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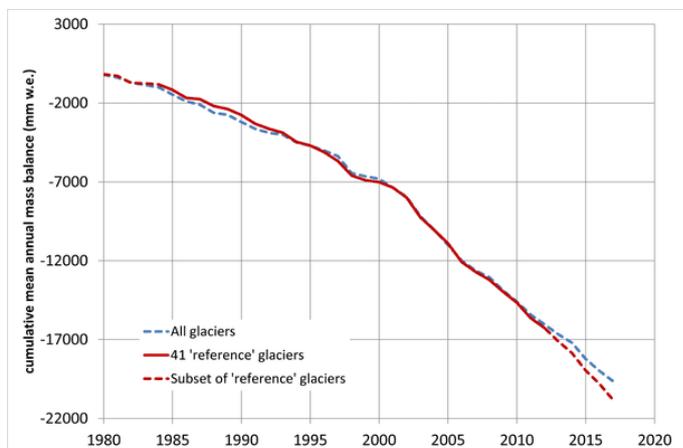
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WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

Reconnecting mankind with Nature

The pandemic ridden global community is all set to embrace *World Environment Day*, the annual flagship day that acts as a gentle reminder of the collective responsibility of our actions on critical environmental concerns. Established by the United Nations General Assembly and celebrated on June 5th since 1974, *World Environment Day* primarily intends to plug the gap between structural policy frameworks and the ecosystem's restoration. While the last decade has clearly experienced a cascade of imbalances, 2020 rings a bell for an exigent call for action. "2020 is a year for urgency, ambition and action to address the crisis facing nature; it is also an opportunity to more fully incorporate nature-based solutions into global climate action," said Inger Andersen, Executive Director of the UNEP

The changes over the course of time, however arguably inevitable, have not been borne out of the blue. We have iteratively come across reports of excessive consumption on behalf of the humankind. There is no denial of blatant facts that human activities have nefariously changed three quarters of the land surface and two thirds of the oceanic region. With an incremental excess in land pressure, 32 million hectares of forests have disappeared between 2010 and 2015 alone. Even the coral reef cover has diminished by half in the last 150 years.



Source: *World Glacier Monitoring Service*

While these pesky statistics are a direct implication of fierce industrialization, overpopulation, and a series of deliberately tumultuous actions, it brings us to a grave concern: the loss of biodiversity.

"Every breath of air we take, every mouthful of food we eat, depends upon a healthy natural world."

- Sir David Attenborough

Biodiversity is a complex, interdependent web, in which each member plays an important role, drawing and contributing in ways that may not even be visible to the eye. It forms the core of all possible life on land and below water. The expulsion of even a single member from this system could make hell break loose. The Sustainable Development Goals - Goal 12,13,14, and 15 in particular, aims to address and reduce such widening inequalities in the biodiversity chain.

The Environmental Performance Index published by the Yale University, USA on 4th June 2020 ranks each country on the basis of its performance on environmental protection and conservation. The Index is a weighted average of two broad indicators, Environmental Health (40%) and Ecosystem Vitality (60%). Environmental health is calculated by evaluating Health Impacts (33%), Air quality (33%) and Water and sanitation (33%) whereas Ecosystem Vitality depends upon the country's Water resources (25%), Agriculture (10%), Forests (10%), Fisheries (5%), Climate and energy (25%) and Biodiversity and habitat (25%). India is ranked 168 among 180 countries with an EPI score as low as 27.6. The table shows the top 7 countries of the world along with their EPI score for 2020.

Top 7 countries as per the Environmental Protection Index 2020

Country	Rank	EPI score	10-year change
Denmark	1	82.5	7.3
Luxembourg	2	82.3	11.6
Switzerland	3	81.5	8.6
United Kingdom	4	81.3	9
France	5	80	5.8
Austria	6	79.6	5.4
Finland	7	78.9	6

Source: Environmental Performance Index 2020

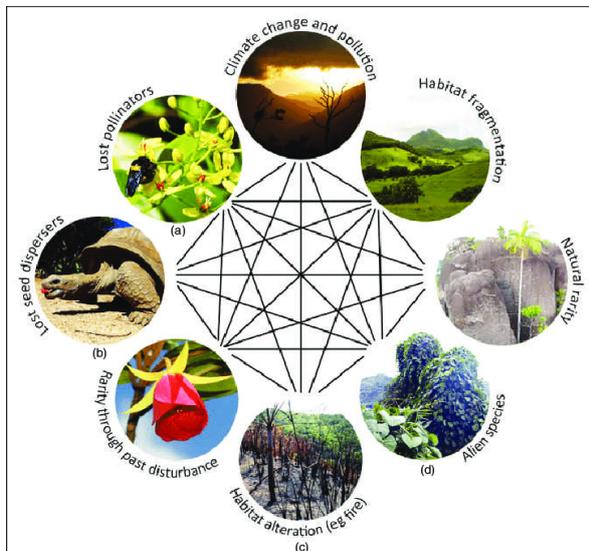
We need to acknowledge the web of chains that we're indebted to, for our own existence, as they are to us. All in all, it ought to be a global mandate to reimagine our equation with the web of chains in a way that puts the environment on the top of the pyramid of decision-making factors.

