

MAY 18

International Assistance to Southeast Asia:

China's "Mask Diplomacy"

With Covid-19 largely contained domestically, the Chinese government has pivoted to providing assistance abroad. Southeast Asia is a particular focus. Unlike in Europe, where China's so-called "mask diplomacy" has generated criticism due to some [faulty equipment](#) and [skepticism](#) about Beijing's [geopolitical intentions](#), Southeast Asian governments have welcomed China's emergency medical assistance. Chinese aid typically consists of surgical masks, test kits, and other equipment, as well as dispatching medical experts. Equipment is typically handed over with great fanfare. In addition to the Chinese government, foundations linked to billionaire Jack Ma and state-owned enterprises have made large donations of medical supplies to Southeast Asian states.

Chinese assistance has included:

- **ASEAN**: On April 21, China donated 75,000 surgical masks, 300 bottles of hand sanitizer, and 35 infrared thermometers to the [ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta](#).
- **Malaysia**: The Chinese Embassy in Malaysia delivered the first batch of medical supplies to [Sungai Buloh Hospital on March 19](#). The Chinese government and other entities sent three more relief packages in March. Foreign Minister Hishammuddin Hussein received the largest shipment of medical supplies from China on March 28. Despite this close engagement, Malaysian officials have expressed [doubts about Chinese-made test kits](#). Malaysian hospitals are now considering acquiring test kits from Singapore and South Korea instead. On May 15, Senior Minister Ismail Sabri Yakoob [expressed](#) his appreciation for China's support in fighting the pandemic to his Chinese counterpart, Minister of National Defence General Wei Fenghe.
- **Philippines**: China's first shipment of medical donations to the Philippines [arrived](#) on March 21. China sent a team of medical experts and a second batch of donations on April 5, followed by another one on April 27. China's Ministry of National Defence [contributed](#) another batch of supplies, including more than 80,000 surgical masks, goggles, and suits on May 13. Secretary Teodoro Locsin said, "[China] is a model for what the rest of the world should be doing. Instead of blaming each other for what's happening, we should all start working together to help each other."
- **Thailand**: China [sent](#) medical supplies worth \$9 million. Deputy Defense Minister Chaichan Changmongkol received them in a public ceremony on May 12. This followed a shipment [received](#) in April during the Songkran Festival.
- **Indonesia**: On March 20, Indonesia [sent](#) a military aircraft to Shanghai to pick up 9 tons of medical supplies. A consortium of Chinese institutions and ministries [sent](#) 40 tons of Covid-19 test kits and other medical supplies to Indonesia one week later. On April 4,

President Xi Jinping committed to helping Indonesia fight the outbreak during a phone call with President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo, reportedly [saying](#), “We believe that with your perseverance, Indonesia will be able to defeat this pandemic.” Indonesia’s Covid-19 taskforce [obtained](#) RNA isolation kits, polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test kits, and a viral transport medium kit from China on April 26. The Sichuan NGO Network for International Exchanges on May 14 donated over [10,000 masks](#) to the Indonesian Chinese Entrepreneur Association.

- [Laos](#): From April 10-11, a team of Chinese medical experts [shared](#) anti-epidemic experiences and held training courses throughout Laos. The team provided 10,000 PCR kits, 10,000 KN95 masks, and 30,000 masks.
- [Cambodia](#): On March 18, China [sent](#) medical supplies including detection kits, ventilators, personal protective equipment (PPE), and masks to Cambodia. On March 23, a Chinese medical team from Guangxi province delivered medical supplies including ventilators, medical masks, and test kits to Phnom Penh. China [shared another shipment](#) of “urgently needed” Covid-19 supplies, including testing kits and protective gowns, on April 26 at Cambodia’s request.
- [Myanmar](#): On April 8, a 12-person Chinese medical team from Yunnan province [arrived](#) in Yangon for a 14-day visit, followed by another visit on April 24. On April 22, China [provided](#) 20 ventilators reportedly worth \$400,000. Another 15 machines are due to arrive in the near future. China sent medical experts from the People’s Liberation Army on April 24 to train Myanmar army [medical workers](#) on Covid-19 infection control.
- [Brunei](#): On April 23, China [provided](#) Brunei with medical supplies, including 100,000 N95 respirators and 1,000 surgical gowns. The Chinese Embassy in Brunei also donated about \$42,000 to Brunei’s Covid-19 Relief Fund. On May 14, Brunei [received](#) masks, goggles, protective clothing, suits, and more.
- [Singapore](#): On May 5, Singapore [received](#) a total of 620,000 face masks from the Chinese government and the Red Cross Society of China.

Non-government Chinese aid:

Chinese non-government entities have also been active, most notably the Alibaba and Jack Ma foundations. On March 19, the two foundations announced they would send 2,000,000 masks, 150,000 test kits, 20,000 sets of PPE, and 20,000 face shields to Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Myanmar, and Thailand. On April 9, the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China [donated](#) medical equipment worth \$117,500, including 150,000 face masks to Laos. On May 14, Jack Ma and the Manny Pacquiao Foundation [donated](#) over 50,000 test and extraction kits to the Philippines.

