

Managing Covid-19 in an Era of Information Communication Technology: The Malaysia Experience

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Abstract

This article looks at the structural and non-structural management elements as applied by the Malaysia State in handling and managing the threat posed by unseen enemies, the Covid-19 virus. This research utilizes non-participants' observations, and it argues that the joint and symbiosis efforts between state and society are vital in ensuring the state objectives to overcome the "attack" of the pandemic. The data shows that since the Covid-19 hit the nations, the matter has contributed to panic among many segments of society due to low socio-political literacy. This situation has created two opposite situational for the state to handle during the crisis. First, the crisis itself, and second, contain the virality of the false and unofficial news across society. Thus, this article concludes to deal with a crisis in a constructive manner, every country segment needs to be mutually symbiosis in their actions and behaviors, particularly their literacy level. The increasing use and exploration of information technologies have created a new way of human interaction, and above all has challenged and posed a new threat towards the concept of "privacy" and "security" within the larger context of integrity and socio-political stability of the Malaysian nation.

Keywords: Managing Covid-19, Information Communication Technology, State and Society, Security, Malaysia.

Introduction

Terms such as cyber power, the internet, virtual space, and information communication technology (ICT) have, in many cases, dominated the lives and social systems of the world to date. The political system of a society is also no exception from the dominance and influence of these terms especially ICT. For example, in the context of a democratic system, the

dissemination of information has form as an important element or a fundamental condition for the healthy development of democratic polity and values to be flourished within such democratic society. Hence, the definition of democracy would be incomplete without the freedom of information, the elements of transparency, the freedom of the press and other media as well as various issues related to the basics of information such as level of literacy within society, better access to the education and systematic improved of IT infrastructure (Zaini, 2020:16).

Thus, this has made the mosaic of community in managing their daily activities becoming more dependent on ICT than ever before. Half a century ago, these phenomena was something that had never been anticipated; except to specific individuals, groups who have direct links to the science of fiction. One of the most obvious things in the context of these developments is the emergence of a new form of power called as cyber power; which in many cases has a strong influence and dominance on the development of a state societal and public system, particularly on the aspect of security. The unprecedented reliance on computer systems and information technology has brought a new form of threat to the well-being of nations, especially in terms of political stability. For example, cyber threats or cyber warfare launched by one country over another; similar threats may be faced by specific individuals or groups in one country against particular parties located in another country; carried out on specific motives or with specific agendas and purposes through a network of computer systems. (Zaini, 2020; Auerbach et al., 2000).

Ontologically, this article analyzes the Malaysian government performance and ability in managing the C19 in an era of Information Communication Technology (ICT). At the outset, Malaysia is part of the ASEAN members, in which her economic developments in the region (Southeast Asia) have progressively been influenced by the global spread of the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic since March 2020. The Covid-19 pandemic has reached Malaysia compound simultaneously with other nations in the region (Asia) such as Philippines, Indonesia, Japan, Thailand, Singapore, India, Sri Lanka, Mynmar, and Pakistan compared to Latin America countries who experienced some delayed arrival of the said virus (WHO, 2020). From the national economic standpoint, the pandemic affects the country through various channels, such as trade, commodities, tourism, and financial and domestic demand channels. The national containment measures, the pandemic's impact on the population, the global nature of the shock, and the differential effects on the country, seeing many economic experts and forecaster revise the nation's GDP outlook for the year 2020 downwards. As all are noticed, especially the economic players, ever since the pandemic arrived unto the nation shore, the Malaysia government have responded through monetary and fiscal policies in order not to only stabilized the nation economy, but more important, politically, create an atmosphere of secured and confident among the various level of society towards the newly installed Malaysia government and leadership. Against this background, this article has three main objectives. First, to look into the effectiveness of the structural measures as imposed by the *Perikatan Nasional*¹ (PN) government in curbing the pandemic towards Malaysia's

¹ *Perikatan Nasional* (PN) is a political coalition composed of the Malaysian United Indigenous Party (PPBM), Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), , Sabah Progressive Party (SAPP), Homeland Solidarity Party (STAR, Sabah), Parti Gerakan Rakyat Malaysia (Gerakan), and supported by

economic development. Second, gauging on the societal responses towards many layers of structural orders put in place by PN government in combating and controlling the pandemic's spread. The third, descriptive analysis of inter-paly relations between government pandemic measurements and society literacy level on the pandemic.

