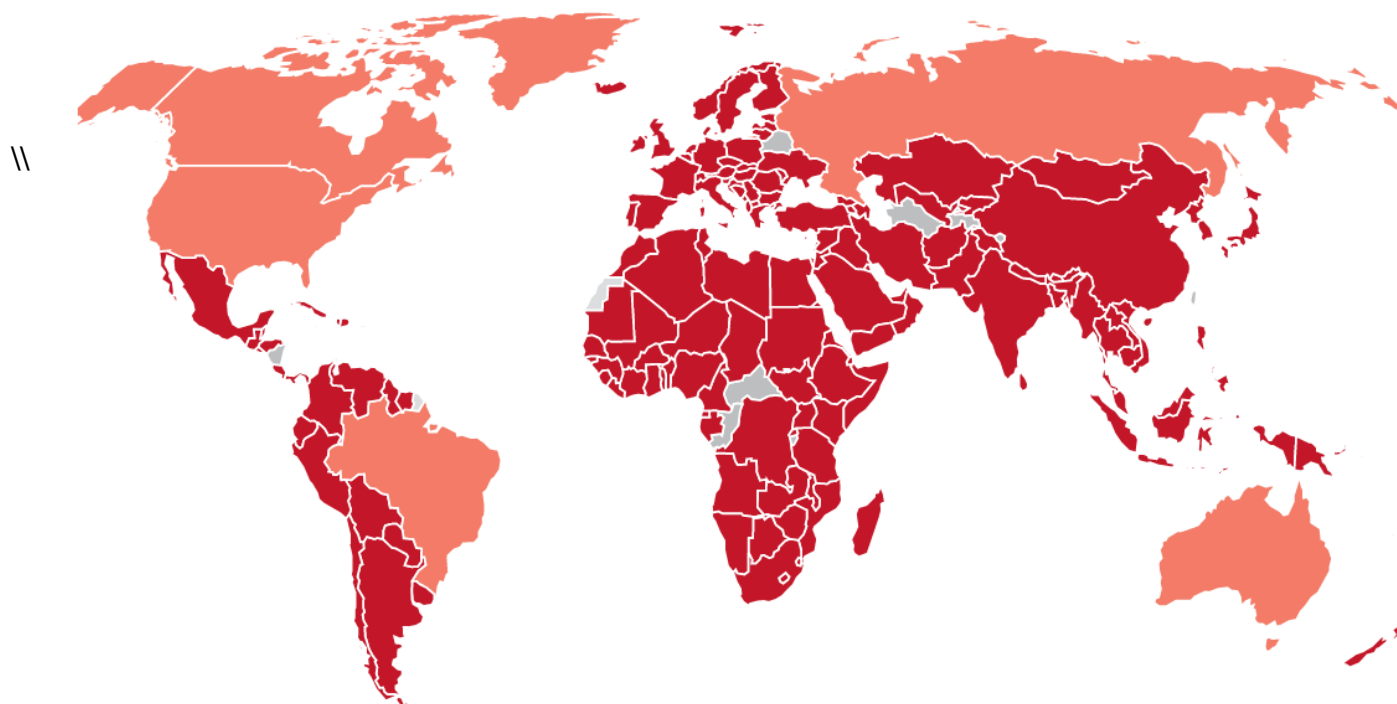
possibly their whole families while many others who are poor and was living day by day cannot afford to make the purchases for what they need. Daniel Stanton, a supply chain project management expert, called it 'phantom demand' that people are buying more but they are not eating nor using more (Bekiempis, 2020), which is why once everything is cooled down, the principle of supply and demand will make another wave of disruption to the market due to the overproduction in factories.

Panic buying, in another angle, accentuates the gap between the haves and have-nots. This gap is even worse in developing countries, where the gap between the rich and poor is too big. Likewise, the majority of South African consumers are unable to fill their baskets even in normal situation (Lappeman, 2020), how could they possibly manage to stock up during times of crisis, especially when their incomes are cut off. Although this case may be quite normal in countries like South Africa, the advanced countries also cannot escape this complication. Inequality is bound to arise in the midst of problematic stockpiling. Several food banks that have been donating food and supplies to those in needs, like refugees, asylum seekers, and charities are facing supply shortages (BBC, 2020). People who used to receive such donations are now knocking on the door of their suppliers for basic survival items.

