

HEED NATURE'S WARNING

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Environmental Conservation, Sustainable Development, and EIA

The activities of homo-sapiens are often toxic. They interfere in nature's design to sustain life. We are predators destroying the veritable life cycle of nature of which homo-sapiens are a very small part. The viruses that we have had to combat: MERS-COV, SARS COV 2 in the past are a warning to us. We must mend our ways or perish. That is the message.

[COVID-19](#) has already taken over 50,000 lives globally. This number will increase. While we await the vaccine, the availability of which is reportedly 12-18 months down the road, we will have to take preventative measures to limit, as much as possible, loss of more human lives.

The virus has had its unintended consequences. With human activity at a standstill, the silence of our cities has emboldened animals to move away from their constricted habitats. In the last 10-12 days, deers, sambars, neelgais, leopards are relishing our incarceration. Rapid urbanisation has limited the space for animals. We are witness to Kashmiri goats sauntering on the streets of Wales. Birds chirping in abandon, a rare phenomenon, cheers us every morning. Different varieties flocking in the sky can be sighted. Woolly clouds floating across a blue Delhi sky is a welcome rarity.

Ambitious schemes of successive governments could not clean the Ganga. About Rs.5,000 crore was pumped in to do the job without any substantial outcomes. During the course of the lockdown, Ganga is healing herself. The three-four thousand devotees taking a daily dip in the holy river has stopped. There are fewer people at the ghats daily. The quality of water is good enough to be consumed but for the presence of bacteria. In fact, the river water is fit for bathing with dissolved oxygen levels upstream being 8.1 mg per litre. The closure of industries along the river, including 400 tannery units has helped. It is clear that the river can recover. If we act with speed, we may see the Ganga flow in its pristine glory.

Yamuna waters too sparkle. Several years of planning, huge allocation of funds did not produce the results we hoped for. But in a few days, the toxic foams have disappeared. Shutting down of industries has made all the difference. Blue stretches of the Yamuna are heartening to see. The Hindon river is showing similar signs of revival. The desire of human beings to bring more comfort to their lives has brought discomfort to all other species. Nature, in protecting herself, protects us. Our senseless destruction of the bounty of nature has paved the way for our own destruction.

Research has shown that the source of new emerging diseases is through inter-species transmission. Human coronaviruses are associated with respiratory and gastronomic diseases. Animal-related viruses also cause severe respiratory, zoonotic and virologic diseases in their hosts. Most animals carrying viruses – bats, pigs, cattle or poultry — are isolated from humans. Novel human pathogens emerge as a result of inter-species transmission. Studies have shown that inter-species transmission of animal viruses to humans is a permanent threat to human life. Of the 12 bat species examined by experts, it was found that the [coronavirus](#) identified with bats was responsible for emerging diseases in humans. We need more studies of these viruses in animals to protect the human species from future attacks. An analysis of public Genome Sequence Data from SARS COV-2 and related viruses clearly suggest that these viruses, through a process of natural selection from non-human hosts, jump to humans after the latter are directly exposed to the virus. As long as we keep consuming animals which host such viruses, the danger to the human race is real. Wuhan, the epicentre of this virus, may well be associated with its transmission from non-human sources to human sources in China.

The human race is under threat. Similar, perhaps more devastating threats, await us. Our survival is also dependent on how we meet the challenges of global warming. People around the world have become cynical about the intent of governments to meet these challenges. COP-25 in Chile also produced no results. The developed world is not honouring its commitments and emerging economies are polluting, like never before. The Himalayan glaciers, ice in the Arctic and the ice cover of the Antarctic are melting at an unprecedented pace. Unless this is arrested immediately, global warming will be irreversible.

We live our lives in comfort because we put our self before nature. The availability of clean drinking water, and the conflicts emerging therefrom, will be the next battlefronts. Global warming will impact agriculture, which in turn, will jeopardise food security. Our coastal areas will be inundated. Island states are likely to disappear. This will present a grave challenge to the economies around the world. Given the abysmal state of health infrastructures globally, it will be difficult to combat the onslaught of new viruses.

It is clear by now that If we threaten nature, nature will hit back, and in this battle, we are sure to lose. We need to change our ways. Elites around the world, for their and our selfish comforts, have exploited nature. Consumerism is now a self-destructive virus. We, the real predators, are a threat to nature's ways. Coronavirus is yet another warning for us to mend our ways. If not, the road to our extinction is inevitable.

The writer, a senior Congress leader, is a former Union minister

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