State, Covid-19 Pandemic and Economic Development: The Statement of Problems

From economy points of views, Malaysia economic developments have been progressively influenced since the start of the year 2020, without doubt by the global spread of the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic. Generally, the Malaysian economy at the beginning of the year 2020 was related and connected with a multi-layer backdrop of weakness and showed mixed indicators. On the one hand, some hope of positive signs originated or derived from the embryonic global recovery, which in many occasions linked to the so-called "*trade seize fire*" between the United States and China, especially in the periods of 2019. However, this "*short honeymoon*" progressively worsened markedly from late January due to the sudden abrupt of the Covid-19 virus in China and the blunt impact it has produced on the state of health in China's neighboring regions (Barcena, 2020). The spread of the pandemic to Malaysia and the neighboring countries beginning from late February has entailed a drastic downturn in the nation's economic growth. To contain the expansion of the epidemic, the Malaysia authorities, through *Majlis Keselamatan Negara* (National Security Council @ MKN), beginning from early March 2020 until August 30th, 2020, adopted extraordinary measures restricting people's movements and closing down a substantial portion of productive activity (The Star, 1.9.2020).

As briefly mentioned earlier, the COVID-19 outbreak started in Malaysia barely on February 26th, when the first case confirmed in the capital city of Kuala Lumpur than followed by many other imported cases that started appearing in another part of the countries in the subsequent weeks. Since then, there have been at least between 1000-2000 confirmed cases and 80 deaths (MKN, 2020). Compared to the number of cases in neighboring countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines, and Singapore, the Malaysia Covid-19 outbreak is significantly lower (MKN, 2020). Nevertheless, the PN government, without taking any complacency, has reacted rather constructively and preventatively, placing an array of measures to protect the citizens across the country and at the same time contain the virus from the spread. These swift and quick deterrence efforts deployed by the PN government were for many reasons due to the many particular regional challenges that Malaysia has to deal with, for example, less expansive and sophisticated healthcare systems and social safety nets.

Most first cases in the country were trace over late February and early March, in which the majority of the confirmed cases were linked to travelers (Malaysian) returning or coming from abroad such as Europe, Asia, or the United States. In response, most states throughout the federation closed all of their borders, and it is only open for the returning citizens and residents of the respective states (MKN, 2020). These measures were strictly imposed during the entire deployment of Movement Control Order (MCO) as per-announced by the Prime Minister following MKN's advice, beginning from March 2020 until the end of August 2020 (Harian, 2020). This measure includes movements between states; only those with special

The United Malay National Organisation (UMNO), Sarawak Parties Alliance (GPS) and Independent.

permission on special case reasons were allowed to travel between states. Also, all states within the federation have implemented measures to close public spaces and limit social gatherings, including particular order to prohibit any form of social movements after 10 pm, such as curfews or quarantine orders to "Stay at Home" or "*Kita Jaga Kita* or We Take Care of Our Selves" slogan. Regardless of all efforts, the number of confirmed cases is rising in all states (The Star, 2020). Apart from the health risks, without a doubt, the rampant onslaught of the Covid-19 pandemic will also bring a significant socio-economic impact on Malaysia's economy in all segments of economic sectors that were already facing difficulties (MKN, 2020). As we all know, Malaysia economy is mainly dependent on the significant economic powerhouse such as China, United States (US), Japan, Europe, particularly market-wise, and the country will feel the crisis even more as the effects of the pandemic on the US, Japan, Europe economy increase (Belser, 2020).

Furthermore, in a perfect worst-case scenario or a situation in which famous always referred to as "*adding salt into the injury*," dropping oil, metal, and the price of agricultural commodities such as Oil Palm and Cocoa, have directly caused in plunging Malaysia markets and currencies (Bonaglia & Parra, 2020). Besides that, problematic economic situation, the countries' tourism sectors, particularly in the State of Sabah and Sarawak, have suffered much, bringing the entire related sectors of tourism such hotel, resorts, into the state of total stagnant. Since then, external and, let alone the domestic conditions, have worsened, and through a combination of different channels, the Malaysia state, be it in economic, political, and social, will contract in 2020; the magnitude of this effect will depend on the depth and length of COVID-19.

Like many other developing countries, the health and economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic are very significant, and Malaysia, without exception, faces an additional set of challenges. As the more Malaysia State, *vis-a-vis*, its policymakers want to curb and curtail the virus, they find it more challenging as the state needs to lock down the country. Thus they need more fiscal space to facilitate the state efforts to mitigate the deeper recession that will occur. Nevertheless, just like many other developing countries, Malaysia lacks fiscal space even in the best of times. Concerning this uncertain socio-economic situational environment resulting from the pandemic, the economy, and society's formal and informal faces are heading towards exacerbating inequalities and social discontent (MTEN, 2020).

