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Member News

- ✧ [Chey Tae-Won](#) of SK Holdings spoke at a memorial honoring the company's late founder and president, saying that companies should act as safety nets to protect society. He called on the firm to find opportunities amid crisis, in the spirit of the former executives, who started the business after the Korean War.
- ✧ [John McFarlane](#) of Westpac Banking Corp. was the subject of a profile in *The Australian* about his plans to transform the bank's culture by overhauling its approach to risk management, digitizing operations, and reforming its reporting structure.
- ✧ [Hiroaki Nakanishi](#) of Hitachi Ltd. told *NHK World-Japan* that Keidanren, the Japan Business Federation, which he chairs, would provide 120,000 masks for medical professionals.
- ✧ [Takeshi Niinami](#) of Suntory Holdings Ltd. spoke with *Nikkei Asian Review* about plans to source consumption data from a workplace vending machine-linked smartphone app, as part of a digital transformation that will see Suntory move away from the mass-marketing business model.
- ✧ [Penny Pritzker](#) of PSP Partners announced that the Illinois COVID-19 Response Fund, which she chairs, made its first distribution, of \$5.5 million, to non-profit agencies across the state.
- ✧ [Nazir Razak](#) of Ikhlas Capital was quoted in *Reuters* speaking about the company's plans to close its inaugural fund this year and the possibility that the pandemic could trigger an economic depression.
- ✧ [Satish Reddy](#) of Dr. Reddy's Laboratories Ltd. called on the Indian government to allocate more funding for healthcare and enact policies to incentivize exports and encourage innovation in the pharmaceutical sector.
- ✧ [Weijian Shan](#) of PAG spoke in an interview with *The Wire China* about China's economic recovery, arguing the country should pursue more fiscal and monetary stimulus. He also talked about his decision to shift his firm's investment away from fixed assets, and why he believes the pandemic will slow U.S.-China decoupling.
- ✧ [Dong-Bin Shin](#) of the Lotte Group was profiled in *Forbes* about his plans to build the conglomerate into an international chemical giant and how the pandemic could influence the details of that strategy.
- ✧ [Raghupati Singhania](#) of JK Tyre and Industries Ltd. was interviewed about his company's efforts to manage liquidity and cut costs during the COVID-19 crisis. He also [spoke](#) about the firm's aid for marginalized communities and the healthcare sector during the pandemic.
- ✧ [Jane Jie Sun](#) of Trip.com Group Ltd. spoke with *Bloomberg* about her decision to give up her salary in response to COVID-19, giving back to the community, and Trip.com's pro-women policies. She was quoted in *CNBC* noting she expects China's domestic travel industry to recover by the summer.
- ✧ [Teresita Sy-Coson](#) of SM Investments Corp. called on the Philippine government to allow industries in Luzon to begin operating at 50 percent capacity, arguing the extended lockdown had had dire consequences for jobs and the economy.
- ✧ [Yuanqing Yang](#) of Lenovo Group spoke about the company's plans to expand its data center business and its software and services units to meet the challenges and opportunities presented by COVID-19.
- ✧ [Jaime Augusto Zobel de Ayala](#) of Ayala Corp. was quoted in *Bloomberg* in an announcement that the conglomerate will divest from coal by 2030 and boost investments in renewable generation. He also [announced](#) that Ayala Corp. will consolidate its energy, water, transport, and logistics businesses to create opportunities in the infrastructure space, including in renewables.

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Summary of Asia Business Council Members' Group Call

The Asia Business Council held its first [members' group call](#) on April 28 to share insights from COVID-19 and discuss how to move forward. Members agreed that the overall agility of the response in many Asian countries stood as a testament to quick action on the part of governments and corporations alike. This offers lessons for future crises, particularly for the business community.

Asia Business Council Chairman Lim Boon Heng described new private-public partnerships to distribute masks and source much-needed hospital beds, and a Japanese member discussed how private industry is retooling to manufacture hand sanitizers. A Taiwanese member described the agile mobilization of a national pandemic response center and the harnessing of telecoms capabilities to send out public health SMS messages.

Many challenges remain. The economic outlook is far from certain, and concerns about fragile supply chains and heightened political tensions loom large. A Hong Kong member discussed the possibility that China may turn inward if external demand for Chinese exports stays low or Sino-U.S. tensions worsen. China-blaming may become a common tactic among governments disinclined to own up to their policy failures. That, or internal pressures, could push a Chinese leadership to flex muscles against Taiwan and Hong Kong, with unpredictable consequences for the region.

