

COVID 19 THE LIFE CHANGING PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

The year 2020 has witnessed the total changes in the life of many people and the Malaysian is no exception to this new normal. This new normal and compliance to Standard Operating procedure (SOP) continues till the year 2021 and perhaps it may prolong to another year or more. The covid 19 has curved the normal routine of everyone in the society including the deceased. The school children have to adapt to the new learning style where physical attendance in a normal class room is no longer a necessity. The online learning is now the new mode of study to almost all school children in Malaysia including the university students. Modern technology including smart phones, lap tops and computers are a must have gadgets in every house hold in Malaysia. Personal hygiene is now the highest importance for every people in the society. This has boosted the economy in the sale of sanitizer, hand glove, and face masks. Nonetheless, the lockdown imposed by the government had caused many people in the society to face a major problem of losing their job. The policy of requiring the close down of factories during lock down had indirectly forced the employer to exercise discretion to reduce number of workers and other industry for example the tourism sector had suffered the most. Besides, the lock down had also caused increased in domestic violence as reported in the daily newspaper. This paper intends to discuss the early traces of covid 19 in Malaysia, the new scenario taken place in Malaysia following the spread of Covid 19 in September 2019 to present. The study is made based on the actual scenario in Malaysia, latest update in the local news, observations, and analysis of online materials.

Keywords: covid 19, new funeral procedure, standard operating procedure (SOP), retrenchment

INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus. Most people infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. Older people, and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness (WHO 2021, newsletter)ⁱ. There are many different kinds, and some cause disease. The first case of COVID-19 was reported Dec. 1, 2019, and the cause was a then-new coronavirus later named SARS-CoV-2. SARS-CoV-2 may have originated in an animal and changed (mutated) so it could cause illness in humans. In the past, several infectious disease outbreaks have been traced to viruses originating in birds, pigs, bats and other animals that mutated to become dangerous to humans. Research continues, and more study may reveal how and why the coronavirus evolved to cause pandemic disease (Lauren M. Sauer, M.S.2021)ⁱⁱ In another research Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is defined as illness caused by a novel coronavirus called severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2; formerly called 2019-nCoV), which was first identified amid an outbreak of respiratory illness cases in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, China. It was initially reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) on December 31, 2019. On January 30, 2020, the WHO declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global health emergency. On March 11, 2020, the WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, its first such designation since declaring H1N1 influenza a pandemic in 2009 (David J Cennimo, 2021).ⁱⁱⁱ

THE EARLY TRACES OF COVID 19 IN MALAYSIA

This paragraph will highlight the early traces of covid 19 cases in Malaysia beginning January 2020 till March 2020 prior to the first movement control order (MCO) 1.0 (from 18th March 2020 - 3rd May 2020).

January 2020

The following Figures (1) highlight the history of covid 19 infection in Malaysia began with the coming of tourist from China who had come into contact with infected person in Singapore, which later came to Malaysia via Johor Baharu. Out of these eight Chinese nationals, three

were confirmed covid 19 positive on the January 25th 2020, and later were quarantined at Sungai Buloh Hospital. Other cases involving Chinese nationals were also detected on January 24th at the Senai airport, Johor Bahru and Langkawi on the 25th January 2020. Figure 2 and 3 on the other hand shown local transmission of the Covid 19.

Figure 1: January 2020

No	Date/Month/Year	Details
1	January 23 2020	Eight Chinese nationals were quarantined at a hotel in Johor Bahru on 24 January after coming into contact with an infected person in neighboring Singapore ^{iv}
2	January 24 2020	a two-year-old child who was suspected to have been infected was detained along with their parents. The parents refused quarantine and were detained the next day by police at Senai International Airport before returning to China. ^v
2	January 25 2020	three of the Chinese nationals were confirmed to be infected on 25 January and quarantined at the Sungai Buloh Hospital in Selangor. ^{vi}
3	January 26	a fourth case of the virus was detected ^{vii}
4	January 29 2020	A suspected case was detected in Langkawi involving two female Chinese nationals with both victims quarantined at the Sultanah Maliha Hospital; one later confirmed positive on 29 January. ^{viii}
5	January 27 2020	A Chinese female national in Bintulu of Sarawak suspected of having contracted the virus ^{ix}
6	January 29 2020	Eight suspected cases were recorded in Sarawak: five in Kuching and one each in Sibul, Bintulu and Miri ^x
7	January 29 2020	Three positive cases were confirmed in Semenanjung Malaysia involving a four-year-old child quarantined at the Sultanah Maliha Hospital in Kedah, a 52-year-old man at

