

## A Sarawak Digital Journey to Tackle Covid-19

Countries around the world are in uncharted territory tackling and managing Covid-19 outbreak. New rules and policies are constantly laid down to pre-empt and respond to the crisis. It is no different for the state of Sarawak, located on the Malaysian side of Borneo.

The Sarawak government's concerted effort to fight this pandemic outbreak came, rightfully from the top. The Sarawak Disaster Management Committee (SDMC), under the supervision of the Honourable Chief Minister of Sarawak, Datuk Patinggi Abang Johari Tun Openg, is chaired by one of his Deputy Chief Ministers, Datuk Amar Douglas Uggah. Key ministries led by their respective ministers, the State Secretary and heads of government department including state officers from the Federal government, meet seven days a week, at times with Covid-19 Chinese experts via video conferencing. The Chairman of SDMC conducts a daily press conference giving reports, statistics, new guidelines and policies.

At the onset, a strategic decision was made by SDMC to leverage digital technology to guide policy making and resource planning. As a member of SDMC, Sarawak Multimedia Authority (SMA), thus, took on this role to develop the necessary digital enablers.

SMA worked on three important goals of that decision; to monitor travellers' movement through all Sarawak's Points of Entry (POE), shaping data to guide policy makers in the form of heat maps and thirdly, to guide public confidence,

With the clock ticking, SMA and the development teams set out to roll out three platforms, drawing on resources from within the State. The 'Permission to Enter/Exit Sarawak' platform, a first in Malaysia, was built, designed and implemented within 24 hours. The mandatory e-Health Declaration + Digital Surveillance System took three days to complete. And finally, the customisation of the i-Alerts App for Covid-19 was rolled out in three days.

### Border Control

Sarawak has extra autonomy in the administration of immigration matters. This layer of border control has given the state a useful means to curb Covid-19 outbreak. Therefore, non-Sarawakians travelling to Sarawak during the enforcement period will now have to apply, remotely, for permission to enter (exit) via the respective Sarawak's POE. The Sarawak Immigration Department officers at the respective POE will then take the cue from this platform which is integrated to theirs, before letting a successful applicant into the state. On the other hand, while Sarawakians are



*Passenger showing his approval code to enter Sarawak at Kuching International Airport Immigration Counter*

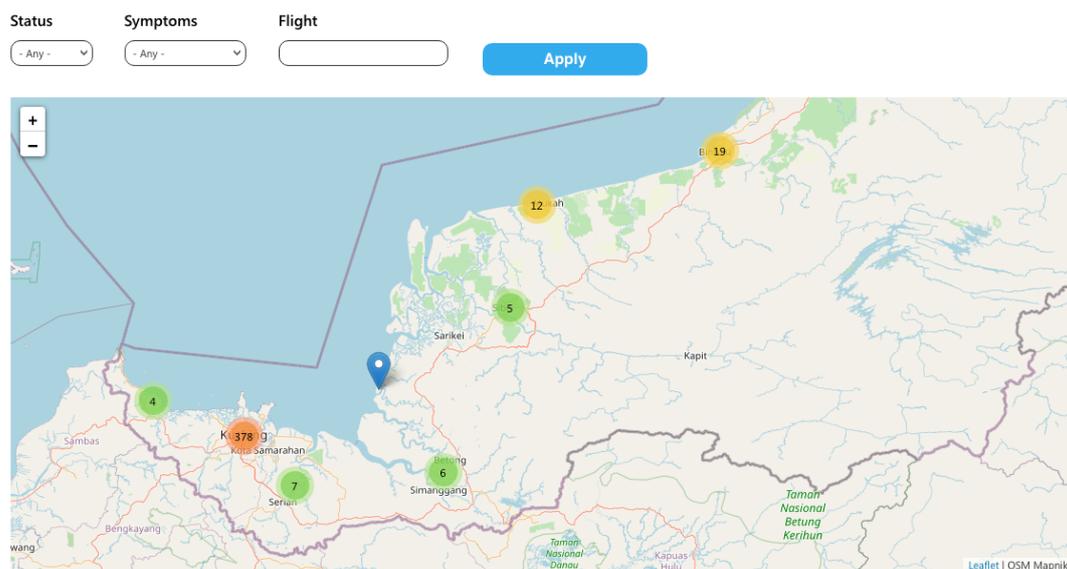


exempted from this entry process, they are required to apply for permission to exit the state. These respective end to end processes therefore have to be completed before the travel date.

The border monitoring continues with the e-health declaration process. Regardless of domicile status, all inbound travellers have to complete the e-health declaration form. Once at a POE, all persons will be issued a QR-coded wristband to wear based on the categories they fall under. No matter which category one falls under, every inbound traveller to the State has to serve a 14-day stay home notice. On a twice-daily basis, wearers are required to report their situation by scanning their wristband's QR code to submit a set of information. To ensure the process is followed through, daily reminder SMS messages are sent to wearers. Implicitly, wristband has a deterring effect on both the wearer and the public. Wearer can be barred from entering business outlets as they begin to enforce their own rules.

Effective risk communication is an important aspect of managing Covid-19 outbreak. In a period where uncertainty abounds, communicating advice and guidance is an important public health tool. Hence, via the i-Alerts App, subscribers are notified on latest news, charts, guidance and advice. On top of these, users can use the i-Alerts report function to tip off the authority of wristband wearer/s seen in public. The Sarawak Disaster Information FB Page is another touch point to listen to and engage the public with.

## Using Data



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*A screen capture of overview heat map used in the Digital Surveillance System*

At the end of the day, the all-important process of massaging and shaping data takes place. As much as digitalisation is key, the challenge has been in collecting consumable data from travellers. A case in point is in collecting actual mobile contact number other than one's own. The implicit outcome is it will complicate the contact tracing process



Nonetheless, with evolving ground experience, the team has been able to optimises their data collection effectiveness so that there is sufficient data value to shape. For eg; how strict are our border screening process seen from the shape of the graph?

When Malaysia imposed the Movement Control Order on 18<sup>th</sup> March to curb the spread of Covid-19, the SDMC leveraged data from the SMART City Traffic Light Control Center to evaluate the effectiveness of the Order in two cities and a town. By analysing traffic volume plying the roads on a daily basis, the Committee was able to appropriate resources.

There is no denying that the human element is a part of the sum total. While digital platforms are great enablers that scale, curbing pandemic outbreak requires cohesiveness. Data silos need to be broken down. By integrating datasets from relevant agencies, only then efforts like producing accurate heat map and predicting cases to estimate the capability of quarantine centers can be accurately done.

All told, Sarawak's digital journey to tackle Covid-19 has started on the right footing.

