

# IN Diplomacy

MISSION TO COMMUNICATE

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## IN Diplomacy MISSION TO COMMUNICATE COVID-19 Coverage **SPECIAL EDITION**

### Featuring

### Heads of Mission on Measures and Impact of COVID-19 Outbreak

- Hungary ■ India
- Indonesia ■ Finland
- Mongolia ■ New Zealand
- Norway ■ Philippines
- Russia ■ Saudi Arabia
- South Korea ■ USA
- Uzbekistan

### Also inside

**US Fund for ASEAN  
COVID-19 Efforts**

**India Calls for  
PEOPLE'S CURFEW**

**MFA & MUIS Repatriate  
Singaporeans from Egypt**

**Connecting During COVID-19:  
Rise of the Video Conference**





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# Presentation of Credentials

*IN Diplomacy* welcomes the new Heads of Mission following their presentation of credentials to the President of Singapore Her Excellency Halimah Yacob  
24th March 2020



*Ambassador to Singapore Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste  
H.E. Maria Natália Carrascalão*

Ambassador Maria Natália Guterres Viegas Carrascalão was the Ambassador to Lao People's Democratic Republic (2016 to January 2020) prior to her current appointment. Ambassador has also served as Ambassador to Portugal, Spain and Cabo Verde (2009 to 2014).

Earlier in her career, she was a Member of Parliament in Lisbon, Portugal from 1999 to 2005, Chief of Staff at the Presidency of the Republic of Timor-Leste from 2007 to 2009, Coordinator at the Conference of Heads of States and Government of the Community of Portuguese Speaking Countries (CPLP) Summit Preparation Commission in Timor-Leste in 2014, President of the Academy of Arts Implementation Unit of Timor-Leste in 2015 and Advisor to the President in the Public Service Commission in Timor-Leste in 2016.

Ambassador Carrascalão is married and has a son.

## Why Diplomacy Matters

Singapore is home to 70 resident foreign High Commissions and Embassies, 43 Consular Posts and 11 International Organisations. They act as a conduit between Singapore and their respective countries. Diplomatic missions are headed by influential newsmakers who open doors for business, trade, investment, education, the arts and culture. *IN Diplomacy* has a mission to communicate and be a bridge between the diplomatic community and Singaporeans.



**LATEST****COVID-19 Coverage****SPECIAL EDITION**

## Round Up of COVID-19 IN Diplomacy Reports March-April 2020

Compilation of indiplomacy.com reports of how several missions in Singapore have responded to the Corona Virus outbreak to look after their citizens, safeguard their staff and operate during these difficult times

### India's People's Curfew Extended to 21-Day Lockdown

Curfew originally a symbol of the country's effort, self-restraint, and resolve to fulfil its duty in service of the nation and prepared it for the upcoming challenges of the lockdown instituted on 25th March 2020



**I**NDIA'S Prime Minister Narendra Modi made an impassioned plea to the nation to join in a successful vol-

untary "people's curfew" Sunday on 22nd March 2020. However, by Tuesday 24th March 2020, the Indian Government announced a total lockdown limiting the movement of the 1.3 billion population after the number of confirmed corona virus patients reached about 500 people. By the middle of April the figure has climbed to over 12,300 confirmed cases.

As it turned out the 14-hour voluntary People's Curfew was a precursor to greater challenges ahead for India. PM Modi said it was "A symbol of our effort, of our self-restraint, and our resolve to fulfil our duty in service of the nation. The success of a people's curfew on 22nd March, and the experience gained from it, will also prepare us for our upcoming challenges."

On the day of the people's curfew of 22nd of March 2020 he also wanted the nation to express gratitude to everyone who has been selflessly serving others such as doctors, nurses, hospital and sanitation workers, transport and home delivery agents etc. He wanted everyone on Sunday at 5pm to give a 5-minute standing ovation: "We clap our hands, beat our plates, ring our bells to boost their morale and salute their service."



He also prepared the nation that: "This global pandemic is also going to have a wide-ranging impact on the economy. Keeping in mind the economic challenges arising from the Corona virus, the government has decided to set up a COVID-19 Economic Response Task Force under the leadership of the Finance Minister."

### COVID-19 TOP 10 AFFECTED COUNTRIES

as of 15th April 2020

Country	Confirmed	Deceased	Recovered
<b>USA</b>	<b>644,061</b>	<b>28,526</b>	<b>1,868</b>
<b>Spain</b>	<b>180,659</b>	<b>18,812</b>	<b>19,259</b>
<b>Italy</b>	<b>165,155</b>	<b>21,645</b>	<b>15,729</b>
<b>France</b>	<b>147,863</b>	<b>17,167</b>	<b>7,928</b>
<b>Germany</b>	<b>134,753</b>	<b>3,804</b>	<b>15,824</b>
<b>UK</b>	<b>98,476</b>	<b>12,868</b>	<b>135</b>
<b>China</b>	<b>82,295</b>	<b>3,342</b>	<b>74,862</b>
<b>Iran</b>	<b>76,389</b>	<b>4,777</b>	<b>14,656</b>
<b>Turkey</b>	<b>69,392</b>	<b>1,518</b>	<b>162</b>
<b>Belgium</b>	<b>33,573</b>	<b>4,440</b>	<b>1,696</b>

(Sources: BNO, CDC & WHO)



*The Shape of Things to Come: G20 Summit in Riyadh - under the Presidency of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia goes online*

### Connecting During COVID-19: Rise of the Video Conference

What does COVID-19 mean for diplomacy around the world?

