

ISSUES ON THE LOGISTICS CHALLENGES IN THE PANDEMIC PERIOD

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Abstract

The newly spread of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) has placed the entire world in an unprecedented situation. Every country is fighting hard to slow down the spread of the disease and mitigate its impacts at the lowest level, country to country travelling is being monitored and strict rulings imposed, most of the inland cross-borders are being closed. The Covid-19 pandemic outbreak is first and foremost a human tragedy in history, it has affecting hundreds of thousands of people around the globe. Indirectly, It is also having a growing impact on the global economy. Regulations prohibit passenger embarkation and disembarkation at all gateways regardless of land, air or seas except under certain circumstances. Numerous transport hubs are being affected badly. Seaports are being closed on the daily basis around the world and numbers of ships has been denied entry are on the rise. This pandemic has causes a tremendous impact at the entire logistics sector, where Malaysia is not spared either, with 14 days "lockdown" on movement restrictions commencing 18th – 31st March, 2020. From March 18th (midnight) and for 14 days, the Malaysian government declared a national lockdown. All Malaysian are given permission to go out only for medical emergencies assistance, food or groceries need to purchase on the daily basis with time restriction given, thus, allowed or for certain catergorised work with standard operating procedures of social distancing are advised. The numbers of staff in office are restricted or with limited numbers allocated. The National public transportation system need substantially reducing the ridership, as for freight transportation, it is not affected by the measures. International freight transport is guaranteed and can be operated, but only transportation of all life essential goods could be prioritised. The second strict hen Movement Control Order (MCO) was announced on the 25th March 2020, another 14 days extended till the 14th April, 2020, due to the Government rates expectation numbers of patients curves has not been flatten. Tighter rulings were enforced with solely one driver is allowed to perform on their domestic's duties. This paper will solely focus on the logistics movement based on collective data and findings via the logistics industry players at the beginning stage of Covid-19 pandemic. Hence, it presents an exploratory study and gives the basis for more research on cooperation, coordination and collaboration between Malaysian logistics industry players and civilian enforcement agencies in humanitarian operations. The paper also written to be a research agenda for all researchers and academicians.

Keywords -- Coronavirus (Covid-19), disease, impact, logistics, pandemic

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INTRODUCTION

For centuries, the world has observed various pandemics throughout the history where some were controllable, a few more are considered disastrous than the others towards the humankind. Now, every nation around the globe are observing and facing a very tough time once again fighting an invisible enemy; the novel of Covid-19 corona virus. Originally, we discovered and observed the pandemic outbreak started from Wuhan, one of the province in China, in the month of December, 2019, and now, the pandemic has mushrooms and spreads rapidly around the world. Reference made by (Lei pan, et & 1, 2020) On January 7th 2020, the outbreak of Covid-19 was segregated and named as severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) by the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses (ICTV) in the wake of an outbreak of pneumonia of unknown cause in Wuhan city, The people republic of China. This pneumonia was named corona virus disease 2019 (COVID-19) by the World Health Organization on February 11th 2020. the COVID-19 outbreak has become a pandemic disaster that is threatening the global health, undermining the global trade and all aspect in economy, and totally destabilizing the entire societies around the world with hundreds of countries being affected.

Stating that in these difficult times, the ability for logistics deliveries services to deliver vital goods, cargoes including medical supplies and foodstuffs, will be central to responding to,

and eventually to find ways by overcoming challenges in this pandemic period. The spread of the Covid-19 outbreak has placed the entire world in an unprecedented situation. In order to slow the rapid spread of the virus and mitigate the impacts, long distance aviation travel is being banned by certain countries and borders are being closed. Non-vessel owning operators (NVOCC) have been forced to hold empty equipment longer than usual, incurring more detention and demurrage charges, chassis fees and repositioning costs, in addition, to possible interchange fees too. The entire transport hubs are being affected. Seaports as the main gateway are being closed and ships has been denied entry, not doubting, fighting the virus must be the first priority, but on the other hand, global trade should be practice in a safe, secure and environmentally friendly manner which must be able to continue, too. It is, therefore, crucially important that the flow of commerce by land sea or air should not be unnecessarily disrupted.