Assistance from the United States:

On April 7, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced [\\$225 million](#) in international assistance to respond to Covid-19 in addition to \$274 million announced in late March. So far, \$18.3 million of that funding is earmarked for countries in Southeast Asia. But Pompeo made clear that urgent domestic needs in the United States meant this assistance will not include shipments of critical medical supplies such as protective gear, in contrast to China's recent "mask diplomacy." Instead, the funding will be used to train medical workers, boost screening capabilities, and bolster national health systems. When making these new pledges, the State Department has emphasized past U.S. leadership on global health, citing approximately \$3.5 billion in international assistance provided over the past two decades.

Pledges have included:

- Philippines: The U.S. government has pledged \$8.8 million for Covid-19 aid. During an April 19 phone call, Presidents Donald Trump and Rodrigo Duterte [discussed](#) cooperation between the United States and the Philippines to combat the pandemic.
- Indonesia: The U.S. government has pledged \$5 million to Indonesia for Covid-19 aid, covering testing and visits by technical experts. During an April 24 phone call, Trump [promised](#) Jokowi an unknown number of ventilators.
- Thailand: The U.S. government has pledged approximately \$2.7 million for Covid-19 aid, including testing and medical supplies.
- Laos: The U.S. government has pledged approximately \$3.5 million for Covid-19 aid, including testing and supplies, plus deliveries of protective equipment and visits by technical experts. Washington has so far provided medical equipment including 440 protective goggles, 1,500 surgical gowns, 220 face shields, disposable biohazard bags, aprons, N95 masks, gloves, and hand sanitizer.
- Cambodia: The U.S. government has pledged approximately \$4 million for Covid-19 aid, encompassing risk communication, community engagement, and laboratory support in response to the pandemic.
- Myanmar: The U.S. government has pledged approximately \$7 million in Covid-19 aid for testing and medical supplies, plus deliveries of protective equipment and visits of technical experts.
- Vietnam: The U.S. government has pledged [\\$9.5 million](#) for Covid-19 aid, testing, and visits by technical experts.
- Malaysia: The U.S. government has pledged \$200,000 for Covid-19-related humanitarian and health assistance as of April 20.

Non-government U.S. aid:

U.S. philanthropic assistance has come from a range of sources, including \$50 million worldwide from the Rockefeller Foundation to combat Covid-19, including to its Asia office in Bangkok. Give2Asia, a U.S.-based public charity, has collected [over \\$17 million](#) in donations from corporations, foundations, and individuals to support Covid-19 response in the Asia-Pacific region. The PepsiCo Foundation has contributed \$3.3 million, the largest donation yet.

Singapore's "Test-kit Diplomacy":

Singapore, partly through the Temasek Foundation, was the first Southeast Asian country with excess capacity and ability to deliver aid to neighbors. "From a foreign policy point of view, we now have test kit diplomacy. What we need to do as a world is to share best practices, to rapidly develop test kits, vaccines, antivirals," [said](#) Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan on March 10.

- [Malaysia](#): On April 1, Singapore [donated](#) 5,000 Universal Transport Medium swabs, a critical component in fast acting test kits, to Malaysia.
- [Philippines](#): On March 25, Singapore [sent](#) 3,000 test kits and a PCR machine for processing tests to the Philippines. On April 1, the Temasek Foundation [donated](#) 40,000 test kits and 2 ventilators to the Philippines.
- [Vietnam](#): On March 30, the Temasek Foundation [presented](#) 10 ventilators to Vietnam to support the country's treatment of Covid-19 patients. The foundation said it will supply 10 oxygen generators to Hanoi and 10 to Ho Chi Minh City in the near future.
- [Brunei](#): Singapore [sent](#) 3,000 test kits and a PCR machine for processing tests on March 25.
- [Indonesia](#): On March 13, Singapore [donated](#) 50 sets of PPE and 2 ventilators to Batam. On April 2, Singapore [sent](#) medical supplies including 30,000 test kits, 5 PCR machines, and more than 1,000 sets of PPE to Indonesia. On April 8, an Indonesian navy vessel was sent to Singapore to collect supplies to manufacture more than 55,000 gallons of hand sanitizer for use in the city. On May 11, Singapore's Economic Development Board organized a consortium of 13 companies to [donate 100,000 KN95](#) masks and 5 tons of hand sanitizer to the city of Batam.
- [Myanmar](#): On March 4, Singapore [sent](#) 3,000 diagnostic tests and 2 PCR machines to test for Covid-19 to Myanmar.

Assistance from Vietnam:

Vietnam has extended aid to regional and international partners since early April after ramping up its domestic production of medical supplies. On April 30, Vietnam [started exporting](#) domestically made and WHO-approved Covid-19 test kits. Having already received orders from 20 countries, Vietnam is reportedly one of five nations with ready-to-export kits. The government [suspended](#) the export of drugs used to treat the virus to ensure sufficient preventive and curative supplies for Vietnam.