		Sultanah Aminah Hospital in Johor and a woman at Sungai Buloh Hospital in Selangor ^{xi}
8	January 30 2020	eighth case was reported at the Permai Hospital in Johor ^{xii}

Figure 2: February 2020

No	Date/Month/Year	Details
1	February 4 2020	two new cases, including a 41-year-old local male, which was the first case involving a Malaysian and other case involved a 63-year-old male from China ^{xiii}
2	February 6 2020	first local transmission, the younger sister of the 41-year-old Malaysian who tested positive for COVID-19 on 4 February and a positive case involving a 37-year-old woman from Wuhan, who had arrived in Malaysia on 25 January, was reported on the same day ^{xiv}
3	February 8 2020	11 new patients were admitted to Sibu Hospital, Miri Hospital and the Sarawak General Hospital in Kuching ^{xv}
4	February 15 2020	elderly American woman, who was among hundreds of passengers who disembarked from the MS Westerdam cruise ship in Cambodia and flew to Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, was identified as Malaysia's 22nd confirmed case ^{xvi}
5	February 26 2020	a female Malaysian hospital worker in Sabah's Kudat District suspected of having contracted the virus when she developed symptoms after returning from South Korea. Although she was later declared free from the virus ^{xvii}

Figure 3: March 2020

No	Date/Month/Year	Details
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1	March 17	<p>Malaysia reported its first two deaths from the coronavirus, a 60-year-old priest from Emmanuel Baptist Church in Kuching, Sarawak and a 34-year-old participant of the Muslim religious gathering (<i>Tabligh</i> cluster)^{xviii} in Sri Petaling from Johor Bahru, Johor.</p> <p>The Sri Petaling <i>Tablighi Jamaat</i> gathering has been linked to more than 620 COVID-19 cases in March 2020, making it the largest-known centre of transmission of the virus in Southeast Asia at that time. At least six countries have traced their cases back to the Malaysia event; most of the 73 COVID-19 cases in Brunei have been linked to the event, as well as 22 in Cambodia, 13 in Indonesia, 10 in Thailand, 5 in Singapore, 2 in the Philippines, and 2 in Vietnam.</p> <p>By 13 March, the Malaysian Ministry of Health had revised the number of Malaysian <i>Tablighi Jamaat</i> participants from 5,000 to 14,500, raising concerns that more positive cases could be discovered. Of the 14,500 participants, 41 tested positive for COVID-19, which brought the total number of cases in Malaysia to 238. By 17 March, the Sri Petaling event had resulted in the biggest increase in COVID-19 cases in Malaysia, with almost two thirds of the 673 confirmed cases in Malaysia linked to this event.</p> <p>On 29 March, the Director-General Noor Hisham Abdullah announced that the <i>Tabligh</i> cluster had reached the fifth generation. By 19 May, Noor Hisham confirmed that 48% of Malaysia's COVID-19 cases (3,347) had been linked to the Sri Petaling <i>Tabligh</i> cluster.^{xix}</p>
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2	March 20 2020	15 medical personnel had contracted COVID-19, with one being placed in an intensive care unit (ICU).
3	March 21 2020	a total of six Malaysian police officers had been infected by the virus while serving their duties ^{xx}
4	March 25 2020	a total of 72 Malaysia's health workers have been infected by the virus ^{xxi}
5	March 26 2020	the Malaysian royal household confirmed that seven officers from the nation's National Palace had been confirmed positive which caused Malaysia's Head of State (<i>Seri Paduka Yang Di Pertuan Agong/King</i>) and his spouse (<i>Seri Paduka Baginda Raja Permaisuri Agong/Queen</i>) to be put into quarantine. ^{xxii}

LIFE CHANGING SCENARIO

The Covid 19 pandemic had shape the life of many people either towards the positive or the negative ways. To most people, including younger children several adjustments were needed to meet the needs that suit them each day with lots of restricted actions. The Malaysian government, in its effort to control the spread of Coronavirus had introduced and implemented several policies and standard operating procedures, which in one way or another had impacted the daily life of every Malaysian citizen.

Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)

The fight against Covid 19 is far from over. The covid has not ended yet. Sudden spike on new cases, a surge of cases among foreigners, emergence of new clusters and death of covid 19 patient had forced the Malaysian government to do impose certain drastic and almost immediate cause of action. The life of many people (almost all Malaysians) is very much affected by the new normal. The people daily movements are being limited with the proclamation of movement control order (MCO); daily activities must comply with the standard operating procedure (SOP) prepared by the national safety Council. This includes

almost all activities such as schooling, leisure, shopping, social gathering, wedding ceremony, funeral due to natural death, funeral of covid patient, opening and closing of commercial center, mall, offices and etc. This has given a great impact on every single individual in the society. Aside from that, it is also sad to note that the number of domestic violence had increased during the MCO period. Above all, the MCO 1.0 had caused many people lost their jobs and had affect the house hold income very badly.