From the above discussion, the era of ICT, any "*unexpected*" crisis, if not constructively handle and manage, would badly be damaging not only the countries' economies but also tearing down the social fabric of the nations in a manner that would cause another set or form of crisis that will endanger the socio-political stability of a government. Furthermore, at this juncture, Malaysia is experiencing such a latitude that she desperately needs to avoid. As illustrated, the said problems are the central concern that this article is trying to explore and addressed.

Data Collecting Method

Conceptually, this article is a study on government action and orientation and societal responses towards government fiscal policy in a time of crisis, *vis-a-vis*, Covid-19 pandemic, with a particular focus on aspects of state and community survival and reciprocal relationships on aspects of survivability. In doing so, all aspects of the study will be

qualitatively analyzed. Thus, this article will comprehensively provide what is referred to as providing an analytical discussion on the questions of state actions, society, and the role of Malaysia government in managing out the said crisis (Hilley, 2001: 23).

Thus, in that context, this article does not present specific hypotheses as a guideline in every analysis counted; in fact, the analysis is done based on the research problems raised at the beginning of the article's discussion. In this regard, these articles rely heavily on the secondary resources available such as government printed reports and government daily conference reports. Apart from that, to accommodate the lacuna of information that cannot be collected through secondary sources, interviews will be conducted with authoritative respondents in this writing context. As Marshall and Rossman (1989) argue:

Interviews are a useful way to assemble large amounts of data quickly, and if necessary, they allow for immediate follow-up questions...thus an interview seemed to be the better line of approach because it would free the interviewer from the prospective burdens of a detailed questionnaire, and help create more relaxing setting for discussing their experiences and problems.

The information obtained through the interviews will also be cross-examined with secondary resources as per-collected and observes. Information collected through interviews and secondary resources were analyzed using specific themes in parsing the research problems presented. In this way, the researcher hopes to produce a balanced study analysis between the abstract and empirical aspects.

State Responses on Covid-19: The Overview

Like any other countries in the region and across the continent in general, the newly installed PN government of Malaysia, led by Muhyiddin Yassin, was quickly put into action to curtail the rapid-spread of Covid-19 across the country. The PN government's first structural move was the primary directive to put MKN into its "war-room" as a leading national institution to lead the A-Z matters concerning Covid-19. The national Health Director has been entrusted to mobilize and galvanize on the matter, particularly in updating the latest situation of the Covid-19 in the country, especially its socio impact on society. The most immediate measure implemented, as per-advised the MKN, was the closing down of the national border, vis-a-vis, air space, land, and water, from any foreign entries. However, the rule does not apply to the Malaysian nationals staying abroad who decide to return home and the foreign diplomats, ministers, or head of state on official work capacity (MKN, 2020).

Besides, all states within the federation have implemented measures to close public spaces and limit social gatherings; Sabah and Sarawak (located on the Island of Borneo) have taken further stringent measures by prohibited and limited the public gathering and activities not later than 1800 hundred hours a day, starting from 6.00 am. On top of that, the two respective states have made it compulsory for the *non-state residents* to undergo health screening process via online form set-up by the State Health Authority Department (SHAD), to those who have passed the screening process will only be allowed to enter the states and this must be done not later than twelve hours before taken the journey or travel to the said states (SHAD, 2020). The measurements and the MCO order have to put more than 80 percent of the Malaysia population under the rule of similar to national curfew during the

Emergency Rule Order 1948 & 1964, or popularly known as "stay at home" or "take shelter at home" (MKN, 2020). There have also been various coordination efforts among government apparatus within and across the states. For example, under the MKN umbrella coordination order, they have created a so-called "MKN Messages Forum," in which under such particular forum, MKN will do the daily update to the public on the State of Covid19 development. In doing so, the forum will act as a medium of interaction between public and authority; rather, it will dismiss and overcome any sorts of false news pertaining to Covid19 that might confuse and trigger an unhealthy atmosphere among the public at large. In other words, the forum is the sole authoritative news to which the public has been directed to subscribe (MKN, 2020).