As a part of suppression of COVID-19 infection, it was reported that at least 191 countries around the world have ordered closures of all educational institutions (Reuters, 2020). More than 1.3 billion students or 80 percent of education pursuers worldwide are affected by this measure. Although online classes are offered as a substitute to physical classroom, it has exposed the inequality of right to education sincere not all learners have a computer or a smart device to take part via online classroom. This is not to mention about internet access and supportive learning environment outside of schools. Such mechanism has undeniably ripped the unfortunates of their right to education.

Countries and Regions Closing Schools and Universities

All schools
 Some schools
 No policy announced



*Updated as of March 31, 2020

Source: Reuters Graphics

Even before the outbreak takes place, there were as many as 258 million students worldwide who had dropped out of schools because of poverty, poor governance and poor living condition (van Fleet, 2020). This outbreak has additionally exacerbated the flaws of staggering education system, further marginalizing those who are already marginalized. Besides, once everything comes back to normal, the government will be facing a difficult time, if not a dilemma, deciding on what sorts of educational programmes and priorities the government should give to students within the limited budget, part of which has been used to contain the outbreak of the coronavirus disease. A sudden change in learning environment will also affect students' learning outcomes and productivities at certain degrees. Not every student can get adapted to new changes, especially the most sudden ones such as this case that is heavily and urgently affected by COVID-19.

Against the backdrop of the coronavirus outbreak, the grave concern that we are facing are healthcare, education and people's response attitude. Since the breaking news of the outbreak in December last year, people have started to view COVID-19 as a deadly disease. To make things worse, there is a rising tide of discrimination and xenophobia against the Chinese in particular and Asian in general. Because of the misunderstanding of the disease, some people are alleged to have misperceived it that Asian people are the carriers of the disease. This misunderstanding is coupled by the twisted words used to describe the COVID-19 as witnessed in the statement Donald Trump as the President of the United States has made, wherein he called the coronavirus as the "Chinese virus" (Al Jazeera, 2020), which soon gathered public backlash against the use of the term. President Trump later corrected his way of words and said he will stop using that term. This racist comment, that

Trump used to defend, comes after their struggle in the COVID-19 conspiracy theories, where China and the United States have pointed finger at each other regarding who has released the virus. This hostility has indeed caused confusion for fearful people out there, and only to stimulate their hard feelings against the Asians even more. There have been news articles and stories circulated on social media about how badly some, if not many, Asians living in foreign countries are treated in the midst of the pandemic, ranging from verbal assaults to physical assaults and vandalism. The xenophobia has no boundaries and will get worse unless appropriate information regarding the disease is properly disseminated to the public. Social divide, furthermore, has already isolated and distanced people from each other before they even realize it.

❖ Global and Regional Responses to COVID-19

To this date, scientists and researchers around the world are racing against the clock in search of a cure for the pandemic that is stirring global anxiety and costing global growth and development. As the exact cause of the virus is yet to be identified, a vaccine that is able to guarantee a total treatment will definitely need some time. Regardless of how, the first phase of clinical trial for the novel coronavirus vaccine has been conducted in the United States on forty-five volunteers with different age groups, where they are closely monitored for six weeks (National Institute of Health [NIH], 2020). A number of other biotech companies and research institutions in many countries, including China, Japan, United Kingdom and Germany, have also joined in the race to find the cure and the vaccine, but still they will need some time to make sure they are effective and safe before they make it available to the public. Besides these accommodating efforts, countries around the world are also implementing and preparing for response measures to deal with the fast spread of this pandemic. Here is glimpse into how the countries around the global and in the region, specifically ASEAN, are coping with the COVID-19.