Movement Control Order (MCO)

On 16 March, Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin announced that the federal government would be imposing a nationwide lockdown known as the Movement Control Order (MCO)^{xxiii}, which would come into effect on 18 March and last for two weeks.^{xxiv}

The order among others included the general prohibition of mass movements and gatherings across the country including religious, sports, social and cultural activities. To enforce this prohibition, all houses of worship and business premises would be closed, except for supermarkets, public markets, grocery stores and convenience stores selling everyday necessities. Specifically for Muslims, the adjournment of all religious activities in mosques including Friday prayers would be in line with the decision made by the Special Muzakarah Meeting of the National Council for Islamic Affairs;

Sanctions covering all Malaysians travelling abroad. For those who have just returned from overseas, they would be required to undergo a health check and a 14-day quarantine (or self-quarantine);

Restrictions on the entry of all tourists and foreign visitors into the country;

Closure of all kindergartens, government and private schools including daily schools, boarding schools, international schools, tahfiz centres and another primary, secondary and pre-university institutions;

Closure of all public and private higher education institutions (IPTs) and skills training institutes nationwide;

Closure of all government and private premises except those involved in essential services (water, electricity, energy, telecommunications, postal, transportation, irrigation, oil, gas, fuel, lubricants, broadcasting, finance, banking, health, pharmacy, fire, prison, port, airport, safety, defense, cleaning, retail and food supply).

Virtual Learning

The Covid 19 pandemic had turned the overall learning methods in Malaysia from the normal class room teaching to the vast usage of technology-based through websites, learning portals, video conferencing, YouTube, mobile apps, and thousand types of free available websites for blended learning tools. Most of the higher education universities are providing online courses for their students within and off campuses.

In Malaysia, the Government is providing many resources to higher education. Based on the news reports, the Malaysian universities, colleges, polytechnics are using Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).^{xxv} The virtual learning does not only affect the higher learning institution but also the primary and secondary schools all over Malaysia. This had caused many school children and the parents facing a lot of learning problems. One of the biggest sat back was poor internet connection often disrupted the learning process and resulted in students losing interest to follow the lessons. The students start to lose the momentum when the video keeps lagging while the teacher speaks, especially when they try to follow the step-to-step working for calculation subjects.^{xxvi} As a result, *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (Malaysian Certificate of Education)^{xxvii} and *Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia* (Malaysian Higher School Certificate)^{xxviii} which was normally scheduled in November 2020 was postponed to March 2021.^{xxix}

Work-From-Home (WFH) Policy

As the conditional movement control order (CMCO) continues to be enforced across Malaysia, the government has directed that only 10% of senior staff from the finance, administration, legal and IT departments in a company are allowed to work in their offices from 10am to 2pm for a maximum of three days a week. In laying out the new WFH directive, Malaysia's Human Resources Minister (Datuk Seri M Saravanan) said that employers in the country must pay the

full salary of their employees who work remotely, and not force workers to use their annual leave or unpaid leave.^{xxx} To curb the spread of covid 19- and the increase of new covid 19 cases, the Malaysia government introduce a stricter movement control order (MCO) 3.0 beginning May 25 2021.^{xxxi} The Senior Minister (Security) said that the government has decided that 80% of government staff and 40% of the private sector will work from home as one of the strategies to flatten the Covid-19 curve. Eighty per cent (80%) civil servants involving 750,000 government staff and about 6.1 million private sector workers to work from home.^{xxxii}

No-Social-Activities Policy

To curb the spread of Covid 19 and to flatten the curve of new cases the Malaysian government had imposed several other social policies. Among others, the No-Dine-In Policy, requires all restaurants and hawker stalls to operate for take away basis only.^{xxxiii}

Social activities involving mass gatherings such as weddings, conferences, religious parades including Thaipusam, meetings, seminars, courses and group sports are not allowed during the Movement Control Order (MCO) period.^{xxxiv}

Interstate travel across the nation is also barred during the MCO, while for states under MCO, inter-district crossings is not be allowed.