The data concerning the movements and whereabouts of the citizens, MKN, through the Ministry of Sciences and Technology (MST), has created an application named "My Sejahtera." The said application, via *Scan Code System (SCS)*, is made compulsory for all business operators to be installed, and all citizens are *de-rigueur* to scan the "My Sejahtera" at any time of their whereabouts. Besides that, all the relevant parties (business outlets in particular) is also made mandatory to provide the like of "attendance book," for the guest or customer to register their details, and in any event concerning COVID-19 related matters; it will be easy for the authority to trace them in return (MOSTI, 2020).

Meanwhile, growing numbers of patients, coupled with specific inadequate protective equipment for health workers and limited facilities to provide intensive care, have caused fears and much concern of a contagion in the country that would be adamant about controlling. In general, Malaysia's healthcare systems have significantly adequate capacity than the average of the majority of developing countries, with more than the satisfying level of health expenditures, a soft, manageable hospital beds and health professionals in the ratio of 1000 patients, and workable disease surveillance systems than any other developing countries around the world. For example, in comparison with a country such as Mexico, Indonesia, Philippines, Costa Rica, Colombia, and Chile, at most at 2.1 beds per 1000 people, whereas the developing countries average according to the World Health Organisation (WHO) standard must be 4.7 beds per 1000 people (WHO, 2020). In other words, as far as Malaysia's health system is concerned, the capacity to face-off with the Covid19 crisis is far better than any other developing country, as mentioned. Nevertheless, that will not make Malaysia complacent; any form of over-confidence will jeopardize the nation's entire socio-political and economic well-being. The United States (USA) is the case to be learned; a country recognized for its advancement in all aspects of human life, has been made paid for their government underestimated behavior towards the impact and magnitude that Covid-19 have, and at present in the state of total health chaos as far as Covid19 management and controlling system is concerned (Fox News, 2020).

On a more serious note, and evidence, it is crystal clear and very glaring that the Covid-19 pandemic harshly shows the inequalities in access to health services in some parts of the country and individual segments of the society. In a country where some quarter million people still lack access to even essential health services and more than 15 percent of the population still lacks access to social security, thus cause a fundamental challenge for the government to climb in ensuring all citizens are safe from the virus threat (MKN, 2020). Lack of strong universal health awareness leaves many citizens under the categories of

"unprotected" and "ignored" in the vulnerable state group. If left unchecked, this vulnerable group can become an "enemy within enemy" to imperil the government efforts to curb the virus in the later stage. Those who have good health coverage, live in well-connected and informed areas, access health services as needed, and receive a salary will be moderately easier to handle and technically will not create many problems. Nonetheless, it will be a different scenario as far as the bottom society chain is concerned. For example, in Sabah, it has been a public secret fact that the state at present hosting more than 1 million undocumented (including the *Bajau Laut* or *Sea Gypsy community*) as well as illegal peoples; a majority of them without adequate health coverage, particularly those working in the informal sector such as indoor plantation; those living in remote or underserved areas, can contribute catastrophic consequences, both on their health and their surroundings (Komrad, 2020).

To not repeat or follow the same mistake as what USA has done, the Malaysia government have been undertaking measures to boost the capacity of the state healthcare systems to cope with this crisis and improve access for all citizens. The said measures divided into two main categories, namely, (1) National Immediate Initiative; (2) National Long-Term Plan, by the Malaysia government (MKN, 2020) are as follows:

(1) National Immediate Initiative

- announced on March 18th what would be the National Economic Stimulus Packages of 10 billion Malaysia Ringgit. The stimulus package, in general, is meant for helping the bottom and medium level community in assisting their financial trail in coping with the stagnant economic cause by the Covid-19 crisis; building an emergency temporary hospital and health facilities to combat the virus and cope with unexpected rises of Covid-19 patients. The case of temporary Medan Hospital in Tawau Sabah and health quarantine facilities of MAHA in Serdang Selangor falls under these categories;
- opened 5,000 contract vacancies for doctors and nurses through the National Health Immediate program; and the official announcement of the setting-up of 2,000 new ICU beds while also approving the inclusion of the COVID-19 test an obligatory procedure for all suspected. Furthermore, on March 20th, the Malaysia government agreed to dedicate at least RM 1 billion of a particular extra budget to the Health Ministry to help and assists the ministry in its battle to the virus; and on top of that, around RM185 million will be allocated to each state and all municipalities throughout the country to cover extended hours in public health facilities, distributed according to state population;
- established a maximum cost of RM300 for the COVID-19 test in private healthcare facilities, while for emergency and immediate case, the test will be made chargeable to all. Announced the virtual deployment of about 2,500 mental health professionals on March 24th to support national quarantine "stay at home" and "Kita Jaga Kita" measures;
- put in place price regulations for all necessary goods such as rice, milk, liquid disinfectants, spray disinfectants, including all household relevant materials. On April 7th, all formal laborers (and their dependents) whose work has been disrupted by the crisis would continue to be enrolled and will not be terminated for the period throughout the effective MCO. Apart from that, Covid-19 tests free of charge for students with symptoms. The government has also announced that it was purchasing 1.4 million coronavirus quick test kits from China and Japan. To boost and speed the recovery treatment for Covid-19 patients, the government temporarily has suspended all non-essential surgeries and hospital visits to

