

Thailand and Covid-19: Health vs Economics

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Thailand had the first case outside China and initially was predicted to become one of the countries worst hit by the pandemic. In mid-March government imposed a soft lockdown, followed by tight border controls, and active tracing. From early June, when cases reached around 3,000 and deaths were 58, domestic transmissions and fatalities effectively ceased. This success can be attributed to the “fortress” strategy, the quality of the public health system, and the public’s trust and hence cooperation. The impact on the economy and society, however, has been severe because of the economy’s great external dependence, particularly on tourism (40 million visitors in 2019). Government relief measures have been only partially effective, requiring supplementary private charity. The global economic crisis will undermine the model of economic growth Thailand has followed in recent years. No coherent strategy for managing this situation is yet in debate.



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[We updated the Covid Chronicles piece in late August for a book now in press in India. We are due to update it again by 1 December for a chapter in ISEAS *Southeast Asian Affairs 2021*.]