As countries take stricter actions to deal with the COVID - 19 pandemic, they have turned to technology to exchange information and strengthen ties. Heads of the G20, the 20 major economies in the world, had a video summit headed by current G20 Chair Saudi Arabia on 26th March. The group has committed to spending measures totalling US\$5 trillion.

On 23th March 2020, the Australia-Singapore Virtual Annual Leaders' Meeting

was also convened via video conference between the two Prime Ministers to discuss COVID-19, digital trade and more. Even with a global health crisis, leaders are exemplifying through technology that diplomacy is more important than ever and must show no signs of slowing down.

On 13th March 2020, the ASEAN Senior Officials 'Meeting' for Health Development (SOMHD) saw senior health officials of the ASEAN countries collaborated on a regional response to the pandemic also through a special video conference that lasted six hours. Businesses have been using technology and apps like Zoom, Teams, Google Hangouts, Google Meet, GotoMeeting, Skype and have thus kept the world connected.

#### Emerging trends

Previously airlines ferried officials to perform the vital task of linking the world's economies. Now governments have looked for alternatives such e-conferencing, to conduct meetings. Once the pandemic loses its grip, options such as e-conferencing which can provide a similar level of connectivity will still be used as economies will need to deal with the losses. It might take a while longer for airline travel volume to rebound, which will most certainly have an impact on the hotels, MICE and hospitality industry at large.

All international travel has come to a virtual halt; the International Air Transport Association ( IATA) has said airline losses can amount up to US\$113 billion.

Another question that will have to be answered will be the impact of COVID-19 on Co-Working; with countries' borders shut and people working from home, how will it reshape work culture, the use of offices and will it mark the end of coworking boom?



## Singapore Leaders and India HC Assure Indian & Foreign Workers in Dormitories

Following the announcement by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong on the launch of even tighter measures to control the spread of COVID-19 (dubbed Circuit Breaker), the Minister for Communication and Information, the Minister of State for Manpower and Information as well as India's High Commissioner to Singapore called on Indian and Foreign workers at their dormitories to assure them their health, livelihood and welfare are also of great concern to the Singapore government

**L**AST weekend, on 5th April, the Indian High Commissioner to Singapore, HE Jawed Ashraf, accompanied the Singapore Minister of Communication and Information, Mr S. Iswaran and the Minister of State for Manpower, Mr Zaqy Mohamad, on a visit to the foreign workers dormitories in Singapore to talk to Indian and other foreign workers there. The 30-minute talk shared the High Commissioner was to: "Assure the workers that Singapore will take care of them during the four-week elevated restriction. There are tens of thousands Indian workers here and he has assured them the Indian High Commission is there 24/7 to help." The Singapore ministers and the High Commissioner told workers measures are in place to take care of their welfare, health and livelihood.



***"...this week we have taken a decision to suspend consular services for the next few days except in emergencies, begun rotating staff and introduced work from home wherever possible."***

### Help for Stranded

In response to questions by INDIPLMACY, the High Commissioner Jawed Ashraf said that since the outset of the outbreak in Singapore the Indian High Commission here has faced several challenges in dealing with Indian citizens among which included 110 Indian citizens stranded in transit in Singapore just before India imposed a lock down from 23rd March 2020. The High Commissioner also said: "We had to take care of their food and conveniences inside Changi for one to two days and make arrangements for their evacuation to India. We received great support from Changi and Singapore Airlines."

"Furthermore, he said: "Beyond that, there are hundreds who are stranded here. Around 1,200 have registered with us online. Many are those whose EPs/DPs have been cancelled. There were others who were on a short term visit pass or were here as tourists. There are hundreds of students here, too, who would like to but are unable to return to India. We are working with

Singapore Government to extend their stay till there are flights for them to return to India. Meanwhile, we are taking care of accommodation and food for those who are in need. In this, we have also received support from the Indian community and places of worship. We are available round the clock on phone, email and social media to assist and counsel the stranded Indians here."

### Mission Safety

On the issue of the High Commission's work here in coping with COVID-19 and steps taken for the safety of those working at the Mission, the High Commissioner said: "We are working on the basis of advisory of Singapore Government and Government of India. We also make our own assessment of the situation and have calibrated our operations at the Mission in accordance with the evolving situation. We have so far functioned normally, with all prescribed

precautions and protocol being strictly observed for visitors and Mission staff. However, this week we have taken a decision to suspend consular services for the next few days except in emergencies, begun rotating staff and introduced work from home wherever possible."