On Customs perspective, health and travel restriction measures also apply to customs office staff, resulting in possible delays in the processing of customs declarations, in particular concerning the customs clearance of goods subject to prohibitions, movement restrictions and presentation of original documents. Nevertheless, the safety of workers stationed at the front-line logistics environment should look upon. These are the people who usually far from home and family. Their own health and welfare is as important as that of anyone else.

In Malaysia, the logistics industry players are not being spare by facing challenges from all over the public agencies field where no clear rulings and indications by the Government were pen-downed and advises pass-downed to all related enforcement agencies during the pandemic periods, the movement of essential cargoes were not clearly stated during the earlier stage of the pandemic period which caused the entire supply and demand chain in logistics has been suffered. Based on researcher close relationship and linkage with the logistics industry, has managed to compiled and obtained actual issues of unhappiness from the industry players. The (MOT) Ministry of Transport of Malaysia received complaints from the industry players, NGO's for being slow in action to address all the necessary measures on the movement of goods from all the gateways through-out the country, unnecessary hefty demurrage charges were charged which port users need to bared, indirectly all costs will be eventually bared by end users, lots of import containers consists of essential and non-essential were detained or idling in all respective seaports, enforcement agencies were unclear with all the directions directed from the ministry, the rules and regulations directives were only posted to the industry player or representatives right after the 8th day of the lockdown period.

INDUSTRY FEEDBACKS & ISSUES

The Federation of Malaysia Freight Forwarders (FMFF) representing more than 1300 company members nationwide request for clear directions and guidelines on the 23th March, 2020 from the Government whether the logistics services, which includes all land cargo transportation and warehousing services are deemed as essential services. There have been several contradicting statements, media statements, guidelines issued by various ministries that the FMFF cannot properly answer or advise to all their members whether they can operate or otherwise.

The situation has further aggravated by all sort of actions and numerous different interpretations by the enforcement agencies such as Customs department, the Road Transport Department and Police personnel whenever they stop their vehicles and lorries loaded with cargoes or some incident were directed all offices must be close.

FMFF have written to the Ministry of Transport and Ministry of Home Affairs to confirm whether logistics movements are essential services, and sadly, the FMFF have not receive any reply from all mentioned Ministries. Port Klang Authority is in agreement that logistics services are essential services but the actions of enforcement agencies seemed to suggest otherwise.

FMFF member's Lorries with cargoes have been stopped and were told to abide by the following by the Police manning roadblocks: the strict orders were given as;

- i) Driver must have work travel pass and provide proof that they have gone to Government clinics/hospitals for testing of covid-19, with the necessary endorsement/stamp by the clinic/hospital.
- ii) Drivers/companies need approval from all related enforcement agencies to transport or carry their goods, and nevertheless,
- iii) Strictly apply only medicine and food can be transported.

These confusing and contradictory actions and requirements are overwhelming and contrarian to the announcement by the Malaysian International of Trade & Industry (MITI) on the approval for logistics services rendered to manufacturers of essential goods and non-essential goods recently which has been approved by MITI.

FMFF then received an announcement by the Minister of Defense that FMFF members need to apply for work travel passes to be issued to staff to travel to work. FMFF have written to both Ministry of Transport(MOT), also forwarded to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) for approval to issue work travel passes to all FMFF members' and staff to travel to work and again, no news received any reply from these 2 agencies.

Hence, goods that have been imported before implementation of Movement Control Order (MCO) have arrived at the ports. Once discovered these goods are not under the approved list, they are barred or restricted to moved out from the ports. In such situation, every single container that being barred or banned from cargo delivery to all respective importers will incur demurrage charges from shipping lines, nevertheless, with storage and removal charges from ports too. This eventually will add up to the final extra burden costs of the delivered goods to manufacturers and importers. At the end of the day, the final costs are consumer bears all these additional costs and manufacturers may face disrupted production schedules, worst still is the losses of market-share. Similarly, exports of non-approved or non-essential goods cannot be sent to ports for shipment, this will be resulting in cancelled of contracts and loss of business. Based on Malaysian cargo index and statistics, essential goods only make up about 20 to 30% of total cargo throughput in most of the seaport gateway nationwide. FMFF stressed that it would not be worth to risk the health and lives of their member's staff to clear this small volume of cargo by hassling their member's staff or drivers when encounter problems at every roadblock. FMFF members also being ordered to sanitize and clean their offices on the daily basis and this eventually add to more people coming to office.