- Laos: On April 3, Vietnam sent nearly 5 tons of Covid-19 related medical equipment worth over \$300,000 to Laos, including test kits, 340,000 face masks, and PPE.
- Cambodia: On April 3, Vietnam donated 390,000 face masks to Cambodia. On April 7, Region 7 of the Vietnam People's Army provided medical supplies and equipment, including 50,000 face mask, 1,000 sets of PPE, and 260 gallons of hand sanitizer to units of the Cambodian Royal Army. The group also provided 30,000 face masks and over \$21,000 in assistance to Vietnamese Cambodians in the area.
- Indonesia: On April 5, Vietnam's Ministry of Science and Technology sent 500 diagnostic test kits to Indonesia.
- Myanmar: On April 10, Vietnam presented \$50,000 as a symbolic gift of support during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- United States: On April 8, Vietnam donated 450,000 protective suits to the United States, with 450,000 more suits to follow in the near future. The delivery drew praise from President Trump on Twitter, who expressed thanks to "our friends in Vietnam." On April 16, Vietnam announced it is donating 250,000 made-in-Vietnam face masks, including 50,000 sent directly for use at the White House, reportedly worth at least \$100,000. Vietnam on April 29 presented 420,000 medical masks to U.S. Ambassador Daniel Kritenbrink as a donation to the American Red Cross.
- China: On February 8, Vietnam's Ha Giang province border guards donated 1,000 face masks and 20 sanitizer containers to the Yunnan Border Guards as a symbolic gesture. Two weeks later, the Department of Military Medicine within Vietnam's Ministry of National Defence supplied unspecified "medical equipment" to China's Ministry of Defence in a more formal ceremony. On March 8, border guards at Dien Bien province gifted 10,000 face masks to their Chinese counterparts.
- Europe: Vietnam on April 7 donated 550,000 masks to France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom.
- Russia: On March 27, Vietnam's Department of Military Medicine gifted unspecified supplies to the minister counsellor of the Russian Embassy in Hanoi. On April 13, Vietnam donated 150,000 made-in-Vietnam antimicrobial face masks.
- Japan: Japan received made-in-Vietnam face masks reportedly worth \$100,000.
- Sweden: Vietnam gifted more than 100,000 face masks to Sweden on April 21.
- France: The Vietnamese Embassy in France on May 7 donated 15,000 masks to local authorities. The Hanoi People's Committee on May 17 presented 200,000 made-in-Vietnam masks to French localities.

- Cuba: The Ministry of National Defence [announced](#) it would transfer test-kit technology developed by the Vietnam Military Medical University to Cuba.

Assistance from Malaysia:

- Palestine: Malaysia [contributed](#) 1 million face masks, 500,000 gloves, and 500 face shields on May 11 to Palestine's efforts against Covid-19.

Assistance from Japan:

Japan, traditionally a major donor in Southeast Asia, has been slower than China to provide assistance to combat Covid-19.

- On February 14, the government of Japan announced it would donate 222,000 sets of PPE to Cambodia, the Philippines, Laos, and Mongolia. The equipment was drawn from a stockpile of the Asia-Europe Foundation financed by Japan's contribution.
- Japanese foreign minister Toshimitsu Motegi on April 1 [pledged to provide at least \\$1.8 million](#) in aid to Vietnam to combat the virus. Japan gifted almost 5,000 isolation gowns, more than 6,000 gloves, 6,000 N95 face masks, 13,200 surgical gowns, 27 goggles, and 240 bottles of rubbing alcohol to Laos and [donated](#) \$20 million to Cambodia's Covid-19 response.
- The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) on [February 7 announced](#) it was providing Covid-19 testing reagents to the National Institute of Hygiene and Epidemiology of Vietnam, worth about \$130,000. JICA [announced on February 25](#) it would send Covid-19 primer and testing reagents to the National Health Laboratory of Myanmar, worth approximately \$3,700.

Assistance from South Korea:

South Korea has begun to pivot toward international assistance with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs [announcing on March 27](#) that the United States, the United Arab Emirates, and Indonesia were "on its priority list for exporting quarantine supplies, such as coronavirus test kits." As of April 7, [126 countries have issued requests](#) for the import of South Korean-made Covid-19 tests.

- On April 8, South Korea committed to provide \$500,000 in "varied forms of assistance" to Indonesia. On April 19, Indonesia received [50,000 test kit reagents](#) with an additional 495,000 reagents expected in the coming weeks. South Korean conglomerates [pledged](#) to donate 50,000 sets of PPE and PCR test kits each. CJ Corporation [donated](#) \$255,000 worth of rapid test kits and hand sanitizers to medical facilities and workers in the ride-hailing industry. The Philippines received over 50,000 test kits from South Korea between March and April.

Assistance from Taiwan

- Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs [on April 14 announced](#) that it was sending 1.6 million surgical masks to countries covered by its New Southbound Policy, including

Australia, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, [the Philippines](#), Singapore and Vietnam. Taiwan donated [70,000 surgical masks](#) to Myanmar with more expected to arrive in May, over [300,000 face masks](#) to the Philippines, [200,000 face masks](#) and 15,000 sets of PPE to Thailand, [and 100,000 face masks](#) to the Singapore Red Cross. Taiwan on May 6 announced another wave of humanitarian assistance, with [1.8 million face masks](#) to be delivered to New Southbound Policy countries.

Assistance from India

- India [provided Myanmar](#) with Covid-19 supplies, include 200,000 hydroxychloroquine tablets, gloves, body bags, and thermometers on May 6.

Assistance from New Zealand

- New Zealand on May 10 [provided \\$3 million](#) to Indonesia's pandemic response and recovery efforts through UNICEF Indonesia.