For states under MCO, movement will be restricted to a 10-kilometre radius, while only two household members will be allowed in the same car while out shopping for essentials. Family gathering is not allowed during the *Eidul Fitri* celebration, Christmas, Deepavali, Chinese New Year. A child cannot even visit their own parents. Some have not visited and seen their parents for more than two years since the covid 19 pandemic hit Malaysia.^{xxxv}

House of Worship Policy

The Movement Control Order (MCO) does not only limit the normal daily activities but also religious activity such as congregational prayer at the mosque. During this period only will six people (mosque committee) are allowed to perform congregational prayer. In line with the

implementation of the full movement control order (MCO), religious authorities in several states have issued the standard operating procedures (SOPs) for congregational Friday and daily obligatory prayers at mosques and surau. The SOPs issued allow only a very limited number of congregants, while other religious activities are temporarily suspended. For the Federal Territories of Kuala Lumpur, Putrajaya and Labuan, Federal Territories Islamic Religious Department (Jawi) for example, Friday and daily obligatory prayers are allowed at mosques and Friday surau, with only 12 congregants and a gap of 1.5 meters between individuals.^{xxxvi}

Domestic Violence

The Covid-19 crisis can result in frustration, stress and risk factors for domestic violence. Accumulation of stressful events such as job lose coupled with inadequate socioeconomic support due to MCO, confined space, too many people sharing limited space may also increase the risk for domestic violence. During the first MCO, it was reported that there were fourfold increases in domestic violence reporting, through the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development's Talian Kasih, as well as the various hotlines of women's NGOs like Women's Aid Organisation (WAO), AWAM, Women's Centre for Change Penang, Sabah Women's Action-Resource Group and Sarawak Women.^{xxxvii} A total of 1,986 domestic violence cases reported during MCO period, March 18 2020 to Aug 20 2020^{xxxviii}. Women's Centre for Change (WCC) programme director Karen Lai Yu Lee said domestic violence was on the rise during the pandemic due to mounting economic, social and psychological pressure on families and communities.^{xxxix}

Suicide cases

The economic impact of the Covid-19 and movement control order (MCO) has been hitting the public harder as many who had lost their jobs, and are still unable to find new ones. Aside from that, businesses are also scaling down, and are unable to employ more workers. This causes financial distress, mental distress, anxiety, and depression among many people. Many who were initially in the middle 40% (M40) income group have slipped into the bottom 40% (B40)

category, where more than 600,000 households were affected by the health crisis, according to the Economic Action Council (EAC) secretariat. With the ongoing financial distress and family issues arising from long isolation, it would also eventually lead more Malaysians to end their life by hanging, poisoning with pesticides, jumping off a tall building or poisoning by car exhaust gas. Such a phenomenon was already reflected during the first two movement control order (MCOs) in 2020. A total of 266 people committed suicide from Mar 18 to Oct 31 2020, whereby a quarter (25%) of the cases were associated with debts, followed by family problems (24%) and marriage problems (23%).^{xi} From 2019 until May 2021, a total of 281 men and 1,427 women had committed suicide in the country. Of those people who committed suicide, 872 were aged between 15 and 18, while 668 victims were aged between 19 and 40. It was revealed that three main factors for suicide cases are family problems, depression and financial troubles.^{xli}

NO	Year	No of cases	Male (%)	Female (%)	Reasons
1	2019-May 2020	1,708	281 (16.5%)	1,427 (83.5%)	i. troubled family relationships; ii. emotional pressure; iii. financial constraints,

Figure 4: No suicide cases from the year 2019 to May 2020^{xlii}

Job loses

Malaysia's economy has been adversely affected by COVID-19. Many workers and businesses have been impacted by the mobility restrictions, although employment and broad economic conditions appear to be gradually improving. Several months of mobility restrictions and business closures have severely impacted Malaysia's economy, resulting in a 17.1 percent year-on-year drop in GDP in the second quarter of 2020.^{xliii} The unemployment rate increased from 3.3 percent in January 2020 to 5.3 percent in May 2020, before decreasing to 4.7 percent in August 2020.^{xliv} A survey conducted by EMIR Research Sdn Bhd^{xlv} involving 2,096 respondents revealed that job or employment loss appears to be Malaysians' top worry as the unprecedented Covid-19-led economic crisis has taken a toll on everyone across the nation.^{xlvi} According to unofficial government statistics, some private sector employees have lost their

jobs, while close to half of self-employed respondents lost their jobs and more than two-thirds of them have savings for only less than a month. The rate of job displacement was been particularly high in the agriculture sector, which employs a large share of workers from the bottom 40 percent of the income distribution (B40).^{xlvi}The five sectors of the economy with the largest employment and are also the most susceptible to the Covid-19 crisis are travel and tourism, wholesale and retail, construction, manufacturing, and agriculture.^{xlvi}

CONCLUSION

No one would have ever thought that in the 21st century, during the flourishing of economy, modern digital era, advancement of technology, moving towards a modern life, that the Covid 19 crisis can result in frustration, stress, risk factors for domestic violence, job lose, limited income and resources. The life of many people in every level of the society including younger children had faced several challenges, in which one way or another required immediate adjustment in life. To some people, their life is becoming more disastrous than it was before as people are losing their jobs, loss of house hold income, having social imbalance which resulted into depression, anxiety disorder, marriage down fall, domestic violence, and increase of suicide cases. Above all, people are disconnecting from each other in real life situation in such that one cannot visit even for the closed family members.