In the U.S., now the leading country in COVID-19 cases, COVID-19 taskforce led by Mike Pence is created to better monitor and control all situations related the COVID-19 pandemic. There was also an order to impose travel restrictions on 26 EU countries, China and other countries that are under serious COVID-19 infection. Moreover, 32 states in the U.S. have so far implemented the stay-at-home order, forcing lockdowns of about 80 percent of American citizens (Secon & Woodward, 2020). The Italian government, on the other hand, has moved to a serious lockdown procedure from imposing the lockdown on most-hit parts in the country at the first place to cover the entire nation, which includes travel restrictions, ban on social gatherings and curfew (Coronavirus: Italy extends emergency measures nationwide, 2020). Schools and universities across the nation remain closed. To tide the economy during the serve outbreak in the country, Italian Prime Minister announced an emergency relief package of USD28.3 billion in early March (Sirletti, Follain, & Rotondi, 2020). The government also ordered a suspension of all inbound flights from China and Taiwan (Coronavirus: Travel restrictions, border shutdowns by country, 2020).

Italy, nevertheless, is not the only affected country in Europe. There is no much difference at many other places in the region. Spain, for instance, has suspended entry of all foreign visitors, excluding European Union residents, both on air and sea for one month long starting for March 22 (Castillo, 2020). Besides, Spain is currently under lockdown period after the country's Prime Minister announced an extension of lockdown from March 29 to April 12 (Coronavirus: How long has Spain been on lockdown and when does it end?, 2020). Spanish people will not be allowed to leave their homes unless they have to go out for necessities like food and medicine or when work cannot be done from home. The government also announced a stimulus package of €200 billion (approximately USD2.2 billion) to aid the people and businesses hit by the coronavirus. In similar way, German government has

given an order to not permit any passengers who depart from countries that are outside Schengen area to enter Germany, except for medical professionals and researchers, permanent residents in France, EEA (European Economic Area) Member States, Switzerland and those who hold British passports (Coronavirus: Travel restrictions, border shutdowns by country, 2020). France's travel restriction applies an almost identical approach to that of Germany. Passengers who depart from countries that are outside Schengen area will not be permitted to enter France with the same exception like what Germany has given. The whole country is currently under a tight lockdown as schools and businesses are closing down one after another.

Looking away from Europe to the first place of outbreak of the virus. China is regarded by many as a successful model of coronavirus containment. Since the lockdown of the entire Wuhan city, the Chinese authority had been closely surveilling the people's movement by constantly flying drones and even yelling at people to stay at home and to wear masks. Beijing government has also effectively exploited the use of advanced technology through implementing facial-recognition software and classifying people by color codes that depend on their contagion risks (Hjelmgaard, Lyman, & Shesgreen, 2020). Now, Wuhan city, once the epicenter of the pandemic, is no longer under lockdown after the authority has successfully managed to flatten the curve. Like many other countries on the planet, however, China's fight against coronavirus is still on-going. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China on March 26 announced a huge scale of travel restrictions suspending entry of foreign nationals who wish to come to China regardless of holding of Chinese visa or permanent residence permits in China. But this new restriction does not cover diplomatic workers and people who come for "necessary economic, trade, scientific or technological activities or emergency humanitarian

needs" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China [FMPRC], 2020). Although the Chinese government has not unleashed a stimulus package like other countries, the government is urging all banks to extend loans payment.

As for ASEAN, since the infection of COVID-19 can be felt differently among this Southeast Asian grouping member states, each ASEAN country has tried to develop and implement different measures in accordance to the severity of the infection in their respective countries. Malaysia comes top in ASEAN with about 3,333 confirmed infection cases and 767 death cases⁴, as of the writing date. Since the COVID-19 situation in Malaysia does not show a sign of going down yet, the government has announced an extension of nationwide lockdown for another two weeks until April 14, after the initial lockdown proved ineffective. The lockdown will restrict the movement and social gathering in the public as the armed forces are deployed to monitor the lockdown. Additionally, the government has increased the stimulus package from RM20 billion to RM250 billion (approximately USD58 billion) and an additional RM1 billion to the Ministry of Health for medical equipment, which brings total allocation for MoH to RM1.5 billion, approximately 350 million in USD (New Straits Times, 2020). Like other countries, Malaysia also bars entry of foreigners into the country and departure of permanent residents (MFAIC, 2020). All residents who just returned back to the country will have to follow the imperative quarantine procedures for 14 days. Educational institutions of all levels are ordered to close temporarily.