Another scenario FMFF highlighted was regards to all seaports storage capacity may not be able to cope with a large number of undelivered or idling containers in port container yards, referred to FMFF member's experiences, there would be huge backlog containers to clear from the ports after the MCO. With non-essential goods making up to nearly 80% of the total cargo volume, the huge volume of undelivered cargo would start a huge backlog and its consider as a potential time bomb that would causes bad affects towards port daily operations, in terms of efficiency and the handling capacity.

We need to bear in mind, Logistics is an essential service that underpins the national economy. It is a manufacturing related activity and the nexus between manufacturing and logistics is clear.

FMFF and their members seek all related enforcement agencies to look upon the problems issues seriously by consideration on all the conflicting and contradicting guidelines, harassment from enforcement agencies and the slow or no response from the relevant Ministries that we have submitted our issues, FMFF may be compelled to advise to all its members to cease operations immediately. Until the Government is able to approve and facilitate the operations of the logistics industry.

Notwithstanding the above, FMFF members will still facilitate clearance and transport of medicine, medical products, foodstuff and any other products deemed to be very essential to the country by land mode during the lockdown period from 18th March until 14th April, 2020.

Look upon other related agencies, clearer guidelines were stated clearly from the Malaysian Maritime Department, example based on ANNEX II, covid-19, Marine Department Malaysia Further Instructions;

1. All passenger cruise ships are PROHIBITED from entering any ports in peninsular Malaysia, as well as seaports in the east Malaysia of Sabah and Sarawak.

2. Any ship entering any ports in Malaysia within 14 days from the date of its arrival in Malaysian waters, from China, Italy, South Korea, Iran, or Japan, all ships are required to undergo port screening inspection by the Port Health Officer, and ensure to comply with the quarantine and isolation procedures set by the Ministry of Health of Malaysia, all are subject to approval from the Port Health Officer.

3. Foreign seafarers are NOT ALLOWED or prohibited to sign-off or going ashore, and also in any Malaysia ports land area and water.

4. All ships seafarers are NOT ALLOWED to have newly sign-on for ship's duty, in any Malaysia ports and water.

5. As for Malaysian seafarers, constantly developed COVID-19 symptoms, from Malaysia flagged vessels are ALLOWED to sign-off and disembark at the DESIGNATED PORT. Online sign-off can be done at the nearest respective Port Office.

6. All Malaysian seafarers must carry out thorough pre-screening test by the Port Health Inspector on board of the ship or port health office, all mentioned subject to any instructions provided by the Port Health Officer.

7. To all foreign seafarers:

a) Who are currently serving on board of Malaysia flagged vessels and not contracting any symptom of COVID-19 symptoms, or not a COVID-19 suspect, have not been ashore at China, Italy, South Korea, Iran, or Japan within 14 days, are ALLOWED to carry on with their normal service or work on board of Malaysian flagged vessel;

b) PROHIBITED to change vessel in any Malaysia ports and water;

c) Any seafarers who already possessed COVID-19 explicit symptoms and considered as COVID-19 suspect, or maybe have been going on land in China, Italy, South Korea, Iran, or Japan within 14 days, they MUST UNDERGO proper health screening and isolation on board of the ship as mentioned in ANNEX I, MSN 05/2020.

8. All seafarers of Malaysian nationality:

a) Assign or work on board Malaysia flagged vessels but not having any COVID-19 symptoms, thus, not a COVID-19 suspect, have not going ashore at China, Italy, South Korea, Iran, or Japan within 14, they are ALLOWED to continue their service on board;

b) Seafarers who are having explicit COVID-19 symptoms, or confirmed as COVID-19 suspects, or have been going on-land at China, Italy, South Korea, Iran, or Japan within 14 days, strictly MUST UNDERGO further health screening and isolation only at the designated seaport, and their contract working on the named ship shall be terminated.