Assistance from the European Union

- The European Union on April 27 [announced the mobilization of \\$378 million \(million\)](#) in funds to ASEAN countries in support of pandemic response efforts.

Assistance from France

- The French Development Bank [provided about](#) \$2 million to Myanmar, Laos, the Philippines, Vietnam, and the Pasteur Institute of Cambodia.

Multilateral Assistance:

- World Bank: In early April, the World Bank approved \$20 million in credit to support Cambodia's pandemic response, \$18 million in assistance to Laos to help the country strengthen its health system and response capacity, [\\$7 billion](#) in loans to Indonesia in partnership with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), a [\\$50 million](#) emergency loan for hospital improvements and public health emergency preparedness to Myanmar, and a \$500 million loan [to support](#) the Philippines' Covid-19 response and recovery.
- Asian Development Bank: In mid-April, the ADB [approved a \\$1.5 billion loan](#) to support Indonesia's response to the Covid-19 pandemic and a [\\$200 million loan](#) to assist the Philippine government in providing cash subsidies to households affected by the pandemic. On May 11, the ADB [announced](#) possible plans for an additional \$125 million to aid the Philippines.
- Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank: The AIIB will [allocate \\$1 billion in loans](#) to Indonesia to support its pandemic response. The first \$250 million will arrive as part of a co-financing program with the World Bank and the Islamic Development Bank, with the second loan of \$750 million coming as a co-financing project with the ADB.

- United Nations: A UN humanitarian aid flight delivered 10,000 test kits to Myanmar on May 10. A second delivery is due next month from the United Nations Children’s Fund, or UNICEF, with 10,000 additional tests, reagents, and other medical supplies.

National Responses to Covid-19 in Southeast Asia

Indonesia:

Indonesia’s confirmed Covid-19 cases are rising extremely rapidly, and it now tops the region in terms of deaths from the virus. Indonesia’s response has been slow and rather piecemeal, with announcements of lockdowns in Jakarta and other metropolitan areas. Inconsistent guidelines, the lack of enforcement for self-quarantines, and the weakness of the national government’s communication strategy have meant that public awareness of social distancing remains a problem.

- Border closures and entry bans: On March 31, the Indonesian government announced a temporary ban on all foreign visitors.
- Quarantine or lockdown: On March 31, the government declared a “public health emergency,” allowing regional administrations to impose social restrictions like closing schools, workplaces, and limiting religious and public gatherings. Indonesia has declared the Covid-19 outbreak a “non-natural national disaster,” but the implementation of quarantines and lockdowns have varied significantly by location.
- An April 28 Reuters study of data from 34 provinces showed that more than 2,200 people had died from Covid-19-like symptoms that were not reported as such. This indicates the number of victims in Indonesia is likely far higher than the official death toll of 895.
- On May 4, President Joko “Jokowi” Widodo announced a five-point plan to anticipate the second wave of the outbreak: (1) an evaluation of “large scale social restrictions,” or PSBB; (2) testing, contact tracing, and isolation goals for provinces under PSBB; (3) stricter monitoring of migrant workers; (4) a stronger social safety net for low-income families; and (5) a hotline for feedback on the government’s handling of the pandemic. Jakarta also extended its initial two-week PSBB measures until May 22. The Coordinating Ministry of Economic Affairs is considering plans to reopen businesses and ease lockdown measures as early as June 1.
- The House of Representative is preparing to pass an executive order (Perppu No. 1/2020) that will reportedly expand the government’s authority to allocate spending on the Covid-19 response, allowing the government to extend the state budget and protect state officials from legal charges granted that they act according to the law.
- Economic stimulus: The government announced a stimulus package worth \$725 million in February 2020, which provides fiscal incentives to support the country’s tourism, aviation, and property industries. The package also allocated \$324 million for low-income households.
- On March 13, the Indonesian government issued its second emergency stimulus package worth \$8.1 billion, which included exempting some workers in manufacturing from income tax and giving manufacturing companies a discount on corporate tax payments.
- On March 31, President Jokowi introduced Indonesia’s third stimulus package worth nearly \$24.6 billion for health care spending, social protection, and tax incentives.

- Minister of Finance Sri Mulyani Indrawati on May 18 [announced \\$43 billion in economic stimulus](#). The funds will be used to support 12 state-owned enterprises, subsidize loan repayments for approximately 60 million borrowers, and strengthen social safety net programs, among other things.
- The [International Monetary Fund](#) (IMF) lowered Indonesia's GDP growth projections for 2020 to 0.5 percent from 5.0 percent in 2019.

Philippines:

The Philippines has among the highest number of new confirmed cases per day in the region. Under President Rodrigo Duterte, the Philippine government veered from dismissing the threat and refusing to restrict travel from China to imposing an abrupt lockdown of the entire island of Luzon, including Metro Manila, enforced by the military and the police. The Congress granted Duterte "special temporary power," which allows him to implement draconian measures which are hitting vulnerable populations, especially the urban poor, especially hard.