In the meantime, the High Commissioner said the directive for citizens here is: "Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi has exhorted everyone to remain where s/he is till travel restrictions are in place. This will help India is breaking the chain of contamination and reduce the risk of infection that comes from travel. He also asked Indian citizens wherever they are to observe local advisory and strictly practice social distancing and hygiene norms. An interesting dimension to his communication is encouraging people to practice yoga to deal with mental stress and to stay healthy and active. Yoga and Ayurveda are generally helpful in strengthening immunity."

On the final question of the impact of the Outbreak on the cooperation between India and Singapore during these challenging times, the High Commissioner replied that, "COVID 19 has obviously affected the high momentum of bilateral engagement, though we did keep up with some bilateral meetings on video conference and continued to pursue our bilateral initiatives.

However, much of that is on hold now. However, Government of Singapore has been exceptionally generous and gracious in giving me farewell calls at the highest levels and with almost the entire cabinet. These meetings have been very helpful in reviewing our relations, identifying and planning for the future, especially as we come out of the unprecedented global crisis," he continued.

"We are working closely to address the immediate challenges, including nationals of both countries and maintaining security of supply lines, especially on essentials. This is also a time for us to exchange notes on best practices in dealing with COVID 19. I should mention the special gesture by Temasek Foundation of sponsoring COVID 19 test kits capable of 30,000 tests that was sent to India on March 30. More is to follow through purchases. In addition, we are seeking to source both reagents to ramp up production of test kits in India and import test kits. Further, the Indian Mission in Singapore is involved in sourcing and arranging supply of critical items such as personal protection equipment and test kits," shared the High Commissioner.



***"A great gesture from a close friend" said HE Jawed Ashraf who received from Mr Benedict Cheong, the CEO of Temasek Foundation a donation of 30,000 test kits for COVID-19 which have reached India***



## Indonesian Embassy in Singapore Doing its Best to Handle Crisis

Indonesian Ambassador to the Republic of Singapore, HE Ngurah Swajaya, talks to Editor-in-Chief Nomita Dhar about Covid 19 and the safeguards being taken against the spread of the virus and its impact on Indonesians in Singapore. The report of the Skype interview first appeared in [www.indoconnectsingapore.com](http://www.indoconnectsingapore.com)



**COULD you tell how has your visiting citizens been affected by the travel restrictions in Singapore and the steps being taken by your**

### Mission to help them?

Many of them are affected by these restrictions as Singapore receives the largest number of foreign visitors and we ourselves have 13 Indonesian international airports connecting to Singapore. What concerns me the most are those who are still in the process of medication after their medical operations in Singapore hospitals. For example those many patients from Indonesia who are still undergoing chemotherapy here. For those who are part of this segment of our community our advice to them has been for them to stay in contact with their doctors in Singapore for advice or on how they can continue to undergo chemotherapy treatment in Indonesia if they need to. And for those who want to come for medical checkups at this time, they should opt to do so in Indonesia — and, if not, they should reschedule their appointments here in Singapore for later dates.

We are also issuing daily press releases, regarding the latest information related to COVID-19, to the media as well as through our social media platforms. We have also made available a 24-7 Emergency Number that can be contacted by our nationals. Our public service section at the mission is still open, though its services are right now limited only to urgent issues

### How is the Mission coping with the COVID-19 emergency and what steps have been taken for the safety of those working in the Mission?

We have been preoccupied with handling issues related to COVID-19 ever since the Dorscon Alert level was raised to 'orange' for the pandemic. In the area of public service at the Mission, we have taken precautionary measures by provid-

ing masks and hand gloves to the staff who are directly engaged with the public. We have been addressing this on a war footing for the safety of our own Mission staff; we have gradually also started introducing the work-from-home and other precautionary approaches for all our staff when they are in public space.

### Regarding COVID-19 have there been any special directives issued by your government for citizens living in Singapore?

No specific directive has been given in this context, but we are grateful for the close cooperation between the MOH and Embassy as well as our own MOH, concerning the Indonesians who are being treated for COVID-19 here in Singapore. The directives from the Singapore government's MOH are monitored closely by our embassy;

these are continuously being relayed by us to our citizens. We have responded to hundreds, if not thousands, of inquiries every day regarding

the pandemic and are trying to do so to all these in a responsible and effective manner.

### During these challenging times, what is the role your Mission has played to keep the cooperation between your country and Singapore going?

We are still doing what we have been doing to continuously enhance our bilateral relations. Although many of the planned activities have been postponed to later dates, we are still making preparations for when the situation gets better. Recently, we arranged the coordination between Jakarta and Singapore in the assistance provided by Singapore for COVID-19, for example the test kit for COVID-19 detection, as also the assistance extended by Temasek Foundation, as well as the range of initiatives by other people to help in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. We are hoping that the crisis is over sooner rather than later. Nevertheless, we are also as ready as we can be to accelerate our bilateral projects as the crisis starts dying away and is finally over.

