

Intervention by the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand
at the Special ASEAN Plus Three (APT) Summit on Coronavirus Disease 2019
(COVID-19)

Tuesday, 14 April 2020, at 14.00-16.00 hrs. PMOC Room, Thai Khu Fah
Building, via Video Conference

* * * * *

Sawasdee Krub,

Mr. Chair, Your Majesty, Your Excellencies,

Allow me, at the outset, to express my appreciation to His Excellency Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc and Viet Nam, as Chair of ASEAN, for your active role in convening this timely Meeting. I also wish to join all other ASEAN Leaders in welcoming the Leaders from the Plus Three countries and the Director-General of WHO as well as to commend the actions taken by your Excellencies to address the COVID-19 outbreak, which have clearly helped to flatten the curve for infections and fatalities in your countries. I also wish to express my gratitude to you for the cooperation rendered to ASEAN at this challenging time.

Today, we all agree that COVID-19 is the global crisis of the 21st century, which has severely impacted all parts of society. In terms of public health, almost 2 million cases of infection and over 100,000 deaths have been reported around the world. In Thailand, we have a total of 2,613 confirmed cases with 1,405 recovered patients and 41 fatalities. On the economic front, the Managing Director of the IMF has sent out a clear signal that this year's global economy has already entered into a recession.

Furthermore, this crisis has adversely affected people's way of life around the world. As for Thailand, the Government has issued several measures, regulations and recommendations, which include the Declaration of an Emergency Situation, the establishment of the Centre for COVID-19 Situation Administration, which is under my full authority, and implementation of "upstream, midstream and downstream" measures to tackle this pandemic. On upstream measures, we

have focused on travel controls and the screening of inbound passengers from outside at the airports and border checkpoints on land and by sea as well as natural border crossing, as part of our preventive and precautionary efforts. On midstream measures, the government has launched a “Stay Home, Stop the Disease, For the Nation” campaign, promoted social distancing, prepared state and local quarantine facilities for 14-day monitoring, used mobile applications to track and monitor quarantined individuals, closed high risk contagion areas, disseminated accurate information in a transparent manner, countered fake news and promoted community engagement through the work of more than one million village-level public health volunteers who have provided advice and assistance directly to every single household as well as the participation of other volunteers. We have also suspended the celebration of the Thai New Year or Songkran Festival and religious gatherings. As for our downstream measures, which are also important measures, we are providing treatment for patients and relief support for those affected by the outbreak, including vulnerable groups and MSMEs. Thailand recently introduced the “We leave no one behind” scheme that allows certain groups of workers and those affected to register via an online platform for income compensation aid.

Nonetheless, the measures taken by each country alone will not enable us to overcome this challenge. Today’s Meeting is thus of paramount importance for us, as Leaders, to find ways for all of us to defeat the COVID-19 crisis today and come out stronger tomorrow. To realise these goals, I would like to propose three recommendations as follows:

First, ASEAN wishes to invite all of us here to support the establishment of the “COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund” by reprioritising the existing Cooperation Funds both in ASEAN and with our Plus Three partners to ensure the provision of test kits, personal protective gear and medical equipment, which are still in serious shortage in our countries, for doctors, nurses and medical personnel who are the real heroes in the fight against this pandemic. The Fund will also be used for the

research and development of medicines and vaccines to fortify ASEAN's immunity for a quick recovery and ensure greater resilience and self-reliance in future crises. In this regard, may I suggest the ASEAN Secretariat to work with the ASEAN Health Cooperation Framework on this matter.

Second is to optimise the ASEAN Plus Three mechanism for maximum effectiveness. This cooperation framework has long rendered invaluable contribution to addressing and responding to many crises in the past, such as the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis and the SARS outbreak in 2003. Thus, I wish to propose that the existing APT health cooperation framework be fully harnessed, together with Big Data and information technology to support research and innovation such as telemedicine, home health checkup devices and geotracking of patients on phones. All of these are for the prevention and suppression of COVID-19, among other things. In this regard, the ASEAN Secretariat should work with the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat or TCS to compile and exchange information on national policies and measures undertaken by each country in order to provide recommendations for possible further cooperation between ASEAN Member States and the Plus Three countries. We should also support utilisation of the Chiang Mai Initiative Multilateralisation or CMIM to enhance regional financial stability, if needed.

Third, digital technology is a vital tool for us in fighting this crisis and building a stronger future. We therefore should enhance digital literacy and the application of digital technology in areas such as education, communication, trade and investment. We should leverage the digital economy, new technologies and e-commerce to help businesses, especially MSMEs, handle negative impacts or any future challenges. Furthermore, we should enhance cooperation to minimise the harmful effects of fake news, which has generated unnecessary panic among the public.

Your Majesty, Excellencies,

The path towards victory against COVID-19 may still be long and hard. Cohesive

partnership is therefore of the utmost necessity. Let us jointly reaffirm our commitment to assuring our people that multilateral trade will still be open and robust; global supply chains will continue to flow smoothly; our business sector will be resilient and make a quick recovery; and, most importantly, the treatment and protection of our people in this region will be comprehensive and equitable. In addition, we should turn this crisis into an opportunity by learning the right lessons and looking to the future to foster preparedness for any future challenges, including climate change, natural disasters, emerging diseases or even economic, social and digital challenges. Here, we should seek to apply the concept of the sustainable development in all dimensions be applied in accordance with the context of each country. Here in Thailand, we have been promoting the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy (SEP) as our home-grown approach in strengthening our national resilience and tackle future challenges.

Lastly, I wish to reaffirm that Thailand will spare no effort in joining hands with the ASEAN Plus Three countries. I wish to thank the ASEAN Plus Three countries for their various kinds of assistance and cooperation rendered to Thailand and ASEAN throughout the past three months. This will help us recover with resilience and move forward together with vigour and confidence as well as continue to remain a significant driving force of the global economy and society.

Together, we will overcome this crisis. Thank you.