create greater hospital capacity. The government has also launched a mobile application to situate cases in the country and a website. On March 28th, the MKN announced measures to stop the rise of domestic violence cases during the quarantine, including an awareness campaign on social and mainstream media (MKN, 2020).

(2) National Long Term-Plan

- Enlargement the capacity for extensive testing to the maximum possible level, thus ensuring the availability of drugs, specifically during the patients' admission to intensive care unit, and provision of medical attention regardless of patient's financial capacity;
- Strengthen the supply process of personal security equipment and tools such as masks, particularly for the immediate use of health workers; including the most needed, vis-a-vis, ICU beds and respirators;
- Mobilising all health professionals personal, including those medical and nursing students in their last year of study, pharmacists and other care workers, which within the assessments of Health Ministry in underutilized to be transported to lend their energy and knowledge to the most needed area of the country such Sabah, Selangor, and Sarawak. The big plan is to develop laboratory and professional capacities for treating infected people while tracing their close reach out and contacts;
- and, it was voiced that to isolate those with infected cases structurally, the government will deploy a measure to uplifted infrastructure and capacity on the area relating to quarantine matters. The said measure was informed will cover and protect the victim's family by ensuring their state of well-being and making necessary arrangements for all types of assistance such as accommodation, family care, psychological and financial support, or what is popularly known as a *moratorium*.

Thus far, the crisis has forced Malaysia to revise public spending and annual budget, especially for the health sector and household survival. Malaysia policies and its measurements to manage and curb the onslaught of Covid-19 is among the best known in the region and received professional salutation and recognition by WHO. While Malaysia's authority received big-clap from the international communities, would she receive the same positive applaud from the Malaysian public? What is the State of Malaysia society's response towards all forms of structural measurements in place by the Malaysian authority? If the response from the Malaysian public is paradoxes and antagonists, why it be such a case? Those are among the fundamental questions that this article wanted to examine in the next section.

The Social Dimension of the Covid-19 Crisis in Malaysia

On March 31st, 2020, the Malaysia Director-General, Noor Hisham Abdullah, made a somewhat professional cautious statement that stated that the Covid-19 pandemic would be harshly hit and cause more brutal consequences to the emerging nation such as Malaysia. Due to that forecast, he strongly suggested that the governments put social policies to sociologically and structurally shield their most vulnerable citizens and populations to ensure that they can comply with public health recommendations (Harian, 2020).

Looking at the State of Malaysia economy for the past decades, particularly in the year between 2010-2108, it is understandable why such a statement antiquated from the most crucial person in Malaysia at the moment. For the past decades, the Malaysian economy barely manages to expand beyond 3 percent a year. The structural squeeze of Malaysia's

economy has affected many segments of the employment sector within the country. In 2017, one of the Malaysian MP from the government backbenchers (Members of Parliament) has suggested that the Malaysian embark into duo jobs to cope with the increasing costs of living. The suggestion has received lots of critics and public anger as well as cynical gestures. At the outset, the suggestion reflects and manifests the problematic image of Malaysia's economy of late. The arrival of Covid-19 was totally beyond the imagery of Malaysia's economic experts. The economic repercussion brought by Covid-19 has wholly put into test the economic knowledge and intellectual capacity of the *Majlis Tindakan Ekonomi Negara* (National Economy Action Council or MTEN), as the economic impact created by Covid-19 is holistically different, unusual and never exist in history of Malaysia economic development before (MTEN, 2020).