## Hungary Embassy Ensured Return of Citizens & Postpone Jubilee Celebrations

The Mission here hopes for the best as preparations and celebrations for the 50th Anniversary of diplomatic ties between Hungary and Singapore are postponed



THE Ambassador of the Hungary Embassy in Singapore H.E. Dr Istvan Szerdahelyi said: "Just like many other nationals, a few dozens of Hungar-

ians were affected by the travel restrictions in Singapore. Our Embassy was in direct contact with those citizens who registered for consular protection and those who reached out to us. We were able to provide support for their safe return to Hungary before all flight connections were suspended."



H.E. Dr Istvan Szerdahelyi

**"We were able to provide support for their safe return to Hungary before all flight connections were suspended."**

In order to cope with the rapidly evolving pandemic situation and to slow the spreading of Covid-19, the Hungarian Government declared state of emergency on 11th of March. A week later Hungary closed its borders for all passenger transport and only Hungarian citizens are allowed to enter the country.

Ambassador Szerdahelyi also said: "Regarding the work of our Embassy, Covid-19 pandemic came at a very bad time because this year we celebrate the 50 years of the diplomatic relations between Hungary and Singapore (1970-2020) therefore we planned a lot of activities and events for the first half of the year, all of which had to be postponed. We hope after life resuming to normal, we will be able to continue our efforts for strengthening bilateral ties between the two countries."

## Finland Embassy Studying Use of Digital Services in Combating COVID-19

H.E. Antti Tapani Vanska, the Ambassador for the Embassy of the Republic of Finland, shares the plan in place to help its nationals in Singapore and how Finnish initiatives to develop digital services use Singapore as a benchmark



**ARE any of your visiting citizens affected by the travel restrictions in Singapore?** What are the steps your Mission has taken to help them?

The Embassy of Finland is closely following the situation of Finns in Singapore. The restrictions have certainly affected all of us. We have helped our citizens by sharing support and information on the current COVID-19 situation. As so many flights have been cancelled we try our best to find Finnish travelers alternative routes to Finland.



H.E. Antti Tapani Vanska

**How is the Mission coping with the COVID-19 emergency and what steps have been taken for the safety of those working in the Mission?**

The Finnish Embassy has been following the given instructions of the authorities of Singapore and also from the Foreign Ministry of Finland. All the planned events are postponed or cancelled, meetings are arranged online and we are working from home to avoid social contact. The situation is extremely unusual, but we are prepared for crisis and do our utmost to keep our staff healthy.

**Regarding COVID-19 are there any special directives issued by your government for citizens living in Singapore?**

The Finnish government requested all travellers to return to Finland as soon as possible. The Finnish citizens living in Singapore can choose to stay as their home is here, but they can always return to Finland in case needed.

**During these challenging times, what role has your Mission played to keep the cooperation between your country and Singapore going?**

Singapore has developed highly effective digital services to support people during the crisis, such as the TraceTogether mobile application. Finnish initiatives to develop digital services to help in this crisis have used Singapore as a benchmark for development efforts in Finland.

## Mongolia Embassy Response to COVID-19 Outbreak in Singapore

Mongolia's Ambassador to Singapore H.E. Tumor Lkhagvadorj on the rapidly evolving situation of the virus outbreak here



THE COVID-19 situation has been evolving rapidly globally and has affected 199 countries

across the world. Unfortunately, Mongolia is not an exception. Many Mongolian visitors have been affected by travel restrictions imposed by both the Mongolian and Singapore governments. There were some short-term visitors complying with the 14 days Stay Home Notice, who entered Singapore before 24 March, 2020, prior to the ban of all foreign short-term visitors. The Ambassador approached the ICA Singapore office to get assistance for Mongolian citizens here who needed for short-stay visa extensions due to the travel restrictions and received a very positive response.

In response to how the Mongolian mission was coping with the COVID-19 emergency and steps taken for the safety of those working in the mission, Ambassador Tumor Lkhagvadorj said, "Our Embassy has been monitoring the situation closely and taking necessary measures to protect the staff and visitors. All visitors have their temperatures taken at the lobby. The staff who come in contact with visitors wear masks to protect themselves; we have also taken precautionary measures like placing hand sanitizers in the common area. Also, we are looking at possible workplace measures, such as implementing shift arrangements and reducing physical interactions.

### Special Directives

All Mongolian diplomatic missions have also received special directives issued by their government and these, said the Ambassador, include: "All Mongolian Diplomatic missions have been instructed to inform and update our citizens living abroad about the COVID-19 situation

and Government regulations of the residing country. Citizens living abroad have been advised to follow the news, follow precautionary measures such as maintaining good personal hygiene to protect themselves and their loved ones. The government is working hard on arranging charter flights to bring back our citizens who are stranded in various countries, but it takes time, so we keep asking for the patience of our citizens until the proper arrangements are made."



H.E. Tumor Lkhagvadorj

The Mongolian mission here is also playing its part and is working with the Singapore government. The Ambassador said, "This year marks the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Mongolia and Singapore. Although we had to make some changes to our commemorative event plans to comply with measures taken due to the current COVID-19 situation, the cooperation and friendship between our two countries is strong as ever. Our Embassy has been working closely with relevant authorities, such as MFA and ICA. Health Ministries of our countries are exchanging their knowledge and experiences directly. Our long-time friends at the Temasek Foundation lent a helping hand to Mongolia during these challenging times and donated 3000 COVID-19 diagnostic kits. Some Singaporean friends are also doing private in-kind donations."