Asia's overall response stands in sharp contrast to the many stumbles in the U.S. and Europe. Despite some bright spots in the U.S.—collaborative research between universities and pharmaceutical companies, and effective leadership on the state and local level—the anti-globalist stance of the Trump administration means the world is not seeing the kind of effective global collaboration that occurred during previous pandemics. The U.S. federal government's lack of swift, coherent mobilization has left individual states on their own and the population at risk, while the president turns to fearmongering and xenophobia.

Members underscored the importance of working together through the recovery. A vaccine is crucial, as are therapeutic medications. China and U.S. medical researchers are collaborating on these challenges, despite strategic tensions, but formalized knowledge-sharing could support their efforts. So, too, could multilateral co-operation at the national level. As economies open up, countries need supplies and systems to guard against new outbreaks.

Ultimately, the world must restart international travel, entice people back into leisure activities, and put supply chains back into action to get the economic gears turning. Here governments and the private sector face some of the most difficult challenges. They must earn the trust of wary publics, who will demand proof that these activities are safe. And they must learn to operate in a new normal where old notions of supply-chain resilience may not be enough.

Israel-Asia Center Webinar with Executive Director Mark Clifford

Asia Business Council executive director Mark Clifford spoke as part of a [webinar](#), hosted by Jerusalem-based non-profit the Israel-Asia Center, on what Israel can learn from the Asian response to COVID-19. He discussed his recent opinion piece in the [South China Morning Post](#), in which he argued that Japan and the “four Asian tigers” of Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan have had unparalleled success in keeping COVID-19 deaths low thanks to their strong public health systems, transparent and accountable governments, and cohesive societies. This new “Asian miracle” is despite the fact that the countries earn mixed scores on public health-related metrics like smoking and obesity, he told participants of the webinar, which was covered by the [Times of Israel](#).

Gedaliah Afterman of the IDC Herzliya’s Abba Eban Institute of International Diplomacy argued that Israel should deepen its cooperation with the Asian tigers and open more communication channels with China, both official and unofficial. The crisis could ultimately support increased Israeli trade with the Asian tigers, he said, particularly if their economies bounce back from the shock relatively quickly.

Asia Business Council Member Reflections on Leadership in a Time of Crisis

As part of our *Leadership in a Time of Crisis* series, Asia Business Council members have shared their thoughts on navigating the COVID-19 pandemic, including support for employees, business partners, and their wider communities, and the challenges and potential opportunities that they see. The members’ companies operate in diverse industries and economies, but many agreed that the task of restarting economies while working to suppress a still-active outbreak is the central challenge facing governments and the private sector. The choices societies make will have an impact far into the future.

Priority goes to employees. Several members mentioned the importance of making mental health resources available during a crisis of this magnitude, even as physical health monitoring became a central concern in almost every workplace. Conserving cash was also key, and many are making hard choices about how to do so. Working from home became a new way of life: the need to improve communication through the use of new technologies quickly became apparent. This presents opportunities for some companies in the form of broader digitization initiatives.

For better or for worse, there will be no going back. While some members are optimistic about the recovery and a resurgence in demand, consumer behavior may be fundamentally altered by the crisis. Businesses that can translate that into innovation will benefit.

[William L. Meaney](#) of Iron Mountain told the Council he is pessimistic about the prospects of a V-shaped recovery given the difficulty of restarting global supply chains until all countries come out of the pandemic. But he finds the crisis has brought out a spirit of collaboration in the company that he aims to carry into the post-crisis period.

[Takeshi Niinami](#) of Suntory Holdings Ltd. spoke about his success in working with the Japanese government to amend regulations, allowing Suntory to start producing hand sanitizer. Moving forward, he plans to use the lessons learned from the crisis to implement digital transformation and increase the efficiency of staff functions.

[Weijian Shan](#) of PAG has been focused on ensuring portfolio companies have enough liquidity to weather the crisis. He noted that PAG has avoided permanent damage thanks to its conservative investment strategy, but he remains concerned about the situation in the U.S. and Europe.

[Jane Jie Sun](#) of Trip.com Group Ltd. discussed how she dealt with massive cancellation volumes and extended aid to struggling business partners at the height of the crisis in China. She also spoke about the company’s recovery strategy and how countries that have brought the virus under control can work together to restart tourism.

[Marcus Wallenberg](#) of SEB spoke about the difficulties facing governments trying to balance the need to control the virus with the long-term effects to society at large.

Upcoming Forum Dates

2020 Autumn Forum: Bangkok, October 15-17

2021 Spring Forum: Tokyo, March 25-27

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