

CEO FORUM 2021

BUSINESS IN THE NEW NORMAL

20 OCT 2021
WEDNESDAY
10:30AM

KEYNOTE SPEECH

Lessons Learned from Malaysia's Battle against Covid-19

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PLF CEO FORUM 2021 - Business in the New Normal

YBhg Dato' Dr Hishamshah Mohd Ibrahim, Deputy Director General of Health Malaysia (Research & Technical Support), Ministry of Health.

Keynote Speech: "Lesson Learned from Malaysia's Battle Against COVID-19."

Yang Berbahagia, Tan Sri Azman Hashim, Chairman, Board of Trustees, Perdana Leadership Foundation;

Excellencies;

Distinguished speakers and participants;

Members of the Media;

Ladies and gentlemen.

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim

Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh

First and foremost, on behalf of Y.Bhg Tan Sri Dato' Sri Dr Noor Hisham Abdullah, The Director General of Health, Malaysia I would like to convey Y.Bhg Tan Sri's sincere apologies for not being able to be here to personally deliver this speech today. Y.Bhg Tan Sri sends his best wishes to the speakers, participants, organisers as well as all the attendees of this summit. On his behalf, I would like to congratulate the organising committee of the Perdana Leadership Foundation CEO Forum for successfully convening the forum.

It is indeed a pleasure to see the presence of so many distinguished guests in this session. The theme of the forum which reads "*Business in the New Normal: Recover, Rethink, Rebuild*" is certainly very apt as our country is now moving forward with The National Recovery Plan which comprises the economy of our nation as well. Please allow me to deliver the keynote address:

Ladies and gentlemen,

As we are well aware, in early 2020, the COVID-19 global crisis appeared in numerous countries, spreading rapidly with multiple waves of infection. Since the country's first case in January 2020 until yesterday with **xxxx** positive cases, we have experienced different waves of attack from this malicious virus, with different variants, natures as well as intensity and continuous adversities yet, I believe, we did our best to defend our country against it and are continuing our battle to Reopen safely.

Our concentrated efforts in the battle have been documented in a series of publication by the Institute for Health Systems Research at NIH Malaysia titled "Malaysia Health Sector Response to COVID-19 Pandemic" and "The COVID-19 Chronicles of Malaysia".

The nation's response to this pandemic is a complex process as it involved cross-cutting sectors, domains, and interests. I would like to refer to an article in the Frontiers in Public Health by Stenseth et al. published last August titled "Lesson Learnt from the COVID-19 Pandemic" where they framed the global responses into two main areas – 1) Source identification (to know your enemy) and 2) Control strategies (to fight your enemy). If we reflect on the country's experiences since our first case in January 2020, or even before that where we took several proactive steps to prepare the country against COVID-19 based on the experiences from the diverse infectious diseases such as SARS, MERS-CoV, Nipah encephalitis, etc., we initiated thermal screening at airports in the country as early as 1st January 2020, we conducted early preparation of reagents to test COVID-19 by the Institute for Medical Research (IMR) labs, as well as early communication and information exchange with health authority in China and the WHO, to get accurate information about the pandemic. It is crucial to know and understand the threats we faced to be able to act accordingly.

Furthermore, the country also has several legislation and policies in place such as National Security Council Act 2016 (Act 776), the Prevention and Control of Infectious Disease Act (Act 342), International Health Regulation 2005, and Malaysia Strategy for Emerging Diseases and Public Health Emergencies (MySED) II Workplan to fortify the command, control and coordination of the government, responding to the pandemic. We can see the effectiveness of the country's control mechanism of the pandemic when we initiated the Movement Control Order (MCO) after a cluster of cases emerged from a religious event in Masjid Seri Petaling that were attended by around 10,000 participants around the world (5,000 from Malaysia). The MCO with its different intensities (Enhanced MCO, Conditional MCO and Recovery MCO) managed to contain the spread and at the same time balance its effect on economic and/or social development.

Nevertheless, the MCO has inevitably resulted in a considerable slowdown in economic activities putting pressure on both consumer and productive economic activity locally and globally. In 2020, Gross Domestic Product contracted 5.6 percent, which is the deepest contraction since 1998 with a GDP of -7.4 percent. The increase in the unemployment rate in the year 2020 also indirectly led to a decrease of Gross National Income from RM45,212 (2019) to RM42,531. Therefore, the government introduced economic stimulus packages and policy rate cuts to stimulate the Malaysian economy, in order to protect the *rakyat* and support businesses including the Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) which are the backbone of the Malaysian economy.