9. DESIGNATED SEAPORT is the International Port of Kuala Linggi, Melaka.

10. This Annex is updated on 18th March 2020, and shall be read alongside MSN 02/2020.

FOREIGN COUNTRIES PRACTICES & GUIDELINES

Based on foreign articles on the impact of freight and passenger transport of the global Corona virus (COVID-19) outbreak, especially references from all the European union countries, starting from Albania dated on the 14th March 2020, As of 15th of

March 2020, all Albanian terrestrial borders will be closed for any passengers' transport.

Cargo transport are given Green light to move, but subjected to medical checks to all assigned drivers.

Please take note that the border crossing from Blato and Shepchshte-Trebishte (Debar) is already completely closed or shut down for any kind of traffic.

Azerbaijani regulation stated on the 10th March 2020; Good transport operations between Azerbaijan and Iran is now normal. Accompanied road transport (complete truck combinations with truck driver and assistant driver) are allowed to cross the border. Passenger transport is still restricted.

Belarus dated 13th March 2020, all foreign and Belarusian citizens entering the territory of the Republic of Belarus through border crossing points are subject to a continuous primary sanitary and epidemiological control.

People arriving from countries with un-favourable epidemical situation (currently it is from China, Iran, Italy, South Korea, Singapore, Thailand and Japan) must be tested (the test result is available in 12 hours). In case of symptoms of a respiratory illness (fever over 37.1 ° C, coughing and others), people arriving from these countries are isolated and hospitalized.

Currently, there are no restrictions on the movement of all heavy commercial vehicles, goods and passengers across the borders of the Republic of Belarus (except for the sanitary checks and the filling on an arrival form).

Hotline telephone number of the Republican Center for Hygiene of Epidemiology and Public Health: +375 (29) 156-85-65 (working days from 8:30 to 13:00 and from 13:30 to 18:00. Source: BAMAP (Ministry of Health and the State Border Committee of Belarus)

Belgium dated 19th March 2020, restriction regulations are; The Belgian Government has taken certain additional measures on 17th March 2020, by introducing further measures to encourage teleworking and closing all non-essential stores (only food stores, pharmacies, and newspaper stores remain open), this is to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus (COVID-19). The temporary measures are valid until 5th April 2020 and the objective is to mitigate public social gathering.

All these measures have no consequences for all international freight drivers and transport. However, there are numerous companies have been forced to close because they are unable to respect the social distancing rules, or perhaps are short of material to continue the production process.

As for passenger transport, the social distancing measure of 1.5m must be respected regardless of every types of collective transport of passengers still operational and allowed, this including public rail and bus transport. In line with the advice regarding unnecessary journeys abroad, the entire coach services are remain in a lockdown phase. As for education sector, such as schools have been closed, all related public transport system has been suspended, apart from schools requiring transport to respect their duties of day care for children from families working in key roles, such as health care workers or all uniform bodies working at the frontline. The professional training program for driving licenses or upgrading continuous education, and even MOT control and operation have been suspended and appropriate measures are taken to waive the potential validity violations. As for Relieves measures, the Minister of Transport of Belgium announced a temporary and complete tolerance concerning the enforcement of driving, rest

times for all truck drivers involved in the transportation of food, medication and any form of life essential cargoes to shops and pharmacies. This particular measure has been taken on the basis of article 14.2 of the EU Regulation 561/2006 and applies from 14th March 2020 at 00:01 until 31st March 2020 at 23:59.

China being the first country contracted with this COVID 19 epidemics, no doubt that the epidemics control on domestic cases is stabilising in China, but the Government is maintaining stringent measures to avoid cases imported from foreign countries. Strict regulations and guidelines remains at a few borders connecting with part of EU countries as well, borders with Kyrgyzstan are closed, - At borders with Tajikistan, Chinese Customs authority only allow Chinese citizens to pass. At the borders with Kazakhstan, from China side, no compulsory quarantine requirements on non-Chinese truck drivers allowed entering into China, but regular business operations have been severely affected: Alashankou BCP has resumed TIR transport since February, the operations are normal, the auxiliary services in Khorgos have shown signs of re-opening for business. However, due to the control measures applied in Kazakhstan, very few operations are taking place, at Erenhot, bordering with Mongolia, freight operations are possible, but normal operations have been severely affected. Quarantine measures are compulsory for all those entering into mainland China. Truck drivers are exempted from all quarantine control. At Manzhouli, bordering Russia, freight operations are possible as normal, but normal operations have been severely affected. Quarantine measures are compulsory for those entering into mainland China from 34 countries. All Russian drivers are exempted from the quarantine control.