Right after Malaysia, the Philippines comes second at 3,018 cases⁵ and followed closely behind by Thailand, Indonesia and Singapore, all of which have over a thousand infection cases. The President of the Philippines has put the entire Philippine island of Luzon under lockdown until

^{4 5} The numbers are updated as of April 3, 2020, 14:49 GMT by Worldometer..

April 12 with possibility of further extension. Visa issuance is suspended and all schools are ordered be closed at least until April 14. For the situation in Singapore, any visitors who have travelled to Italy, Spain, Germany and France in the last 14 days will not be allowed to enter Singapore, both from direct and transit flight, while port of calls for cruise vessels will not be approved for the time-being. In Singapore at this moment, anyone who violates social distancing order will be punished a fine of up to USD7,000 or up to 6-month imprisonment. To save the economy from collapsing, Singaporean government has issued USD33 billion stimulus package, (Dezan Shira & Associates, 2020).

Thailand and Indonesia, at a similar number of confirmed infection cases, are now under the state of emergency. Thailand is put under the state of emergency until April 30, according to the official announcement from Thai government on March 26 (Techakitteranun, 2020). Furthermore, Bangkok governor just signed a shutdown order that instructs the closure of department stores, markets, schools and sports stadiums, among others, except takeaway restaurants, supermarkets, drug stores and food markets. Thailand will also stop issuing visa on arrival and visa exemption policy for countries previously eligible for it. (Dezan Shira & Associates, 2020). The Republic of Indonesia, on the other hand, is also currently under the state of emergency at least until April 19, 2020. To absorb the overwhelming number of infected persons, the government has renovated a former Athletes Village in Jakarta in order to turn it into a hospital that can accommodate up to 22,000 patients. Besides, to prevent the imported cases, Indonesian government has ordered the suspension of visa-exemption policy for all countries for one month and the entry ban on those people who have a travel history to the world's most infected countries. Indonesian government has prepared, however, an allocation of USD24.8 billion to fight against the pandemic (Dezan Shira & Associates, 2020).

CLMV (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam) countries and Brunei are currently the least COVID-19 infection cases countries in ASEAN. However, all of them are also applying serious preventive and containment measures for fighting the coronavirus disease. The government of Brunei, for example, has restricted the citizens and foreign residents from leaving the country while banning visitors the Chinese provinces of Zhejiang and Jiangzhu – but with exception to the permanent residents in Brunei – from entering the country (Dezan Shira & Associates, 2020). In addition, social gathering in public space is also prohibited, in which anyone who violates the order will be fined 10,000 Brunei dollars and/or face 6-month in imprisonment (MFAIC, 2020). In Laos, the government has ordered the closures of international gate checkpoint, preventing people from leaving and entering the country. The Golden Triangle that connects China and Myanmar is also closed. To prevent price gouging, the government has set a price ceiling on facemasks, demanding a box of 50 three-layer mask not be sold at more than USD2.82 while a single mask must not exceed USD0.11. In Myanmar, starting from March 25, people who have recent travel history outside of the country, including tourists, citizens and government officials, and attempt to enter into the country must provide a medical certificate issued no longer than 72 hours starting from their travel date (MFAIC, 2020). The country has stopped the visa on arrival for all travelers from China. Besides, the country's Ministry of Health has allocated about USD200,000 for medical equipment and supplies (Dezan Shira & Associates, 2020). Vietnamese Prime Minister, on the other hand, has declared COVID-19 as a nationwide pandemic and imposed a nationwide social distancing order for 15 days starting from April 1 as the infection cases continue to rise day by day (Dezan Shira & Associates, 2020). Any gathering of more than two people is at this point banned in Vietnam, and citizens are advised to stay at least two meters away from each other in public. The government is announced to carry out mass