As classical Marxist theorists once suggest, the state of stability within a society or nation to be maintained is absolutely depending on the country's economic production to produce and provide surplus from the scarcity sources for the peoples' consumption at all times. In other words, if the government or the state failed to provide or maintain such a socio-economic situation, it is no surprise to see the state will receive antagonist political reactionists from the public at large. Historically, for the past six decades, Malaysia's success story's socio-economic development is very much driven or centered on the concept of "*state-led modernization and development*" (Rahman, 2002). Fear for any form of public discontent and disappointment, and given to the real political reality within PN government, vis-a-vis, solidarity and elites internal tussle, without any option left, the PN government faces the following set of social challenges alongside and in conjunction with their policy responses to this crisis:

1. *Societal Safety Nets*: Malaysia, with 30-40 percent informality rates, face particular challenges: 1) many baskets of Malaysia's economy, particularly in the informal and low skilled sectors and workers, will face reduced hours and job loss due to the pandemic. Job loss means loss of income, no assurance of receiving unemployment benefits; 2) most informal workers generally have zero access to official social safety net system; and 3) jobs criteria implies the concept of "*no work and no income*," causing a psychological breakdown which means a security dilemma of "*work or lose your income*." Without proper work-sheet account like workers in professional sectors; nature of work quite similar to a modern system of the subsistence economy, make a living on a daily survival basis; these particular segments of workers or economy group, without jobs in a time of national crisis, would definitely impeditment them into the vicious poverty circle or trap (MTEN, 2020).
2. *Citizens' Perceptions*: since battling COVID19 in March 2020, the Malaysian public has shown strong solidarity and mobilizing behind the PN government in confronting the COVID-pandemic. However, the opposite story image in other developing countries such as Indonesia, Peru, Brazil, Venezuela, Bolivia, just about a month ago, their countries experiencing a wave of mass protests originated from the deep social discontent, a frustrated socio-political image of an emerging "middle-class," and uncertain future at risk of their survival and unpromises government. Again, the said situation, if not carefully managed, would contribute towards more predicaments for

the governments. In another dimension, the crisis could exacerbate these problems (MKN, 2020).

3. *Inequality*: As the crisis prolongs without any specific end date stated, parallel with the majority of the nation around the globe still struggle to establish a viable vaccine; the size of the spread area of the pandemic has expanding unmeasurably, so do the crisis has deepened beyond what can be imagined by the lame-President of US, *vis-a-vis*, Donald Trump, and if left unguard, will give birth to another form and phase of human crisis which is the increase of scarcity and rivalry over raw resources. With that, there occurred what the public called an unequal social treatment of the pandemic involving the "VIP" versus "*Proletar*." The "VIP" often get acquitted or even if received punishment with a minimum amount of penalty; whereas the "*Proletar*" not only forced to obey and abide the pandemic rules, if found rift of pandemic rules and regulation, the punishment they (*proletariat*) received is severe without any discretion taking into account. This situation has made vulnerable groups feel stressed in abiding by all pandemic rules, as many of them are neither covered by health insurance nor unemployment benefits (SAWO, 2020).

As structurally discussed above, the social dimension of Covid-19 takes its high-toll for the government to handle when it comes to social media---*Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, telegram, WhatsGroup*---version of the pandemic. The social media is very much attached to what many describe today as an ICT era. ICT has profoundly impacted a country's political viability and security, especially in news dissemination. Before the end of the twentieth century, the government controls the freedom of speech in Malaysia. However, with ICT in place, it has accelerated many social activities, including space freedom. For example, the up-date version or the latest state of the pandemic in the country was made available and can be retrieved via many social media types or versions. To avoid leaving behind or being ignored by society, traditional media is also available in social media, such as *Awani YouTube News, RTM News, TV3 FB Live*, and many others. In order to improve the raising awareness of the cruel danger of Covid-19 among the society, the government, through programs broadcast on social media, has play-down several slogans such as "*Kita Jaga Kita*," "Stay at Home," "Flating The Curve" and "*Sayangi Diri Anda*." In the meantime, many types of private social media news also surface in corollary with the development of ICT, such as "*Benar News*," "*Kelantan Today's*," "*Malaysia Kini*," "*Malaysia Today's*," "*Malaysia Gazette*," "*Sarawak report*," "*Sabah News*," and many others (MKN, 2020).