The SOPs introduced by the government also have negative effect to the *rakyat* although the negative effects may vary by the stringency of the social distancing measures, length of implementation, or the degree of compliance. On the other hand, the measures may lead to higher levels of mental health distress, increased economic inequality especially on certain socio-demographic groups. Everybody knows that the population needs to stay healthy. The disruption of the health aspect must be well recognised and targeted in the interventions. For example, people may subject to high stress when dealing with fear, anxiety, and uncertainty. Priorities of strategy may include safety, health, wellbeing, care and job security aspects. Operating business for economy needs to put people safety first while having business continuity in place. Economic activity should prepare and allow people into new ways of working.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It seems that we need to live in this situation for years ahead. We in MoH, acknowledge these issues and the needs to focus on it to improve the lives of the population health now and beyond. Therefore, healthcare system is going through a massive transformation, driven by pandemic with shift of organization in healthcare demand and healthcare deliveries. There are several areas that I would like to point out here for this transformation.

First, we can see that our nation appears more united and disciplined in facing a common enemy – this was what our Prime Minister said a couple of weeks back. The public now has realized the seriousness of this threat especially when we lost our family members, close relatives, and friends. Everybody tried wholeheartedly to comply with the SOP – we stayed home for a longer duration, we wear mask almost all the time when we are out in the public and comply with the SOPs. I believe, and I hope that the public are more prepared to face this kind of situation in future and it is the responsibility of both the government and the public to strengthen our preparedness.

It is vital for us to strengthen our preparedness to rapidly identify and limit the spread of emerging pathogens and we need to be able to develop creative solutions to address the ability to meet sudden supply-demand dynamics like what already happened to our PPEs, ventilators, ICUs etc. We also need to ensure rapid mobilisation and control strategies at the national level which I think we were quite successful as National Security Council (NSC) and National Crisis Preparedness and Response Centre (CPRC) have been doing all this while.

Although the vaccines proven to be the key component of COVID-19 control, we cannot deny the fundamental importance of the non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs). We know that several NPIs that consistently reduced the transmission include 1) Closure of schools and workplace, 2) Bans on public events and mass gathering and 3) Limiting human movement. All in all, the rapid, effective, coordinated and sustained response to this pandemic is the key to the battle.

It is the nature of a crisis that it brings togetherness in order for an organization/ community/ nation or even globally to come together to overcome the crisis. In Malaysia, this is certainly evident with the involvement various sectors in helping to overcome the crisis itself. During the peak period of this pandemic, we have observed how the healthcare system was overburdened by overwhelming number of Covid cases and that the private healthcare had played a large role in sustaining our healthcare system. The extensive involvement of the private healthcare sector lending a helping hand to the Ministry of Health and the Malaysian Healthcare system to enable patient care and management in terms of hospitalization and other services not only helped saving lives but also in reducing the financial burden of the

Malaysian Healthcare system as well. The collaborative efforts and the forthcoming of the private healthcare sector to help in managing the pandemic must be appreciated with the highest form of admiration. This is rather the beginning of multiple efforts of the public and private healthcare system working hand in hand to ensure a sustainable healthcare system in Malaysia. There have been efforts that are put in place to analyse the way forward of such collaborations and the right to time is perhaps soon to approach.

Ladies and Gentleman,

Every individual, every organization, every community and every nation has certainly learnt innumerable lessons from the Covid-19 Pandemic itself. As for the Ministry of Health, this pandemic has been another learning point. In times to come, our healthcare workers, professionals and all parties involved in managing this pandemic will look back to use the different methodologies and approaches that have been used and put in place to curb a disease that had so much to give (in terms of learning) and yet took thousands of lives away. Are we ready to face similar situations? The answer to that question would be. Yes ! We certainly can however, we have learnt that mitigation of crisis management needs multiple interventions and unprecedented changes and manipulations no matter how prepared we are, and on that I can say that now Malaysia is more prepared to face such challenges more than ever before. I would like conclude my speech with an invitation to all of you to read the books that have been produced and published by the National Institutes of Health, Malaysia on NIH Malaysia titled “Malaysia Health Sector Response to COVID-19 Pandemic” and “The COVID-19 Chronicles of Malaysia”.

Thank you.