Agenda for 2020 – Sustain the Precious Biodiversity

Each year, World Environment Day garners public attention and amplifies the voices of millions of participating people of more than 100 countries. Columbia, one of the world’s “megadiverse” countries, has taken charge to host the World Environment Day in 2020, the theme of which is biodiversity. It is more important than ever to address the interconnectedness of our ecosystem; a slight alteration in the face of human development can cause disruption in the natural functioning of a miniscule sized species. According to the United Nations, roughly 25% of all animal and plant species are under the threat of global extinction.



Recent events elucidate the above concern and act as a trigger for global policymakers to not only act upon it but also ensure a smooth implementation of regulations. Last year, Brazil



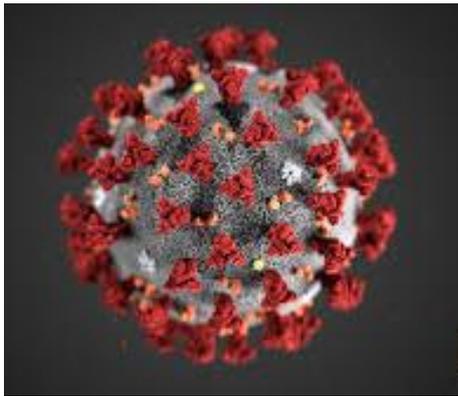
suffered a grieving loss of 1.3 million hectares of primary forest, owing to the bushfires. A similar bushfire outbreak in New South Wales, Australia swept millions of trees off their grounds and caught the local public unawares. The fires were unique because of how aggressive and widespread they became. The Indian State, Uttarakhand too, had to bear the brunt of rising temperatures recently in May, 2020 when 46 wildfires were reported in a short span of four days. To make things worse, locust infestations are rapidly spreading across countries, proving there could certainly not be a panacea to myriad different cases. Owing to this, UNEP along

with its partners is aiding countries in developing their National Biodiversity Strategic Action Plans.

Back in the Indian subcontinent, 91000 animal species represent 6.5% of world’s fauna, which include 60,000 insect species, 2,456 fish species, 1,230 bird species, 372 mammals, over 440 reptiles and 200 amphibians with largest concentration in Western Ghats and 500 molluscs. India’s boastful faunal wealth makes it even the more accountable for its conservation. The National Biodiversity Authority (NBA) has been on the frontlines of ensuring that the National Biodiversity targets are met. In an effort to sensitize people further, Día Mirza, the UN Environment Goodwill Ambassador started a series of dialogues, #DowntoEarthWithDee, that she aims to continue until the 5th of June.

COVID19 - How human disruptions became the cause of another deadly virus

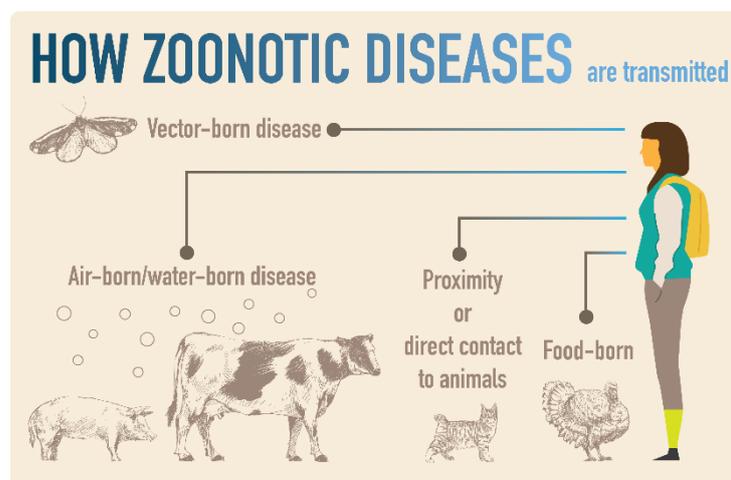
The wild and rapid spread of COVID-19 has taken a toll on the movement of people of different countries in the world. It has presented us with an immense challenge to fight for global health. Yet to be confirmed, DNA evidence and researchers suggest that the novel coronavirus is related to bats. The latest evidence suggests that perhaps, a pangolin, an endangered species,



victim of illegal trafficking might have given rise to the virus. Now it is suggested that it was the bat virus that may have spread to pangolins, and took an evolution from there. All the theories confirm the environmental contamination in the market which caused the infection within the people. It is considered highly plausible that the origin of this virus was one of the wet markets called Huanan Seafood Wholesale Market of Wuhan, China. Wet markets are places used to confine animals within small enclosed spaces and cages. Such setting leads to increased stress among animals, which start to harbour

new diseases. Thus, wet markets become the source of transfer of animal virus, contained in these reservoirs, to flow to the human population.