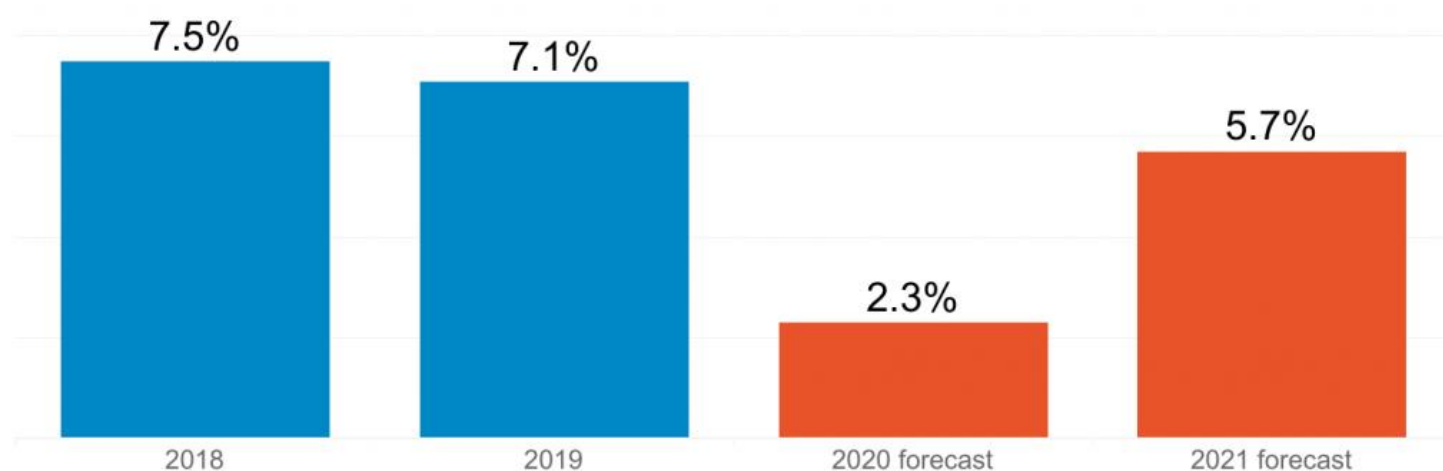
testing after importing 200,000 rapid test kits from South Korea. The Vietnamese government has also announced a stimulus package worth of USD1.16 billion to help local businesses that were hit by the pandemic (*“Vietnam announces \$1.16bln stimulus package to help virus-hit businesses - state media”*, 2020).

❖ Cambodia’s Measures to Tackle COVID-19

Cambodia is not exempted from COVID-19 and its impacts. A forecast made by Asian Development Bank has suggested that Cambodia could be suffering the worst economic impacts from COVID-19 among its fellow ASEAN member states comparing the percentage of economic loss and Cambodia’s total GDP (Abiad et al., 2020). Based on the ADB report, Cambodia will see a loss of more than USD390 million, which is equivalent to 1.15 percent of the country’s GDP. After Cambodia, Thailand is predicted to come second that will experience the most hit from the COVID-19 impacts on its national economy, wherein the loss amounts close to 1.11 percent of the country’s GDP while the rest of the countries in this regional organization in Southeast Asia will come through a loss roughly and below 0.5 percent of GDP (Abiad et al., 2020).

In addition, a newly released annual economic report, Asian Development Outlook 2020 by Asian Development Bank projected that Cambodia could experience a big drop in its annual growth in 2020. The report indicated that Cambodia's economic growth for 2020 could drop as low as 2.3 percent and rebound back to 5.7 next year, supposing that all economic activities will return back to normal, and that there is no more pandemic (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2020). Similarly, another report by World Bank published on March 30, 2020 also predicts a similar economic situation for the country. Along with an economic assessment of East Asia and Pacific countries in a 234-page report, the World Bank indicated that Cambodia’s real GDP growth – at the baseline scenario – will drop to 2.5 percent in 2020 as a repercussion of COVID-19 outbreak and will rebound back to 5.9 in 2021 (World Bank, 2020). The World Bank’s worst-case scenario on Cambodia’s economy suggested that real growth will be as low as 1 percent in 2020 and recover to 3.9 percent in 2021. World Bank’s projection of Cambodia’s economy at the worst-case scenario, on the other hand, is possibly as low as 1 percent in 2020 and recover to 3.9 percent in 2021, according to the same economic assessment report on East Asia and Pacific countries.