Regards to a notice published on 20th March by The State Council of the People's Republic of China, China has in-fact suspend all cross-border road transportation for passengers, and also hold back inbound and outbound tourist services as part of a broader effort, this is to curb the importation of novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) cases from 20 March until further announcement

Sources: National Immigration Administration, Chinese Customs Agencies, references also can be found @ <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202003/20/WS5e740aa9a31012821728095b.html>

From Germany perspective, being one of the most advance, modern and leading country in the world, with strong bilateral ties with the People Republic of China, the guidelines of logistics freight movement and passengers starting from the 16th March, 08:00, Germany has started re-introducing temporary border controls at the borders with Austria, Switzerland, France, Luxemburg and Denmark. All road access at these borders must be performed via dedicated border crossings.

The following groups of personnel may allowed to continue to enter German territory via the borders with Austria, Switzerland, France, Luxemburg and Denmark:

- * Individual with German nationality.
- * Individual with a German residence permit. - Person with permanent residency in Germany.
- * All professional commuters, regardless of their nationality - proof of commuting status should be carried e.g.; template for a commuter certificate here.
- * Seasonal workers, EU parliamentarians and accredited diplomats may also allowed to enter the country.
- * Individual who have urgent relevant reasons for entry - proof must be shown of urgent reasons should be carried, and the Federal Police will make individual decisions at their discretion.

In addition to the above stated, and most relevant for our profession:

- *Cross border movement of goods remains guaranteed.

BGL is not aware of any cases where cross border goods transports have been refused entry into the land of Germany via the above mentioned borders.

The subsequent groups of personnel will be prohibited to entry onto German territory via the borders with Switzerland, Austria, Luxemburg, France, and Denmark:

- * Individual who do not belong to any of the above mentioned groups, not allowed to enter German territory.
- * Individual who show symptoms of illness, such as flu or cough?

Normally with such cases, the competent health authority will be consulted immediately.

Look upon United Kingdom, as one of the powerhouse in Europe, restriction guidelines and measures dated on the 17th March 2020, the British Government has taken some new measures as well, which include advising all British nationals, if possible, against all the non-essential international travel.

But the advice against non-essential travel is not intended to apply to international and domestic freight transport. Thus, haulage services continues under no extra restrictions in the UK officially. The Department for Infrastructure (DfI) has issued notification of certain relaxation on the drivers' hours' rules for Northern Ireland. The stated temporary relaxation applies from 00:01 on Wednesday 18th March 2020 and will run until 23:59 on Thursday 16th April 2020. Initially, this will apply for all truck drivers of vehicles involved in the delivery of groceries, non-food (personal care and household paper and any form of hygienic and cleaning products) and over the counter pharmaceuticals when undertaking the following journeys:

- * From all distribution centre to stores (or fulfilment centre).
- * From manufacturers or suppliers to all designated distribution centre (including backhaul collections).
- * From manufacturer or supplier to stores (or fulfilment centre).
- * Between distribution centres and smaller transportation hub trucking.
- * Transportation hub deliveries to assigned stores. This exemption does not apply to truck drivers undertaking deliveries directly to consumers. Operators are reminded that such relaxation does not apply, or excuse them from their duty of care to truck drivers and that truck drivers should not be allowed or required to drive whilst tired.

The United Kingdom Department for Transport (DfT) has introduced a temporary and limited urgent relaxation of the enforcement of EU drivers' hours' rules when they operates in England, Scotland and Wales. It has also introduced certain temporary and limited urgent relaxation of the enforcement of GB drivers' hours' rules in England, Scotland and Wales.

This also applies to those undertaking carriage of goods by road in all sectors, between 00.01 on Monday 23rd March and 23.59 on Tuesday 21st April (continuation of the relaxation past 5th April is subject to review).