Without a doubt, the internet has facilitated dissemination of information to various parties, including governments, political organizations, and individuals. Political parties, Non-Government Organisations, Local Community Groups, Activists have leveraged this ICT by building their website, sharing a wealth of information, and providing a wide range of interactions and views. Activists and the public can communicate with each other more quickly and efficiently. The use of IT had grown exponentially due to the MCO, in which the majority of citizens under the "*Stay at Home*" program glue more time with their family members to the social media, seeking and searching for updated news about the Covid-19 crisis. On a positive note, the MCO "*Stay at Home*" program has enlightened the citizen's entrepreneurial skills online on various forms of business capacity that improve and ease their financial burden. This skill can be seen and traced out with the emerging multi-layer

advertisement on social media like the citizens' online-business management. The classic case that receives nationwide attention is the middle-low-income couple, who run out of jobs due to Covid-19, assisting by her husband, has bravely uploaded and shared their cooking skills on the YouTube channel. The Mugu's couple has the couple popularly known, received a constructive number of subscribers and viewing about their version of the curry-based menu. The couple's success has attracted the prime minister's attention for their innovative efforts that handsomely paid off during nation times of pandemic crisis (Awani Portal News, 2020).

On another note, the ICT has also created virtual chaos, especially on the many facets of social strata concerning the PN government's ability to cope with the pandemic's growing challenge. Withstanding the PN government minority strength within Parliament, it was reported that there would be another change of guard event take place. Amid Sabah State Election 2020, on the September 18th, barely seven days before the Sabahan cast their vote, Anwar Ibrahim held a press conference that he has a 'strong, commendable majority support' from various MP to form a new government, thus would put an end to the minority PN government lead by Muhyiddin Yassin. The Anwar announcement has politically shock-up the entire nation and was received multiple responses from the public, including politicians alike. Some political pundits view the announcement as a political-strategic by the oppositions to sway away from the Sabahan votes towards the PN state alliance for the state election; others view it as a genuine political announcement by Anwar given the state of internal political turbulence among political elites in PN-BN (*Barisan Nasional*) (Daily Express, 2020).

With the advent of various web pages on the ICT, the news that Anwar will take over the nation's political perils and information disseminated concerning the matter has become a focal points news search by the public; seeking the multiple and viable explanation over the issue. Information obtained from web-maintainers on specific sites of mainstream social media station around Kuala Lumpur stated that for the period September 18th, 2020 until October 11th, 2020, the search for the news, for example, on the *Utusan Melayu* (The Malay Post) and *Daily News* websites have increased by 40 percent than standard times. The public is beginning to feel uneasy with the Anwar announcement. Public opinion polls based on 2978 respondents across Sabah, conducted online by *GeoPES* (Borneo Geo-Politics and Electoral Study Group of Universiti Malaysia Sabah), shown that 73 percent of the respondents disagreed with Anwar attempt to ousted the Muhyiddin led government (*GeoPES*, 2020). For example, news of the gathering and press conference held by Anwar Ibrahim was searched by tens of thousands of netizens. This development marks the citizens' truth towards seeking the facts and data nowadays, online or what popularly perceived as "internet of things" has become the prime mobile for today's generations in managing their lives. This can be viewed from the excerpts obtained from respondents interviewed:

"...it is a clear fact or what many labels as the new way of life..or perhaps in these periods of pandemic crisis, social media, internet of things have become more and more embedded in our life today's, peoples or netizens will get angry and caused rampant shout at the authority if the internet services went down or broke, and at the same time, peoples welcome ICT things as their valuable opportunity in participating within the system, and to the many ICT generations, internet or social media is part and parcel of their lives. In which ICT to them is the sphere of contestation, sphere of actions, and sphere of survival. Furthermore, this has

become very glaring during the Covid-19 crisis in our country at the moment. ICT to me, during this crisis, provide some elements of life balance with what citizens have lost due to the pandemic; the simplest social example is that, during MCO periods, ICT has truly acted as an alternative sphere in connecting family friends, love-one, brother and sister, mother and daughter..." (Zain, 2020).

For example, the *WhatsApp Groups* (WG) is the most popular version of ICT that was built in response to the Covid-19 crisis as an alternative medium not only to connect peoples in the form of family-ties or friends circles, instead, the emerging of many types of WG, but also create more generous space for anyone to survive and maintain their livelihood at the age of the pandemic. Moreover, WG is a non-structured entity even though it is very private and private, the news sharing from one WG to an otherwise transparent. These so-called "*bandwagon news or snowballing news*," created by WG, has emerged and stands as a prime source of facts among today's citizens. The news on Covid-19 across the country, for instance, is moving fast via WG medium compared to the traditional channel, in fact to a certain extend the news then went viral along WG trail, on many occasions, if not handled with wisdom, would lead to social-chaotic. In this light, it requires citizens' or netizens' level of literacy in dealing with the news circulating or viral along social media corridors. The case of the nature of the Covid-19 virus is one of the examples that citizens need to take into account. Along the corridors of social media trail, exist multiple news of the nature of the behavior of the said virus; one news came up with the version that the Covid-19 virus is *drop-let*; some news went viral that the virus is *floating*; other news mentioned that the virus is fast-accumulating and become immune once contacted with animals. Without proper scientific investigation or seeking professional information, it would contribute to societal anomie (MKN, 2020).