Cambodia
GDP growth forecasts



Source: Asian Development Bank. *Asian Development Outlook 2020* (April 2020)

#ADO2020



Source: Asian Development Bank

Decisive and precise health actions, however, are argued to be more important than financial decisions at this stage because this tragedy is a public health crisis; thus, fiscal or monetary policies in such situation may be necessary but not efficient and not the top priority if compared the healthcare and welfare of the people. Despite economic system of the country at large must also be a worry for every relevant stakeholder, which include the government and the people themselves, the most immediate remedy for COVID-19 shall be virus containment and prevention of spread to the community that requires timely and very focused responses. Also, it necessitates the most special attention, compared to any other time ever, on the country's healthcare system. As long as the virus is not contained and the public is at a panic and unstable situation, the national economy will be still at grave risk.

In the midst of up-and-down social panic during the COVID-19 pandemic, Cambodia like many other countries is also battling with a great deal of social problems in addition to the economic and public healthcare difficulties. The most serious ones among those include circulating fake news on social media about COVID-19 quick test kits, treatment medicines, closure of capital and provinces and even spiritual myth like eating chicken eggs by midnight that could prevent people from getting the disease. Besides, there are people out there attempting to exploit the situation and grab the opportunity. Some retailers are hiking up the price – some of which are ways higher than the original price – of hand sanitizers, masks, alcohol sprays and other necessities during the outbreak for their own personal gains. Furthermore, it was revealed that more than 16,000 new web domains with coronavirus-themed has been registered since January this year (Scott, 2020). Some among those malicious websites are argued to have intended to sell malwares and hacking tools disguised as COVID-19 discount codes on the

black market, attempting to collect the data from employees who are working from home, wherein their personal laptops lack of security protection. Such actions call for tightening government's monitor and control over cyber-related crimes as well as a proper price setting mechanism in a dire time like this.

During the time of writing, the latest official statement by the Ministry of Health Cambodia confirmed that there are now 114 infection cases in Cambodia, 35 of whom have fully recovered (Cambodia's Ministry of Health [MoH], 2020). Following a quick increase of confirmed cases, Cambodia's Prime Minister announced that he is in consideration whether to declare the country in a state of emergency while weighing the costs that the emergency status could bring to civil rights, people, society and national economy. Although the Prime Minister is considering this option, he has assured that places such as markets, restaurants, and coffee shops will not be closed because those are where people pick up food, basic sanitary and medical supplies and essential needs. Speaking at press conference after the National Assembly plenary session in late March, Prime Minister Hun Sen claimed that the government has stockpiled a large amount of facemasks and sanitizers as well as medical supplies to help the medical officers at the frontlines and general public. Furthermore, an official statement released after the meeting of permanent members of Cambodian Council of Ministers, a lineup of Prime Minister with all the Deputy Prime Ministers, to discuss the state of emergency draft law indicated that the government considers alcohol and facemasks as strategic products for the situation of COVID-19 pandemic, and that the government has decided to make a purchase of 5.2 million facemasks, 4 million of which are from abroad, according to the statement⁶ issued on 31 March 2020 by Cambodian Office of Council of Ministers.

⁶ See more at Office of the Council of Minister. (31 March 2020). *Statement on the Meeting Result of Permanent Members of Cambodia's Council of Ministers*. Available at: <https://pressocm.gov.kh/archives/65258>

Besides, there have also been many other mechanisms that the Cambodian government has imposed to contain the spread of the COVID-19. On March 16, for instance, Cambodia's Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports had ordered a temporary closure of all educational institutions, both public and private, announcing an early summer vacation to students nationwide. Additional order of closures has been made on KTVs, casinos, cinemas and religious gatherings which are perceived as posing high risk of group infection. There has also been an establishment of a new national committee tasked specifically to deal the COVID-19 outbreak in the country, which is chaired by the Prime Minister himself. In addition, the Prime Minister has been appealing to the public to join hand with the government in donating funds to the mission in combating the spread of coronavirus although the government has announced to have already prepared about USD30 million emergency fund for the situation. In this connection, the Prime Minister has urged all micro-finance institutions and banks to extend the debt and loan payment while asking – and even warning – the sellers not to increase the price of necessities like masks and hand sanitizers or otherwise their business licenses will be revoked for a lifetime.