- **Border closures and entry bans:** All inbound and outbound commercial flights have been suspended to [ease congestion at quarantine facilities](#). Foreigners are banned from entry, with exceptions for foreign spouses and children of repatriating overseas Filipino workers.
- **Quarantine or lockdown:** President Duterte [imposed](#) an Enhanced Community Quarantine, or ECQ, on the main island of Luzon as well as cities in the Visayas and Mindanao until May 15. The rest of the country is under a less restrictive General Community Quarantine, or GCQ, until May 15.
- On April 1, Duterte [ordered](#) the police and the military to shoot protesters violating these measures. [The first case of police shooting](#) a civilian for refusing to follow quarantine restrictions was reported on April 4. Since then, Human Rights Watch [has reported](#) other instances of law enforcement abuse during the implementation of these public health measures. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights [called out](#) the Philippines' "highly militarized response" during the lockdown, which has led to the arrest of 120,000 people for violating curfew.
- **Economic stimulus:** On March 17, the Philippines government announced the entire country would be placed under a "state of calamity" for six months, enabling national and local governments to quickly access relief funds.
- On March 24, President Duterte signed into law [Republic Act No.11469](#), granting him "special temporary power" for three months with a possible extension. Duterte can now direct the operations of private hospital and ships, reappropriate the Executive Department's budget, and access \$5.36 billion from various government agencies to mitigate the potential economic fallout of the pandemic.
- On March 30, the government [approved](#) a \$3.9 billion social protection program for low-income families and health workers.
- On April 7, the Duterte administration announced a \$610 million "[Bayanihan Grant to Cities and Municipalities](#)" to assist local governments. On April 13, the government [approved](#) a \$1 billion wage subsidy package intended to support about 3.4 million small business workers. Workers qualifying for the financial assistance will receive about \$340 for two months.

- On May 12, House of Representatives Speaker Alan Peter Cayetano and eight other lawmakers [filed](#) the House Bill No. 6709, or the COVID-19 Unemployment Reduction Economic Stimulus Act of 2020, aimed at creating jobs in rural areas through infrastructure projects worth \$29 billion. More than 20 million families [will receive](#) government aid.
- The [IMF](#) lowered the Philippines's GDP growth projections for 2020 to 0.6 percent from 5.9 percent in 2019. JPMorgan [downgraded](#) the Philippines' growth forecast to 0.9.

Vietnam:

Despite limited resources and a bustling border with China, Vietnam has managed to effectively contain the pandemic. It has done so with a prompt and aggressive response, starting with travel restrictions in late January and a local quarantine in mid-February. The Communist Party of Vietnam has shown its ability to mobilize society, enact aggressive containment and monitoring strategies, and communicate effectively with citizens, underpinned by its network of informants who surveil the populace and help enforce government restrictions. Vietnam is the first ASEAN country to incrementally lift lockdown measures.

- Border closure and entry bans: All foreign visitors are banned, including all overseas Vietnamese. Vietnam [banned](#) all flights to and from China on February 1. Vietnam is set to reopen [six secondary border gates](#) with China in mid-May to facilitate the resumption of cross-border trade.
- Quarantine or lockdown: A national lockdown began April 1. Social isolation measures were [lifted in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi](#) on April 23 with some restrictions remaining for hospitality and entertainment businesses. “Unnecessary major events” remain banned, and non-essential public services are suspended. On May 7, the Ministry of Transport [announced that all public and commercial transport](#) could begin to operate at full capacity and frequency.
- With the issuance of Decree No. 19 on April 25, centrally-directed areas [can now lift Covid-19 restrictions](#) if the disease is contained and controlled.
- Other responses: A decree preventing the spread of “[fake news](#)” was set in motion on April 15. Violators may be fined between \$426 and \$853.
- Economic stimulus: On March 3, Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc [announced](#) a \$1.16 billion fiscal stimulus package from the government's contingency budget. The package includes tax breaks, delayed tax payments, and government spending on infrastructure in an effort to maintain a 6.8 percent growth target, according to state media. Vietnam stopped exporting rice on March 24 to ensure national food security.
- In early April, the government announced plans for a [\\$2.6 billion](#) fiscal package to support those most affected by the pandemic. Under the new package, those displaced from their jobs will receive about \$76 per month through June, low-income households will collect about \$42 per month, and those who “rendered services to the state during the revolution” will be sent about \$22 a month. The government will [also delay](#) collecting and estimated \$7.6 billion in value-added tax, corporate income tax, and land rent from various businesses and households for five months starting from April.
- The [IMF](#) lowered Vietnam's GDP growth projections for 2020 to 2.7 percent from 7.0 percent in 2019.

Thailand:

The Covid-19 pandemic presents Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha with a new crisis at a time when Thailand was returning to a semblance of normalcy after five years of junta rule.

Inconsistent policies about travel and quarantine, poor communication, and supply shortages have highlighted the government's inability to promptly and adequately respond to the surge of Covid-19 cases. This has led to widespread criticism and frustration on social media. Prayuth has responded with a clamp down on the press and social media reporting.

