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

Covid-19 seems to have plateaued in China. Beijing first mishandled the crisis by trying to cover it up, thus allowing the virus to take hold in China and rapidly spread beyond its borders. But the severe measures of which only a Leninist system is capable brought it under control, albeit at great cost – not all of which was borne by China.

The global epicenter is now in Europe and, increasingly, the US. Like China, the West fumbled its initial responses. Democracies are slow to react until shocked into action. However, these are resilient systems with strong economic, scientific and administrative capabilities, and they have begun to mobilize. The costs to everyone will again be great. Still, there is no question that they will eventually get a grip on the disease and bring it under control in their own way.

CHINA

The accusation that the Chinese government delayed in letting the world know about the COVID-19 outbreak has become a political weapon in countries including the US, the UK and Canada.

But China’s scientists have won international praise for hitting several key milestones in understanding the novel, fast-moving virus.

Chinese leaders were seen as slow to react to the outbreak that began in the city of Wuhan, suppressing information and even punishing those who raised the alarm.

From the time when the first cases of COVID-19 were identified in Wuhan City, China, in December 2019, WHO has been at the forefront of the country’s containment efforts. The WHO Country Office in China, supported by the Regional Office for the Western Pacific and global headquarters, has provided the Government of China with technical advice on detection, testing, isolation and quarantine measures to support a rapid response to contain the outbreak.

As China emerges from the containment phase of the outbreak after 2 months and moves into the mitigation stage, its experience is helping countries currently at the start of the COVID-19 cycle to plan their responses better.

Taking south east Asia, the first case of COVID-19 in Southeast Asia was found in Singapore on the 23rd of January. This came to no surprise for Singapore as they had been preparing for the virus outbreak since late December. The result has been a low COVID-19 mortality rate. In contrast, Indonesia repeatedly denied having any COVID-19 cases until March 2, and since then, the numbers grew overwhelmingly rapidly. Indonesia has the highest number of COVID-19 deaths in Southeast Asia, followed by the Philippines and Malaysia. Malaysia’s skyrocketing number of COVID-19 patients is mainly due to the delayed ban of religious gatherings. Malaysia then implemented a nation-wide lockdown and similarly, the Philippines issued a lockdown policy in the Luzon area, including Manila. Meanwhile, Laos and Myanmar continue to deny any confirmed cases of COVID-19.

Singapore was aware of the Wuhan outbreak in late December and immediately began conducting laboratory research on the virus, heightened border control and surveillance, and implemented temperature screening for inbound flights from Wuhan and then the rest of China. Singapore’s immediate response was arguably a product of the trauma from the 2003 SARS outbreak, which severely affected the nation’s economy and population.

In the fight to contain the virus, Singapore established a website and an online application called Dubbed TraceTogether to enhance the transparency of the outbreak situation and to guarantee those under home- based quarantine comply with the quarantine policy. These online platforms list the places and times of potential Coronavirus carriers and use Bluetooth to detect those who have been within two meters of a confirmed Coronavirus patient for at least 30 minutes. Moreover, the government is providing S$100 for self-employed individuals, prohibits the reduction of annual leave for people who self- quarantine, and ensures full pay or even additional financial support for those working from home.

Meanwhile in Indonesia and Malaysia, citizens ignore public announcements for social distancing procedures. There are cases of Indonesians using the opportunity to working from home and study from home to visit tourist places. Working from home is also limited to large corporations and a few state- owned enterprises. This is because firms worry about their survival if they have to continue paying their working-from-home employees while the firms continue to experience an economic downturn.

Similarly, despite finding COVID-19 cases in late January, life in Malaysia continued as usual. The sudden surge in cases was primarily due to the transmission that occurred during the continued Friday prayers, which were attended by around 16,000 people from late February until March. Though Malaysia is now on lockdown, there are still a few people trading in markets and eating out in restaurants. Malaysia’s worsening situation is also driven by the recent political turmoil. The prime minister and health minister are both recently elected, and the cabinet is comprised of several first-time ministers. It is important to note, however, that Malaysians believe Malaysia’s medical team is handling the situation competently and efficiently. Further, the employment policy in Malaysia amidst the lockdown is still unclear, which is also the case in the Philippines. Both Malaysians and Filipinos are worried about their incomes, as well as the potential for food shortages. However, for Malaysian workers in Singapore, the Singaporean prime minister promised to support their financial wellbeing.

As for Laos and Myanmar, both countries deny having confirmed cases of COVID-19. It has been suggested that these countries either lack the technical capacity to detect the virus or are hiding reported cases to avoid chaos. Regardless, both governments have prohibited several mass gatherings and all official events, like the National Sports Games and the annual military parade. Both governments also monitor travel movements into their countries, especially those from China and neighboring Southeast Asian countries. Likewise, Vietnam and Cambodia have suspended all international flights.

Well, now the coronavirus is spreading in Africa.The countries of Africa have therefore decided to unite around a common continental response. coordinating efforts among member states, African Union (A.U.) agencies and other multilateral organizations. response covers surveillance, prevention, diagnosis, treatment and control.

A number of countries have embarked on border closures, nationwide lockdowns and the rollout of mass screening and testing programs. Isolation and quarantine measures are being put in place for those at risk and medical management for those who are already ill. These efforts are taking place in tandem with mass public-education campaigns around social distancing and proper hygiene.

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