## Singaporeans Repatriated Home from Cairo in Chartered Flight

Many of the Singaporeans who arrived this morning from Egypt are students from the highly respected Al-Azhar University

EARLY morning on 8th April 2020, 224 Singaporeans arrived at Changi Airport after they were repatriated back from Cairo after Egypt stopped commercial flight services. 211 of them are students studying at Al-Azhar University in Cairo. The returnees will serve a two-week period of isolation at dedicated Stay-Home Notice facilities. The chartered flight was arranged by the Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs and MUIS (the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore). MFA said the returning residents will serve 14-day of self-isolation at dedicated stay-home notice facilities.

According to reports, MUIS has set aside Zakat funds to help students and parents offset the cost of the flight. MUIS will also monitor the situation for other students studying overseas in foreign

Islamic universities and work with the MFA to safeguard their welfare. Singapore's Minister for the Environment and Water Resources as well as Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs, Masagos Zulkifli, commented on his FB about the repatriation and said, "Since mid-March, the students have been staying at their place of residence due to the suspension of their classes. MUIS is working closely with Al-Azhar University to ensure they are able to continue with their studies with flexible learning arrangements so that they can graduate on time. I thank the Singapore Embassy in Cairo for their hard work in facilitating this departure and MUIS for the subsidies it provided to the students for their return."

## NZ HC Coping & Caring While Supply Chains Kept Open

New Zealand High Commissioner to Singapore H.E. Jo Tyndall describes the steps and approach the mission is taking to care for New Zealanders who are affected by COVID-19



HIGH Commissioner Jo Tyndall shared how: "2020 has taken us on a different path

from what any of us could have foreseen. Many of our citizens have been impacted by the new travel restrictions and hence a key focus of our team's work has been offering consular support to distressed New Zealanders. A small number of our citizens based in Singapore were confirmed to have Covid-19 – we have been working hard to ensure they are well-cared for."

### Familial Attitude

The High Commissioner also described how the Mission is coping with the COVID-19 emergency and what steps have been taken for the safety of those working in the Mission: "The new 'Circuit Breaker' social distancing measures implemented in Singapore also mean that with the exception of essential consular staff, most of us are now working from home. As a small team we consider ourselves to be whānau (family) and we have found new ways to keep connected, and provide one another the support we need."



H.E. Jo Tyndall

She also felt that, "It is in these uncertain times that NZ's strong bilateral relationships with countries like Singapore really come into their own. Faced with an unprecedented global crisis, NZ's Minister for Trade and Export Growth David Parker and Singapore's Minister for Trade and Industry Chan Chun Sing committed to maintaining open and connected supply chains and to removing existing trade restrictive measures on essential goods, especially medical supplies. A number of other countries have since joined this initiative. These measures will hopefully mean that our nations can remain connected and that we all have access to the items we need most."

The High Commissioner also posted a video message on the New Zealand High Commission in Singapore Facebook site (<https://www.facebook.com/NewZealandinSingapore/>) on 30th March 2020 that went into more details of the COVID-19 Outbreak.

## Norwegian Embassy Taking All Measures to Minimise Risks of Infection

H.E. Anita Nergaard the Ambassador of the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Singapore also advises Norwegian nationals to pay close attention to the latest news and information on the outbreak



AMBASSADOR Nergaard said in order to provide accurate information to the public, "We work closely on information- exchange with

the Singaporean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Manpower, Immigration and Checkpoints Authority, as well as the other Nordic and European embassies. We are currently assisting visitors with repatriation on commercial flights still operating from Changi International Airport. The Embassy is also assisting with a wide range of consular matters as needed during COVID-19.

There is a stringent set of measures in place at the Embassy to protect the health of visitors and staff.

These include ensuring that all workstations are clean, hygienic and more than one metre apart. The now ubiquitous hand sanitizers and alcohol wipes are readily available for staff use, hand wash is mandatory upon arrival, and there are many posters promoting additional hygiene measures displayed at the Chancery. All external events have been postponed and meetings are conducted online and according to Ambassador Nergaard: "All staff adheres to staggered travel times and lunch breaks. Vulnerable employees work exclusively from home. Further measures might be implemented based on government advice and internal policies."

Presently, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs advises against non-essential travel to all countries. This advice, said the Ambassador applies to those who are travelling, i.e. who have no place of residence or permanent accommodation abroad. For Norwegian citizens residing in Singapore and elsewhere, the Ministry encourages everyone to follow closely information from and instructions issued by local authorities, to monitor local news, especially regarding the spread of the virus and related information and advice.

The Ambassador also highlighted how the embassy is in regular contact with the Singapore Government on the latest measures, advisories and travel restrictions, and appreciates the competence of and close cooperation with Singapore during these challenging times.