- **Border closures and entry bans:** All borders were closed on March 22, and foreign visitors to Thailand were banned. On April 20, the country reopened five gates along its border with Malaysia. The ban on incoming flights [has been extended](#) from April 30 to May 31.
- **Quarantine or lockdown:** On May 17, Thailand's national curfew was shortened to 11 p.m. to 4 a.m. from the previously announced 10 p.m. to 4 a.m. time. The army is helping enforce the curfew. This followed a [State of Emergency](#) decree issued by Prayuth on March 26, which [has been extended](#) to May 31. The decree grants the government sweeping powers to restrict domestic travel, ban social gatherings, and [censor the media](#).
- On April 15, Prime Minister Prayuth announced plans to gradually ease Covid-19 restrictions at the end of April due to a decline in new confirmed cases. Thailand began to [ease restrictions on business operations](#) on May 3 and will allow certain businesses to reopen, including retail stores, food services, and markets. Thailand removed South Korea and China, including Hong Kong and Macau, from its list of Covid-19 Disease Infected Zones on May 15, easing restrictions on travel to and from those countries. . Thailand reopened more businesses, including department stores and shopping malls, on May 17.
- Schools will [remain closed](#) until July 1.
- Thailand has created a Covid-19 [contact-tracing app](#), *Thai Chana* (Thailand Wins). The government has yet to announce if use of the app will be mandatory.
- **Economic stimulus:** On April 7, the government unveiled plans for a new stimulus package worth \$58 billion—10 percent of GDP. Of this, \$18 billion will be used for financial aid to workers, \$12 billion for infrastructure and job investments, \$15 billion for soft loans to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and \$12 billion for a Corporate Bond Liquidity Stabilization Fund. The government had approved an earlier stimulus package on March 10 that was expected to inject \$12.7 billion into the economy on March 10. Ninety-two public-private partnership projects worth \$3.3 trillion are currently [being planned](#) to stimulate the economy. On April 28, the cabinet approved monthly payments of \$154 for three months to the 8.4 million households registered as farmers.
- On April 14, the [IMF](#) lowered Thailand's GDP growth projections for 2020 to -6.7 percent from 2.4 percent in 2019.

Myanmar:

Myanmar did not report its first case until March 23. But considering its long, porous border with China, Myanmar's paucity of Covid-19 cases likely results more from the lack of testing than from the absence of the virus. The country's underdeveloped health care system and the government's failure to act decisively underscore Myanmar's unpreparedness to cope with the

pandemic. The national government has not yet declared a state of emergency or instituted any nationwide lockdown.

- **Border closures and entry bans:** Borders with China and India are closed. Border crossings with Bangladesh are restricted to trade flows. International flights and public gatherings are banned until May 31.
- **Quarantine or lockdown:** In mid-March, the government formed a Covid-19 committee led by State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi to oversee the crisis response. On March 31, however, Myanmar's military set up a [separate task force](#) led by the military-appointed vice president, U Myint Swe. The task force includes other military-appointed members of the cabinet as well as the joint chief of staff of the defense forces and five civilian cabinet members. This military-led task force [does not report to](#) Aung San Suu Kyi and has taken upon itself broad powers to investigate Covid-19 cases, conduct contact tracing, and clamp down on the press and social media.
- Starting April 19, Yangon imposed a 10 p.m. to 4 a.m. [curfew](#) and a supplementary [stay-at-home order on seven Yangon townships until June 18](#), excluding essential workers. Shan, Karen, and Kachin states and Mandalay, Sagaing, Ayeyarwaddy, and Bago regions have also [adopted](#) curfews. Schools nationwide are set to resume on June 1.
- On May 15, Myanmar [extended](#) Covid-19 measures a second time, including the ban on public gatherings, school and cinema closures, and visa and international flight suspensions, until May 31.
- The first Covid-19 case [was reported](#) on May 15 in the Kutupalong Rohingya refugee settlement in Cox's Bazaar.
- **Other responses:** Rights groups have reported that the military is [escalating offensives](#) against ethnic armed groups in Shan, Kachin, Chin, and Rakhine states. On April 21, after an [attack](#) on a World Health Organization team, the United Nations called for an urgent cease-fire. UN Special Rapporteur Yanghee Lee [said](#) the military was conducting "war crimes" against minorities, emboldened by the significant political role it was granted to fight the pandemic. On April 28, the government and ethnic armed organizations [established a coordinating committee](#) to jointly fight Covid-19. Skirmishes were reported on May 8 between the Myanmar army and the Karen National Union.
- Myanmar's Union Minister of Health and Sports on May 18 submitted to the Lower House of Parliament a new draft Prevention and Control of Communicable Diseases Law. The country's current law on communicable diseases was drafted in 1995 and has only been amended once, in 2011.
- **Economic stimulus:** On April 27, the government released a comprehensive economic [relief plan](#) outlining, among other things, new monetary policy, measures to boost private businesses and trade, and efforts to mitigate the economic impacts for workers and households. As of April 28, Myanmar is [reportedly](#) close to releasing a \$2-3 billion stimulus package. A fund of nearly \$70 million was previously established at the Myanmar Economic Bank to provide soft loans to affected business (particularly the garment and tourism sectors and SMEs). The Ministry of Health will receive \$200,000 to buy laboratory equipment and medical supplies.

Malaysia:

Malaysia's initial response to the outbreak was nonchalant and complicated by an abrupt change in government. But in mid-March, the country closed its borders and shut down non-essential businesses, schools, and religious services. The armed forces have been deployed to enforce a partial lockdown and the government is increasing testing capacity and contact tracing as confirmed Covid-19 cases continue to rise.

