

Quarterly Viewpoint

FROM THE DESK OF RATTAN LAL

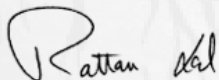
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Mother Nature Knows Best

COVID-19 has disrupted human activities as never before during the recent past. There have been drastic changes in human-earth interaction through decreases in gaseous emissions into the atmosphere, reduction in discharge of industrial effluents into the rivers and waterways, and decline in agricultural activities. These and other disruptions had strong impacts on atmospheric chemistry and air quality, concentration of pollutants and water quality, and mechanical disturbance and soil quality. Global daily emissions decreased by 17% in early April 2020 compared to that in April 2019. Annual emissions may decrease by 7% by the end of 2020. The trinity of soil-water-air, three components of the environment, benefitted from the shutdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Some positive impacts of the shutdown on the environment were reflected globally, but especially in developing and densely populated countries like India, such as cleaner water in rivers (e.g., the Ganges), reduction in smog and soot in the air so that Himalayan snowy peaks were visible from more than 100 km away, and appearance of wildlife in unexpected places, such as dolphins in the Ganges, flamingos on the Western coast of Southern India, and peacocks in abandoned schools. While nature benefitted, humans suffered because of increased prevalence of food insecurity. Indeed, prevalence of food insecurity increased globally between 80 and 130 million by the end of 2020.

Humanity must never forget some important lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. One, the invisible microscopic foe (coronavirus) affected all nations, regardless of their economic development, military power, education status, scientific skills, and global status. Mother Nature did not discriminate, and she exhibited no mercy to anyone who did not respect her power to discipline the disobedient and disrespectful. Two, while humanity suffered, nature benefitted. Nature's resilience is infinite. Three, humanity must create strong buffers between it and nature by returning some land back to nature. Four, it is important to redefine critical natural boundaries (the so-called "Lakshman Rekha" of the Ramayana Epic) that humanity must respect. Trespassing these boundaries can lead to drastic consequences to humanity, while nature will flourish.

Sincerely,



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