H.E. Anita Nergaard

## Philippine Embassy Committed to Continuous Operation throughout Outbreak

Philippine Embassy geared up to handle any 'stranded' nationals here and Ambassador H.E. Joseph Del Mar Yap of the Philippines Embassy in Singapore shares contingency measures to protect staff and create two consular teams to provide continuous operations if either team succumbs to infection



VISITING Filipino nationals in Singapore for business meetings or tourism or

family visits, were more affected by the disruption of international flights due to the community quarantine of the National Capital Region (Metro Manila), which took effect on 15th March 2020, and was followed shortly thereafter by the enhanced community quarantine of the entire island of Luzon and other cities.

The Embassy advised visiting Filipinos to return to the Philippines on available commercial flights before they were suspended or else be prepared to remain in Singapore until flights resume. Ambassador Yap said: "I think most of our visiting nationals were able to fly out. Of course, if there are Filipinos that will be stranded here in Singapore, we will do everything we can to assist them."

### Imperative Consular Service Continues

The Ambassador also said that: "It is imperative that the Embassy continues to provide consular and labour services to the Filipinos residing in Singapore. On 7th February 2020, we implemented enhanced precautionary measures to minimize COVID-19 transmission within the Chancery. The comprehensive set of measures included:

- Temperature scanning at Embassy entrance. If temperature is greater than 37.5 degrees Celsius, the visitor is denied entry.
- Visitor accomplishment of Health and Travel Declaration form at Embassy entrance. If the visitor ticked flu-like symptoms and/or issuance of Stay Home Notice, visitor is denied entry. If the visitor ticked travel history within the last 14 days to high-risk countries as indicated by the Singapore Government, the visitor is denied entry.
- Issuance and required wearing of surgical masks and surgical gloves by Embassy frontline personnel.
- Provision of hand sanitizers to personnel and to clients in the customer service areas
- Closing service window openings and use of two-way communication microphones in all transaction points between clients and frontline staff.



H.E. Joseph Del Mar Yap

- Provision of shuttle service to Embassy personnel to minimize risk of exposure to infection.
- Adopting effective personal hygiene safeguards, i.e. frequent washing of hands with water and soap, sanitizing of hands, not touching face
- Thorough disinfection of customer service area, public toilet and transaction windows at end of each business day.
- Echoing of Singapore Ministry of Health and Philippine Department of Health advisories in the Embassy website and social media channel on a daily basis.

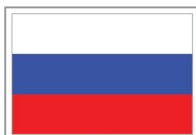
Another insight into the measures in place to ensure the smooth running of the Embassy took place when the Host Government implemented the enhanced social distancing measures. On 23th March 2020, the Embassy implemented on a second phase of the business contingency plan, which was to split the Consular Section into two 8-person teams, which will take turns, on a weekly basis, in providing consular services at the Chancery. The Ambassador Joseph Yap revealed: "The two teams are not allowed to physically socialize or interact with each other, so that the quarantine of one team will not affect the other. Officers and non-consular personnel telecommute. In addition, other further measures were implemented.: The measures included:

- Appointment system for consular services. Clients are required to make an appointment for most consular services (notarials, authentication, travel document, passport renewal, civil registration) before coming to the Chancery.
- The information on the Embassy website has been amended to reflect the requirement to make an appointment for consular services and the hours for these services.

Throughout the duration of the COVID-19 Outbreak the Philippine Embassy continue to maintain its lines of communication with the MFA, MOM and ICA and convey concerns affecting Philippine nationals in Singapore. Ambassador Yap also added: "The Embassy has also worked closely with the Singapore government in facilitating and expediting donations by the MOH and Temasek Foundation to the Philippines of test kits and ventilators in support of the Philippines response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Russia and Singapore in Close Cooperation on Measures to Combat Spread of COVID-19

The Embassy of the Russian Federation's Ambassador to Singapore H.E.Andrey Tatarinov responded to IN Diplomacy's queries on the work and measures the mission here has undertaken since the start of the outbreak



ACCORDING to Ambassador Andrey Tatarinov: "COVID-19 pandemic, which has taken thousands of lives globally and led to the most serious global public health crisis in a century, undoubtedly, remains one of the toughest challenges to all of us. Combating it requires a robust response and international cooperation. Both Russia and Singapore have taken unprecedented measures to stop the virus, including travel restrictions, flights cancelations and borders closures."

On the cooperation between Russia and Singapore in fighting the pandemic, he said the sharing of experience and best practices is of crucial importance: "In this connection, our countries started to exchange information about the practical steps to contain the spread of the disease, especially on public transportation."

The introduction of travel restrictions has thrown up additional challenges for Russian citizens in Singapore, on this move the Ambassador commented: "Of course, as all foreigners in Singapore, Russian nationals are also affected by these restrictions. As the problems are very different (varying from tourists unable to return home to long-term visit pass holders, who spent their vacations overseas, being not allowed to reenter Singapore), each person requires an individual approach. For our part, we do as much as possible. Our mission is in touch with Russian nationals on a 24/7 basis by providing them



H.E. Andrey Tatarinov

updated information on the current situation and return flight options, assisting in rebooking the tickets, extending visit passes, reissuing travel documents, etc."