This finding has indirectly revealed that advanced information technology has given birth to a new form of power within Malaysian society's social life. This power, if treated without any wisdom would become a prime threat to the nation's survival and socio-political stability. It becomes more vital in a time of crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic. The super-diverse nation of Malaysia, will be struggling to deal with this new form of power, the State at this juncture (pandemic periods), requiring most citizens to alleviate knowledge and wisdom on ICT and its nature. Furthermore, this element is in line with the concept of power once conceived by German sociologist Max Weber who described the concept of power as:

In general, we understand by 'power' the chance of a man or of many men to realize their own will in action' (Weber, 1952: 180; 1986: 29)

Because of the above discussion context, it is clear that handling crisis in the ICT era is, without a doubt, a very challenging task for any country and government. The challenge is becoming more crucial and difficult when the cause of crisis the country is dealing with is unseen, vis-a-vis, COVID-19. Thus, within the knowledge of the various government agencies and Malaysian governments, they have implemented additional social measures to boost and uplift the nation's economic recovery efforts and ensure that the citizens comply with the MCO containment restriction order. However, as discussed above, all those measures will only be effective, if from a social point of view, received proper and constructive support from the public at large, particularly their literacy and wisdom in threatening news, facts, and regulations flowing in and out within ICT modes.

The effects of the COVID-19 crisis in Malaysia are very much centered and concentrated in the economic sphere. However, the unprecedented impact of a pandemic does not confine to the economic circle per se. As discussed above, the pandemic does have its social dimension effects on the livelihood of multiethnic and superdiversity strata of Malaysia lives. As far as the Malaysian government efforts are concerned, vis-a-vis, economic and social measures, the containment, and the recovery plan worked moderately well and generally received a positive response from the Malaysian public. However, the state plan recovery plan and how it will help Malaysian sustain their socio-political survival depend on two main factors: (1) Malaysia's economy is highly dependent on world economic powerhouses such as China, the USA, and Japan. The sharp decline of the global powerhouse economy would directly impact Malaysia's recovery to overcome and sustain during the pandemic; (2) Malaysia's social-fabric is very fragile if as far as socio-economy status is concerned. In facing the crisis, to ensure the nation is politically intact, it demands the citizens' socio-political wisdom to attach and mobilize behind the government policies, measures, and ideology.

The above discussion clearly shows us that managing crisis in the era of ICT and the internet has presented new challenges to the patterns of national and urbanist life of Malaysian society. The Covid-19 pandemic has brought a new dimension, or perspective not only on the aspects of the Malaysia State struggle to curb the virus, above all its put into the test on the level of political literacy, socio-political wisdom as well as non-false consciousness attitudes of majority Malaysian, in response to the crisis itself. In these contexts, in view and anticipate any form of challenges in the future and ICT become an integral part of human life, it is crystal clear that the challenges to Malaysian nations' integrity are becoming more complex than ever before.

Conclusion

As structurally discussed above, the post-modern era, in which managing life is heavily reliant on the widespread use of ICT, has directly created a new form of challenges to any government, particularly in ensuring and safeguarding the nation from any threat. The Covid-19 pandemic, as far as the International Relations language is concerned, is very much a threat to the non-traditional version. However, the said pandemic threat has required all nations worldwide to mobilize both the nation-state's traditional and non-traditional elements. The emergence of ICT combined with the globalization process has led to much thought that the nation-state's traditional border is becoming less relevant. Amidst all that, the Covid-19 pandemic has brought back the importance of safeguarding the traditional border into its old-function. In a pandemic time, all traditional borders are strictly closed as part of the nation-state's measure to curtail the spread of the said virus. Simultaneously, the literacy of the many peoples alongside with ICT is vitally required to help the nation manage the crisis. Thus, the rapid growth of ICT, the world requires rethinking the concept of crisis, security, its challenges, and increasing demands for every nation to strengthen its knowledge of ICT.

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