- **Border closures and entry bans:** Malaysia [shut](#) its borders on March 16, banning all visitors and barring residents from travel overseas. Starting April 14, Malaysians in Singapore have been allowed to return if they are tested and placed in quarantine facilities. One checkpoint in Songklah on the Thailand-Malaysia border reopened on April 26.
- On April 16, Malaysia [denied](#) entry to a boat carrying 200 Rohingya refugees, saying it feared they might spread the virus. [Human Rights Watch](#) has called on Malaysia to better protect its human rights obligations while adopting public health measures.
- **Quarantine or lockdown:** Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin enacted a “Movement Control Order,” or MCO, on March 18. The government has mobilized the Malaysian Armed Forces to enforce the order, including through the use of drones, resulting in the [arrest](#) of hundreds of MCO violators. The order has been extended four times, most recently to [June 9](#). On May 1, Muhyiddin announced that a Conditional Movement Control Order, or CMCO, would take effect three days later, allowing private tertiary institutions (but not entertainment businesses, hospitality venues, schools, or religious gatherings) to operate under strict conditions. Bazaars will remain closed for the holy month of Ramadan, which began April 23, and there will be no public prayers in mosques. Travel permits for the annual *balik kampung*, during which millions of people return to their home villages at the end of Ramadan, remain [suspended](#).
- Unemployment [hit](#) a 10-year high of 3.9 percent, or 610,500 people, in March.
- **Economic stimulus:** Three economic stimulus packages have been unveiled. Interim prime minister Mahathir Mohamad launched the first, worth \$4.6 billion, on Feb 27 to cushion the blow of Covid-19 for the tourism sector and other industries. This included nationwide electricity discounts of 2 percent for industrial, commercial, and domestic users, as well as a monetary assistance scheme for employees.
- Newly-installed prime minister Muhyiddin unveiled the second package, estimated at \$53 billion, on March 26. It includes \$23.1 billion for businesses and \$2.3 billion in direct cash payments for 4 million low-income households. The combined value of the first two packages equaled 15.5 percent of Malaysia's GDP and 84.2 percent of the federal government's original 2020 budget.
- The government announced a [third stimulus package](#), worth \$2.2 billion, on April 6. It includes wage subsidies, grants and loans for SMEs, and tax deductions.
- On April 14, the [IMF](#) lowered Malaysia's GDP growth projections for 2020 to -1.7 percent from 4.3 percent in 2019.

Cambodia:

After downplaying the risks of the crisis and refusing to shut the country's borders for several weeks, Prime Minister Hun Sen declared a state of emergency on March 31 and put forward a draft emergency law granting the government unfettered powers. This prompted an outcry from

human rights groups. Hun Sen's reluctance to act earlier likely stemmed from his desire to maintain a close relationship with China.

- **Border closures and entry bans:** All visa exemptions, visas on arrival, and e-visas are suspended until April 30. On March 17, Hun Sen [banned arrivals](#) from Italy, Germany, Spain, France, the United States, and Iran until further notice.
- **Quarantine or lockdown:** All persons entering the country are being placed under quarantine for 14 days.
- **Other responses:** On April 10, the Cambodian National Assembly passed a [state of emergency](#) law granting Prime Minister Hun Sen greater powers to combat the Covid-19 pandemic. A royal decree announced the promulgation of the law on April 29. It grants the government the power to monitor communications and social media and restrict the distribution of information. The government [has arrested](#) at least 30 people since January on charges of spreading “fake news” related to the outbreak. Twelve of them were linked to the dissolved Cambodian National Rescue Party—. This has raised concerns about human rights violations and the martial power granted to Hun Sen without oversight.
- **Economic stimulus:** As of March 30, the Cambodian government was expected to approve around \$70 million in additional resources for the health sector. On March 9, Hun Sen announced the government had allocated between \$800 million and \$2 billion to address the economic impacts of Covid-19. Only “[legally registered and formally verified](#)” SMEs will receive benefits. This would exclude the 95 percent of Cambodian SMEs that are informal businesses.

Laos:

Laos, the most rural country in Southeast Asia, was also the last to report its first Covid-19 infection. The country's governance and almost non-existent health care system will be tested as case numbers rise in the coming weeks. This will only be partially offset by the significant assistance it has received from China since early March.

- **Border closures and entry bans:** On March 30, the government shut down all international border checkpoints until May 3. Returning Lao citizens are required to undergo a mandatory 14-day self-quarantine [monitored](#) by local officials.
- **Quarantine or lockdown:** On March 30, Laos issued a [national stay-at-home order](#) except for essential outings. On May 4, the government permitted restaurants and malls to reopen. Offices can reopen if they adopt rotating shifts. On May 18, authorities announced more businesses can operate, including some schools and sport activities. Entertainment and retail venues remain closed.
- **Economic stimulus:** On March 20, the Lao cabinet approved a preliminary 13-part stimulus package during its monthly meeting. Only about \$11 million has been allocated to Covid-19 prevention and control. The government approved [relief measures on April 10](#) exempting micro- and small businesses from paying income tax for three months..

Singapore:

Singapore had been hailed as a global public-health model due to its early and aggressive response to Covid-19. It initially managed to contain the virus through widespread testing, comprehensive contact tracing, and mandatory, well-enforced quarantines for those testing

positive, their contacts, and all returning travelers. Singapore developed its own test kits as early as January and is now distributing them to countries in the region. But despite its early success, Singapore has had the highest number of confirmed cases in Southeast Asia since April 20 following an explosion of infections linked to [foreign workers dormitories](#).