Ambassador Andrey Tatarinov also highlighted that: "The Embassy is operating as usual, and its Consular section remains open for visitors with less available appointments to ensure the safe number of simultaneous visitors.

"At the same time, we take the situation very seriously and adhere to all the necessary precautionary measures advised by the healthcare authorities of Singapore. Our general recommendation for all Russians staying in Singapore is to observe good personal hygiene and social distancing, as well as all other recommendations provided by the Singapore Government."

## South Korea Embassy Already Looking Ahead Post-CORVIS-19 Crisis

H.E.Ahn Youngjip, the Ambassador of the Republic of Korea Embassy in Singapore, highlights how Singapore as a key partner in Korea's New Southern Policy is constantly in communication with the Singapore government and kept informed, aware of each country's needs and exploring 'creative' ways to address the outbreak



GIVEN the high travel volume between the Republic of Korea and Singapore (over 890,000 visitors in 2019), and the

fact that Singapore is a transportation hub, the Korean Mission already has its hands full dealing with the travel restrictions arising from the CORVID-19 Outbreak. Given its many visiting citizens the Embassy has:

- (a) kept the citizens constantly updated on the newest measures introduced by Singapore through the Embassy website and by disseminating the information to local Korean communities
- (b) has maintained operational a 24/7 consular duty phone number to attend to citizens' needs



H.E. Ahn Youngjip

- (c) has been in touch with various Singaporean agencies to facilitate the request of Korean citizens, to the extent possible

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## Royal Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in Constant Touch with Subjects and Governments

H.E. Saas Saleh Alsaleh replies to IN Diplomacy's questions on their response to the COVID-19 Outbreak



**HOW has visiting citizens been affected by the travel restrictions in Singapore, what steps has your Mission taken to**

**help them?**

Just as any other visitors to Singapore, a number of visiting Saudi citizens have been affected by the measures taken in Singapore to confront virus Covid 19. Upon the instructions we received from the Kingdom, the embassy provided all possible assistance to them, including full accommodations in hotels until they are returned home safely.

**How is the Mission coping with the COVID-19 emergency and what steps have been taken for the safety of those working in the Mission?**

The embassy has taken several measures, including reducing daily working hours with the fewest possible number of its staff and



*H.E. Saad Saleh I. Alsaleh*

work remotely. The embassy has also asked its staff to take all precautions and health measures that guarantee their safety and the safety of their family members.

**Regarding Covid 19 – are there any special**

**directives issued by your government for citizens living in Singapore?**

Since the beginning of the Covid 19 outbreak, the Ministry of Health in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has issued precaution advisories to Saudi citizens in the Kingdom and those living abroad, the embassy has transferred that to Saudi citizens in Singapore as well as all of the necessary precautionary measures issued by the official authorities in Singapore.

**During these challenging times, what role has your Mission paid to keep the cooperation between your country and Singapore going?**

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia assumes the presidency of the G20 in 2020. Since Singapore is an invited country to the group's meetings, this keeps the embassy in constant communication with the relevant authorities in Singapore, in addition to what is related to the bilateral relations between the two countries.

## Uzbek Embassy Efforts Meeting COVID-19 Challenges

H.E. Kakhramon Shakirov outlines measures implemented by the Mission since the COVID-19 Outbreak



THE Ambassador of Uzbekistan to Singapore shared how since the start of the spread of the

corona virus here, the Embassy was on alert and was able to help its citizens with repatriation. He said: "The current COVID-19 situation in the world as well as measures implemented by the Government of Singapore including mandatory quarantine or self-isolation for 14 days upon arrival have affected travellers and in this regard, with the assistance of the Embassy of the Republic



*H.E. Kakhramon Shakirov*

of Uzbekistan we helped relocate seven citizens of Singapore as well as two citizens of Uzbekistan back to their home countries."

He continued, "At the same time a 24-hour Organizing Committee Operation was set up in the Embassy for quick response, to help and facilitate requests along with providing necessary assistance by telephone or email to citizens of Uzbekistan and Singapore."

Ambassador Shakirov also placed on record his appreciation: "The Embassy is thankful for the

Singapore Government's care and measures to protect of citizens and foreigners from spreading of COVID-19. Accordingly the Embassy systematically disinfects premises, checks for temperature at the entrance of the office. All staff are aware of the necessity to frequently wash their hands with soap and hot water, using alcohol-containing disinfectants as well as necessity to avoid close contact with people who have symptoms of colds or flu."

According to the Uzbekistan Government's guidelines to prevent the spread of coronavirus infection COVID-19, starting from March 1, 2020, he said: "All travelers who had been in Singapore in the past 14 days must be kept in isolation at the place of residence (home, hotel, hostel, etc.) for 14 days." He also pointed out that despite the existing problems with COVID-19, "The Embassy continues to actively work on promoting economic diplomacy (in remote online form) as well as hold negotiations with foreign partners to maintain current and new investment projects, promote exports and other foreign economic interests of Uzbekistan in Singapore."