As for the school children and young adult learners, the Covid-19 significantly affects their daily routine by adjusting to online learning without the adequate facilities needed. Some poor families for instance, cannot afford to buy a smart phone which is required for online distance learning (ODL) and what more in buying other gadgets for their children. On top of that, they too could not afford to buy the household basic needs as they are losing a lot of money due to the pandemic.

Lastly, the Covid-19 also strike a new trend in our community which rarely happened throughout the years in Malaysia and that is, suicide. Since the first movement control order started in March 2020 to the third movement control in 2021, the number of suicidal cases had risen to a drastic level.

ENDNOTES

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- ^{iv} Loh, Ivan (2020). "Wuhan virus: Eight in isolation in JB after coming into contact with Singapore victim". The Star.
- ^v Devi, Venesa (2020). "Wuhan virus: Chinese toddler, parents who dodged quarantine in Johor detained". The Star.
- ^{vi} New Straits Times, (2020). "[Breaking] 3 coronavirus cases confirmed in Johor Baru. See also Borneo Post, (2020), "First coronavirus cases in Malaysia: 3 Chinese nationals confirmed infected, quarantined in Sungai Buloh Hospital". The Malaysian public were reminded by local authorities to take precautionary measures in the wake of the virus threat with those travelling to China have been advised to stay away from animal farms and markets in the country and to not eat raw or semi-cooked meats.[6] Following several earlier suspected cases in Sabah's capital of Kota Kinabalu, all direct flights between the state with China were stopped indefinitely.
- ^{vii} Refer note 6,(2020) "Malaysia reports fourth confirmed case of Wuhan virus".
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- ^{xviii} Between 27 February and 1 March 2020, the Tablighi Jamaat movement organised an international conference at the "Masjid Jamek Sri Petaling" in Sri Petaling, Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia. The religious gathering was attended by approximately 16,000 attendees (only 12,500 attendees as claimed by the Sri Petaling tabligh group leaders) including about 1,500 from outside Malaysia. Attendees were found to share food, sit close together, and hold hands at the event. According to guests, the leaders of the event did not talk about COVID-19 precautions, but most attendees washed their hands during the event. Malaysian authorities were criticised for allowing the event to go forward.
- ^{xix} Malaysian health authorities from 11 March began tracking around 5,000 Malaysian citizens who were suspected of being exposed to COVID-19 during the Sri Petaling *Tablighi Jamaat* gathering. Many of the infected had returned to their respective states and communities, which had led to a surge in community transmissions throughout Malaysia. See also Barker, Anne (2020). "Coronavirus COVID-19 cases spiked across Asia after a mass gathering in Malaysia. This is how it caught the countries by surprise", Latiff, Rozanna (2020), Aravindan, Aradhana; Bandial, Ain; Birsal, Robert; The new Straits Times, (2020), "Twelve coronavirus cases linked to Malaysian Islamic conference", "Malaysia confirms first sporadic case of coronavirus, indicating community spread".
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- ^{xxiii} The Malaysian Government Movement Control Order (Malay: Perintah Kawalan Pergerakan Kerajaan Malaysia), commonly referred to as the MCO or PKP, is a cordon sanitaire implemented as a preventive measure by the federal government of Malaysia in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in the country on 18 March 2020. The order was commonly referred to in local and international media as a "lockdown" or "partial lockdown."
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- ^{xxvi} Dhesegaan Bala Krishnan, (2021), "Anxious SPM students want exams postponed", <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2021/01/659266/anxious-spm-students-want-exams-postponed>
- ^{xxvii} The Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM), or the Malaysian Certificate of Education, is a national examination taken by all fifth-form secondary school students in Malaysia. The SPM is equivalent to the British GCSE, and provides the opportunity for Malaysians to continue their studies to pre-university level.
- ^{xxviii} The Malaysian Higher School Certificate (Malay: Sijil Tinggi Persekolahan Malaysia), commonly abbreviated as STPM, is a pre-university examination in Malaysia. It was formerly known as the Higher School Certificate (HSC). Since 1982, STPM has been administered by the Malaysian Examinations Council (MEC), a statutory council under the Ministry of Education.
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