Wildlife population is put under pressure which becomes intolerable for them. Unlike domesticated animals, who are bred to succumb to traditional farming, wildlife suffers under such extreme conditions which leads to breeding of zoonotic diseases. Zoonotic Diseases refers to diseases caused by animals carrying harmful germs, which can spread to the human population and cause illness. Pathogens can reach humans through various ways- water and food contamination, direct and indirect contact with wildlife population, and vector-borne (bitten by insect/pet). An increase in spread of zoonotic diseases has been witnessed and various human activities are the reason behind this. Deforestation and rapidly changing land-use patterns, poorly regulated illegal wildlife trade, and the worst of all, climate change, which many of us refuse to believe is happening.



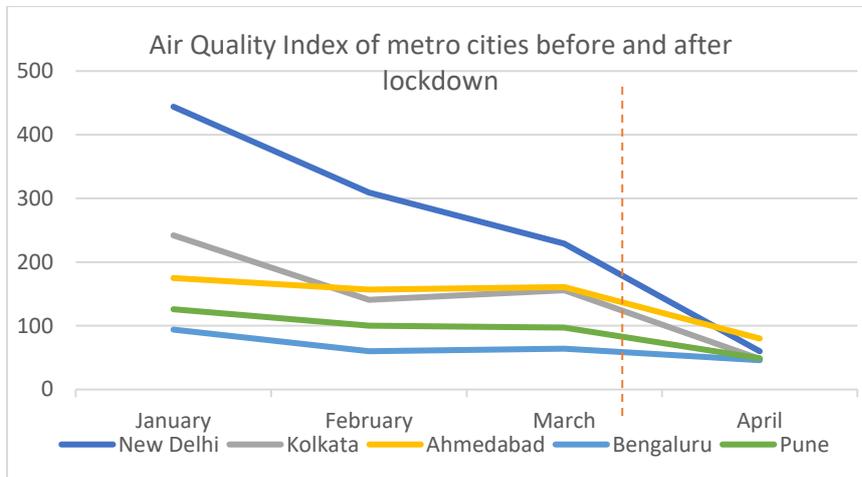
However, this is not the first time a disease likely to come from an animal has turned into a disastrous epidemic. Such zoonotic diseases have brought havoc to the world earlier and history is filled with examples- Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Ebola, even the measles. One of the major reasons which give confidence in believing bats as the origin of novel coronavirus is the earlier 2003 SARS pandemic.

The bats were hunted and eaten by the Chinese population and were brought into the market, which led to the spread of SARS, causing infection to other animals, including humans. Avian influenza (H5N1), caused by birds but can also spread to mammals, is a deadly contagious disease, which caused high mortality in different continents. COVID-19 is a signal from nature to make humans aware about animal preservation instead of exploiting them continuously for their needs.

Post-COVID - An Era of Social Change

United Nations' environment chief, Inger Anderson says, "Nature is sending us a message with the coronavirus pandemic and the ongoing climate crisis." Humans have pressured nature with irreparable damage and consequences and constantly looked away at the warnings from nature. Human behaviour has almost always been the helping hand in increasing the spread of deadly diseases, as is most likely the case of coronavirus. Destruction of forests and natural animal habitat has led to animals living closer to humans than ever, and thus, increasing the possibility of spilling over diseases to humans. Humans fail to recognize their inter-connectivity with nature and thus, forget to take care of it. Human health is associated with all the other organisms with them we share this planet. COVID-19 made humans realize the importance of balancing nature preservation and its exploitation. Prevention of any such further disasters will require cooperation from all in reducing global heat, controlling biodiversity loss and avoiding destruction to animal life, which is a feasible long-term response.

After bringing the entire country to a standstill for a good two months, coronavirus has definitely caused a positive impact on the air-quality level of the country. It is ironic that a deadly respiratory virus helped resolve or at least control another respiratory crisis. The only positive effect of this catastrophic crisis is that humans were given a chance to breathe low-carbon air. Factories and businesses being closed, shutting down flight travel and fewer cars on the road, lowered greenhouse gas emission due to huge reduction witnessed in the industrial activity has allowed nature to recover slowly. According to the data provided by the Central Pollution Control Board, the Air Quality Index of prime metropolitan cities was recorded to be 'healthy' (<50) for the month of April when the entire country was in a complete lockdown. For a city like New Delhi, which has recorded AQI levels as 'severe' (>400) in January also experienced 'clean and healthy' air during the lockdown.



Source: Central Pollution Control Board, Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change

We cannot become complacent with the ephemeral victory achieved by breathing in less contaminated air as once the economy is given a full-blown, there is a huge possibility of air condition being back to normal or worsening. The recurring lockdown imposed has shown us that air quality can improve when harmful emissions are massively reduced on a global scale. We must ensure that people do not revert to old behaviour and ignore ways to avoid climate change. The very least businesses and governments can do is consider different modes of operating things after the pandemic, which help increase the sustainability of the improved air quality.

“The choice is ours; the route is clean energy!”

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