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In response to IN Diplomacy's questions regarding how internally the Korean mission is coping with the outbreak here, Ambassador Youngjip said, "Starting 28 January, the Embassy has shifted to "Situation Room" mode, whereby the entire staff was reconfigured into five teams –

- (a) situation analysis
- (b) on-site response
- (c) media coverage
- (d) consular and family support
- (e) administrative support.

"In line with the measures announced by the Singaporean government, the Embassy

measured the temperature of its staff regularly, has placed hand sanitizers on various locations, ensured that those who feel unwell stay at home, provided masks to the consular section staff, and has placed thermal imagers at the main gateways. More recently we have split the staff into two to ensure functional continuity; each team comes alternately to the office every other day."

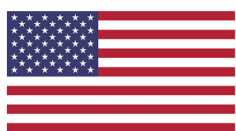
But even during these challenging times, the Mission said Ambassador Youngjip is still paying great attention to the cooperation between Korea and Singapore.

### Korea's New Southern Policy

He explained: "Singapore is one of the key partners in Korea's New Southern Policy. Regarding COVID-19 situation, the Embassy has been in touch with many Singaporean agencies to ensure that both sides are kept informed ahead of public announcements, that we are aware of each other's concerns, and that we explore creative ways to address each other's needs. However, sooner or later COVID-19 will become history. The Embassy wants to look beyond this crisis and thus we continue to discuss with our Singaporean counterparts ways to enhance our cooperation."

# U.S. Support and Funding for ASEAN to Fight COVID-19

America providing both technical and financial support to prepare labs for large-scale testing, infection and prevention control



A fact sheet released by the United States (US) Embassy in Singapore has outlined how since

the outbreak began, the US government has provided approx. US\$18.3 million in emergency health and humanitarian assistance to the members of ASEAN. The funds aim to support the ASEAN nations in combating the COVID-19 virus. Globally, as of 26th March 2020, the US is providing an initial investment of nearly \$274 million in emergency health and humanitarian assistance to help countries in need, on top of the funding the US already provide to multilateral organizations such as the World Health Organization and UNICEF.

This total to date includes nearly \$100 million in emergency health assistance from USAID's Global Health Emergency Reserve Fund and \$110 million in humanitarian assistance from USAID's International Disaster Assistance account, to be provided for up to 64 of the most at-risk countries facing the threat of this global pandemic. Through the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) will receive \$64 million in humanitarian assistance to help address the threats posed by COVID-19 in existing humanitarian crisis situations for some of the world's most vulnerable people.

***The United States is the global leader in public health assistance, with more than \$9.5 billion allocated in 2019 to support public health overseas, including in Southeast Asia.***

## New Funding to Support ASEAN

U.S. funding to ASEAN countries on COVID-19 supports the following goals:

- Prepare laboratories for large-scale testing for COVID-19
- Infection prevention and control
- Enable risk communication
- Implement public-health emergency plans for border points of entry
- Activate case-finding and event-based surveillance for influenza-like illnesses
- Train and equip rapid-responders in investigation and contact-tracing
- Update training materials for health workers

US government agencies spearheading international response, including The Department of State, USAID, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are working closely to allocate funds based on COVID-19 hotspots and vulnerabilities. The United States also

coordinates with other donors to complement assistance and avoid duplicating efforts.

## Leading Support for ASEAN's Public Health

This emergency support is in addition to the nearly \$3.5 billion dollars in public health assistance the United States has provided to ASEAN Member States over the last 20 years.

The United States is the global leader in public health assistance, with more than \$9.5 billion allocated in 2019 to support public health overseas, including in Southeast Asia. This amount includes funding to counter pandemic threats, HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis (TB), and other health needs. Since 2009, American taxpayers have generously funded more than \$100 billion in health assistance and nearly \$70 billion in humanitarian assistance globally.

The US continues to be the single largest health and humanitarian donor for both long-term development and capacity building efforts with partners, and emergency response efforts in the face of recurrent crises. This money has saved lives, protected people who are most vulnerable to disease, built health institutions, and promoted the stability of communities and nations.

## Our Wish for You!

*The picture looks as pretty as a Christmas card and the bells can be found in Singapore at Mount Faber! The Poland's Bells of Happiness is a gift from the people and government of Poland. They are believed to bring good fortune. Now with the two bells hanging side by side, all who ring the bells will be said to be blessed with double happiness, and an everlasting, blissful future*

*We would like to leave this issue on a positive note and share with you our wish for the day to come soon when we can ring for ourselves*  
Poland's Bells of Happiness.

(Photo by Jenny Tan)

**Bells' Background:** The first bell was given in 1992 to mark the visit of the Polish ship *Dar Pomorz*. To celebrate the 50th Anniversary of diplomatic ties between Poland and Singapore the second bell was added last October. The second bell also commemorated the first anniversary of the visit of the Polish tall ship *Dar Młodzieży*