The Prime Minister also ordered a temporary suspension of white rice and paddy exports outside of the country for the time-being to fulfill the local demands amid the rising tide of food preparation for worst case scenario or crisis situation, or even for a situation that problem of need arise as a result of some would call panic-buying. Apart from these, Cambodian government has also ordered governors of Phnom Penh capital and all provinces to use available hotels – and schools since schools are currently vacant if no hotels are available – as places for medical care for infected patients.

To keep the citizens informed, the Ministry of Health regularly updates the COVID-19 situation in Cambodia on a daily basis, with new infection cases, new recovery cases and the total cases so far while advising the people to follow standard medical procedures to keep themselves safe from coronavirus such as proper hand wash, social distancing and mask using. In providing medical care to the public, Cambodian government offers free treatment and medical care to both local and foreign patients of COVID-19 inside the country so that the patients can get treated and recover without having to worry about the medical bills, which has been one of major reasons for some people to escape the treatment.

To prevent further imported cases of COVID-19, Cambodian government had earlier issued a travel restriction on travelers from six countries, namely the U.S., Germany, France, Spain, Italy and Iran to enter the country while advising all Cambodian nationals to refrain from travelling to Europe, the United States and Iran. Now, the latest press release⁷ by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation issued on 28 March declared the government's decision for the suspension of e-visas and visa on arrival for all foreigners for a month-long period while all foreigners who wish to enter the country within this restricted period of time has to possess a prior visa granted by Cambodia diplomatic missions abroad. However, the decision, according the press release, does also impose at least two further conditions that all tourists who wish to enter the country must be able to provide a medical certificate, dated not more than 72 hours to the date of departure, proving that they are not patient with coronavirus disease and must carry a health insurance worth of USD50,000 during their stay in Cambodia. Moreover, in order to assist foreign tourists who cannot return back to their home countries because almost all airlines are grounded, the Royal Government of Cambodia has

⁷ See more at Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. (28 March, 2020). *Travel Restrictions Issued by the Royal Government of Cambodia in Relation to the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)*. Available at: <https://www.mfaic.gov.kh/site/detail/41728>

issued a new order to grant automatic visa extension of tourist visa to all foreign visitors, who arrived Cambodia after the 1st of January 2020, until they are able to find an available flight back home, according to a diplomatic note verbale issued on April 3, 2020 from Cambodian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation addressing to all foreign diplomatic and consular missions accredited in the Kingdom of Cambodia and carbon-copied to all Cambodian diplomatic mission abroad⁸.

The government understands that people are having a difficult time during this pandemic, both mentally and financially. That is why the government recently announced a three-month tax waiver for businesses in tourist industry in an attempt to reduce the financial burden they are facing in addition to revenue loss during this time. At the time of writing this last part, Cambodia is at the stage of discussing the draft law on the state of emergency that is supposed to be adopted by members of National Assembly of Cambodia at its earliest plenary session. Despite having the draft law on the state of emergency proposed, adopted and promulgated, the current COVID-19 situation in Cambodia is not really in need to declare the state of emergency. It is more like, nevertheless, to have a good preparation for the worst-case scenario, which is now unpredictable by anyone for COVID-19 time. In other words, the coronavirus disease makes everything today fast-changing and very unpredictable, including a time that the COVID-19 situation in Cambodia can be under complete control without the need to declare the state of emergency or a time of worsen crisis that such status is more than a must to control and stabilize the situation.

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⁸ This Diplomatic Note Verbale was posted on Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation's official Facebook page on April 4, 2020.

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