The EU drivers' hour's rules can be temporarily relaxed as follows:

- a) Replacement of the EU daily driving limit of 9 hours with one of 11 hours.
- b) Reduction of the daily rest requirements from 11 to 9 hours.
- c) Lifting the weekly (56 hours) and fortnightly driving limits (90 hours) to 60 and 96 hours respectively.
- d) Postponement of the requirement to start a weekly rest period after six-24 hours' periods, for after seven 24 hours' period; although two regular weekly rest periods or a regular and a reduced weekly rest period will still be required within a fortnight.

e) The requirements for daily breaks of 45 minutes after 4.5 hours driving replaced with a break of 45 minutes after 5.5 hours of driving.

Drivers must not use relaxation 'a' and 'd' at the same time. This is to ensure drivers are able to get adequate rest. DfT guidance can be found here.

Starting from Monday the 23rd March all road user charging schemes in the capital will be temporarily suspended until further notice. This includes the Congestion Charge, the central London ULEZ and the London-wide LEZ

CONCLUSION

No doubt that the World Health Organization (WHO) only finally declared the Covid-19 outbreak as a pandemic on 11th March, 2020, many countries around the world especially EU has prepared with guidelines and regulations right after the declared announcement, clear indications actions has been taken within 1-2 days in order to mitigate issues of unhappiness from the logistics sectors. If we compared to the rest of the world, where 114 countries and all continents except Antarctica, have reported cases of the Covid-19 have arisen drastically, as here in Malaysia, still considered as in the early stage of the Covid-19 outbreak during this period, started with only 161 confirmed cases at the beginning stage. The number of cases will eventually continue on an upward trend, without delaying, the Government stepped in to change its strategy, moving from containment to mitigation. This was when all industry was caught red-handed and various measures outlined by the Malaysian Government were not clearly guided, it has causes many confusions and contradicts voices out from the field. Containment measures, is aimed at prevent the disease from taking charge, are broadly in line with those of other European countries at a similar stage in the outbreak, encompassing early detection, isolation, and care of people already infected, of course, with careful tracing and screening of their contacts. During the mitigation period, the main objective of the Malaysian Government looking for is social distancing, avoiding visits at large crowds' area, totally lockdown of schools, from primary level to the highest institutions, working from home and totally stopped or reducing unnecessary long distance inter-state travelling, but what happen to all logistics movement? No doubt, that Europe has also become the epicenter of the COVID-19 outbreak, with one-third of globally reported cases now stemming from the EU region especially Italy and Spain. Italy and Spain has recorded as one of highest epicenter now, total logistics movement on both countries are badly affected, to compare with other nations such as Germany and certain part of the Scandinavian nations, preparation on logistics movement has been prepared ahead and not much affecting on their industries, no doubt that every country, with no exceptions, need to take their boldest actions to stop or slow down the virus threat. Yet, the government ministry must play the significant roles by advising their logistics sectors ahead on the measures and categorised the cargoes urgency. Logistics movement shouldn't be affected, as during the lockdown period, essential and non-essential cargoes should be treated equally and fairly, we reckon that many economies will fall into recession. Which is unavoidable, as we need to continue fighting the pandemic, while at the same time increasing efforts to be able to restore economic normality as fast as possible when the outbreak war ended, in this beginning stage of Covid-19 pandemic, focusing on Singapore, a small nation in the ASEAN region, it could be useful and informative for many countries: having learned lessons from the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) epidemic of 2002-03, Singapore has so far managed the Covid-19 outbreak well, with rapid testing of suspected cases, clear public health messages from the outset, regardless to individual citizen and all sectors including the most important logistics sector, and by individuals taking action to protect themselves and others, most importantly now, possibly no mitigation on logistics movement,

strict enforcement rulings and pre-notification advises should be given to all logistics players in Malaysia.

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After leaving my industrial career in maritime shipping for the past 29 years, and through-out my academic career for the past nine and the half years, shamefully address, only a few articles or journals has been scribble, simply due to high numbers of teaching hours and students, extra hours were assigned on coordinating student's activities and etc. Thanks to the chance given during this nation pandemic lockdown period, I would like to thank to my close friend Prof. Stoller, from DHBW Germany, for all the assistant given by providing useful logistics sources from the EU, Mr. David from COSCO shipping, Johor Bahru branch, on the latest updates from the Malaysian Logistics industry, and nevertheless, my beloved family and especially daughter Joelle, for not disturbing me, allowing to completed this write-up on time.

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