- **Border closure:** On March 22, the city-state barred all short-term visitors from entering Singapore. Singapore, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, and Canada have agreed to [resume cross-border](#) travel to maintain supply chains. Malaysians with a Singapore work permit will continue to be allowed to [work](#) in the country. The only other non-nationals allowed entry are work permit holders in "essential sectors" such as health care. Singapore [banned the entry](#) of all travelers from China on January 31.
- **Quarantine or lockdown:** On April 5, Singapore [imposed a quarantine](#) on dormitories housing 20,000 migrant workers, most of whom are manual laborers from South Asia living in cramped conditions. A task force led by the Ministries of Health and Manpower [has deployed](#) special teams to bring supplies, food, and medical assistance to quarantined foreign workers.
- On April 21, Prime Minister Lee Hsien Long [announced](#) that the stay at home order, which the government has dubbed a "circuit breaker," would be extended until June 1. Work permit holders were placed under a mandatory stay-at-home notice until May 18 because of the rise in the number of infections in the community. On May 1, Prime Minister Lee announced the eventual "step-by-step" reopening of the economy. Singapore has since decided to allow [certain sectors](#), including home-based businesses and selected food retail and manufacturing firms, to begin reopening on May 12.
- **Economic stimulus:** On March 26, Singapore unveiled a second stimulus plan, the "Resilience Budget," worth [\\$33 billion](#). The package is designed to assist hard-hit sectors and self-employed individuals and provide cash payouts to citizens depending on income. Singapore had first announced \$4.4 billion of relief funding, dubbed the "Unity Budget," on February 18 to co-fund of business costs and provide tax relief for workers.
- On April 6, Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat announced an unprecedented third round of support measures called the "Solidarity Budget." This includes one-off payments to citizens, wage subsidies, and self-employed relief schemes. Singaporeans over the age of 21 began receive \$424 each on April 14. Altogether, the government has earmarked \$41.6 billion, about 12 percent of GDP, to respond to Covid-19. This is the largest, most aggressive stimulus package in Asia.
- On April 14, the [IMF](#) lowered Singapore's GDP growth projections for 2020 to -3.5 percent from 0.7 percent last October.

Brunei:

The sultanate has implemented drastic measures to clamp down on travel, impose strict quarantine rules, and conduct extensive testing. Most cases in Brunei can be linked back to a large-scale religious event in Malaysia at the end of February.

- **Border closures and entry bans:** All foreign visitors have been banned since March 24. On March 16, citizens, foreign residents, and green card holders in the country were barred from leaving without permission from the Prime Minister's Office. Malaysia has closed its land border with Brunei.

- **Quarantine or lockdown:** The government has [prohibited](#) mass gatherings, weddings, and sporting events. Brunei started [easing Covid-19 measures](#) in certain areas on May 16, beginning with social distancing and the reopening of businesses like sports facilities and markets. Schools are to reopen on June 2. Brunei issued iMSafe [tracking bracelets](#) on April 30 to all Covid-19 patients currently under home quarantine and those already recovered.
- **Economic stimulus:** On March 19, the Brunei Darussalam Monetary Authority announced measures to alleviate the financial burden on sectors hit hard by the pandemic.
- On April 1, the Ministry of Finance and Economy [announced](#) additional steps in aiding SMEs and individuals affected by the pandemic, amounting to about \$1.7 million in the form of deferment of principal or loan repayment and exemptions from fees and charges.
- On April 13, Brunei announced a special \$400 monthly allowance for health care workers, including doctors, nurses, volunteers, hospital cleaners, and security guards.

ASEAN Response to Covid-19:

While ASEAN has convened a series of meetings on how to deal with the pandemic, including with external partners such as the United States, China, and the European Union, there has been very little collective action to date. Diplomatically, the crisis has threatened ASEAN's centrality in regional affairs, with the crisis causing the cancellation of several key ASEAN meetings, including the ASEAN-U.S. summit scheduled for March 14 in Las Vegas and the 36th ASEAN Summit scheduled for April 6-9 in Vietnam. The latter has been [rescheduled](#) for late June.

- The [29th Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership \(RCEP\) Trade Negotiating Committee Meeting](#) was held April 20-24. The representatives from the 17 signatories to the agreement reaffirmed their commitment to sign the agreement into law in 2020, their continued interest in engaging with India to bring it back into the fold, and the importance of RCEP in jump starting the global economy in response to Covid-19.
- ASEAN foreign ministers [participated](#) in an ASEAN-U.S. special foreign ministers' meeting with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and ASEAN Secretary General Lim Jock Hoi on April 23. In addition to discussing coordination on Covid-19, Pompeo raised Washington's concerns about China's damming of the Mekong River and its continued assertiveness in the South China Sea despite the ongoing pandemic.
- On February 20, the foreign ministers of ASEAN and China [met](#) in Vientiane, Laos, to discuss ways to tackle the public health and economic implications of the global pandemic. The 10 ASEAN countries and China agreed to step up cooperation in sharing medical and health information and best practices to enhance emergency preparedness and response, with the communiqué praising China's response to the pandemic.

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