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HOW IS ASIA AS A REGION RESPONDING TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC? CONTRAST THIS WITH RESPONSE IN AFRICA.

**WHAT IS COVID-19?**

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), coronaviruses are a family of viruses that cause illnesses ranging from the common cold to more severe diseases such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and the Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS). These viruses were originally transmitted from animals to people. SARS, for instance, was transmitted from civet cats to humans while MERS moved to humans from a type of camel. Several known coronaviruses are circulating in animals that have not yet infected humans. The name coronavirus comes from the Latin word corona, meaning crown or halo. Under an electron microscope, the virus looks like it is surrounded by a solar corona. The novel coronavirus, identified by Chinese authorities on January 7 and since named SARS-CoV-2, is a new strain that had not been previously identified in humans. Little is known about it, although human-to-human transmission has been confirmed.

**COVID-19 IN ASIA AND THEIR RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC**

There are several cases of corona virus reportedly in Asia, In Indonesia, the most populous country of Southeast Asia, tested a suspected 38 cases that all turned out negative. But this month, Indonesia, along with a number of other countries that usually have strong travel and trade relations with China, announced a precautionary travel and trade ban. Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), said that the containment of COVID-19 requires a policy trifecta. Countries should share surveillance information, and if they cannot test for coronavirus then the WHO will facilitate sending samples to countries that can. Second, governments must work to contain the outbreak without trade and travel bans, which can affect information sharing. Finally, he stressed the importance of managing the information flow to people affected by the outbreak. Social media rumors; fueled by false information is harmful from a public health approach and xenophobic from a human rights perspective. Official government information is unable to keep pace with the spread of misinformation online.

Southeast Asian foreign ministers have endorsed the setting up of a regional fund to respond to the coronavirus pandemic and discussed a planned video summit of their leaders with counterparts from China, Japan, and South Korea. The move came following growing indications that the regional organization was looking to step up its response to COVID-19, after coming under some criticism for its slow response at the start of the pandemic gripping the globe. The ministers endorsed several collective steps to fight the pandemic, including the establishment of a COVID-19 ASEAN response fund, the sharing of information, and strategies and ways to ease the impact of the global health crisis on people and the economy, the department said in a statement. It did not provide details. They also discussed the planned meeting of their leaders with counterparts from China, Japan, and South Korea in a video conference on April 14 to talk about the pandemic, three Southeast Asian diplomats told The Associated Press. The diplomats spoke on condition of anonymity due to a lack of authority to discuss the high-level meeting.

Large and well-targeted emergency fiscal support is required to contain the spread of the disease and cope with the burden of extra patients and testing. Most affected countries of the region have provided fiscal subsidies for medical testing and treatment of the disease as well as fiscal support for emergency public interventions to increase hospital capacity and medical supplies. Some national and local governments have also provided monetary incentives to encourage public cooperation for quarantine efforts. Government should be prepared to show flexibility in their budgets to effectively use available fiscal resources to respond to the pandemic Immediate measures to ease the shock to jobs and guarantee minimum living standards. Fiscal measures to support jobs and living standards are needed on two fronts: (i) fiscal support for employers to retain jobs, and (ii) direct support for the employees and households to guarantee minimum living standards. The former includes targeted tax exemptions and fiscal subsidies to SMEs, the informal sector and the most affected businesses for business and employment continuity. The latter includes emergency measures to extend medical and employment insurance to those not sufficiently covered or to provide direct cash transfers for consumption smoothening. There are various examples of such policies already being implemented in the region. The good news is that the region has ample policy space. Most countries in the region have relatively low levels of fiscal deficit and public debt (as a share of GDP), which provides room for expanded fiscal spending. India proposed the establishment of a COVID-19 emergency fund under South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and offered an initial contribution of US$10 million. This entails the pooling of sub-regional resources for rapid response teams of doctors and specialists along with testing kits and other equipment and for the sharing of knowledge on quarantine and technologies. The United Nations, including ESCAP, could be a suitable platform to manage an emergency fund, to bring stakeholders together, including member States, regional intergovernmental organizations, multilateral development banks, the private sector, philanthropies, and civil society.

COVID-19 has slowed down economic activities, led to a temporary shut-down of industrial activities, closing of schools and a range of public institutions affecting millions of students and significantly reduced air travel and human mobility worldwide. This has reduced demand for oil and gas, and at the same time also resulted in substantive reduction in emissions of carbon dioxide and nitrogen dioxide and reduced air pollution, especially in Asia where the intensive use of natural resources has come at steep environmental costs.

**SITUATION IN AFRICA**

There are now more than over 15,000 confirmed cases of coronavirus across the continent, with a number of African countries imposing a range of prevention and containment measures against the spread of the pandemic. According to the latest data by the John Hopkins University and Africa Center for Disease Control on COVID-19 in Africa, the breakdown remains fluid as countries confirm cases as and when. The whole of Africa has rising cases with only two countries holding out as of April 14**.** The case continues to increase day by day because governments are now exposed to more health facilities so to test people with symptoms. Also measure of preventing the spread of this virus is not working .Most people in Africa go out daily to get their daily bread so this has made it hard for people to comply to rules of social distancing and other measures used to prevent this virus. Most scientists have predicted the virus to spread more in Africa mainly because of lack of health facilities. The first confirmed case on the continent was in Egypt, and the first confirmed case in sub-Saharan Africa was in Nigeria. In the coming weeks, the flow of capital out of Africa will reach unprecedented heights.The international community cannot stand idle as the coronavirus, national self-interest and trade wars amongst major powers derail growth on the continent. Otherwise, poverty, malnutrition, health and social instability will ultimately bring about greater devastation than the virus itself .Global crises call for global solutions. However, where Africa is concerned, Europe must play a particular role.For Europe, turning its back on Africa would be a human tragedy and would represent a considerable setback in the cooperation between the two continents on migration issues and the fight against terrorism.

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