

EDITORIAL

POISONOUS BREATHS AND CONTAMINATED POTIONS

Thinking about "Only One Earth"; Are we breathing poisonous air?

One Earth, Our Health, All have responsibilities

Clean air, clear blue sky, chirping sounds of humming birds, return of multi-coloured pheasants, and peaceful calm streets devoid of the traffic hustle and bustle were some hallmarks of the COVID-19 lockdown. This led to specific pertinent questions: Is it possible to create a society where everyone has access to clean air? Where do economies place a premium on health and happiness, where people have control over their health and the health of the Earth, and cities are liveable? Shall we think about our Earth? Should we consider the air we breathe as clean air or the water we drink as clean water? The World Health Organization (WHO) hosted the First World Health Assembly in 1948. Since 1950, the assembly declared 7th April to be World Health Day. World Health Day commemorates the creation of WHO and is used by the organisation to bring global attention to a topic of immense importance to global health each year. This year, on 7th April 2022, the WHO theme was 'Our Planet, Our Health'.¹

WHO has estimated 4.2 million deaths per year due to heart diseases, stroke, lung cancer and chronic respiratory diseases related to ambient air pollution? Almost 91% of the world's population, especially those living in the Western Pacific and Southeast Asian region, is facing air quality levels that exceed the WHO limit.² Environmental protection agency has described trends for particle pollution or particulate matter (PM) as 2.5 (fine inhalable particles, 2.5 micrometres or smaller) and PM10 (10 micrometres or smaller).³ Based on the air quality index (AQI) and PM 2.5, the report about Pakistan's environment is quite alarming. According to it, PM 2.5 is currently 11.8 times higher than the WHO annual air quality guideline value. Lahore with 163 is the most polluted city, and Islamabad with 110 is the cleanest city in Pakistan. Lahore has been ranked 6th in air quality and pollution after Delhi, Dhaka, Mumbai, Hanoi, and Kuwait, considering it in the "unhealthy for sensitive groups" category according to WHO.^{4,5}

Although, on the one hand, an unprecedented decrease in global economic activity was reported, on the other hand, lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic has reduced the population-weighted concentration of nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter levels by about 60% and 31% in 34 countries during 2020.⁶

Major reasons behind the drastic decrease in concentration levels of greenhouse gases, NO₂, PM_{2.5}, PM₁₀ and CO was shutting down of power plants, decreased transportation, reduced human activities and industrial operations.⁷ Although the picture painted in front of our eyes was short-lived, at the same time, it has left all of us thinking deeply about our "only one earth" and the safety of its environment. Leaving thought behind, "this is a pretty good model for what the world would be like if half of us were driving electric cars".⁸ A decrease in the concentration of pollutants over different regions in Pakistan also has assured regulatory bodies to implement mitigation measures to have future long-term effects on air quality while bringing appropriate alternatives for declining or refusing the anthropogenic activities.⁹ Clean and clear air welcomed by many with respiratory problems as a blessing but left a path clear for ozone due to the absence of harmful micro particles demanding some longer-lasting measures to meet air quality requirements according to WHO.¹⁰

Sustainable development goal 13 impulses to take action to combat climate change and its impacts on Earth along with other goals to make the 2030 agenda a reality.¹¹ What we decide today will have a longer-lasting impact in upcoming years. We need a better tomorrow where our generations to come can breathe air free of pollutants indoors and outdoors, where they are not forced to wear respirators or other devices. The theme "only one earth" on world environment day 2022 reminds humans to know the boundaries of planets and to bring transformative changes in policies to enable cleaner, greener and sustainable living. This is a matter of policy and individual choices where every individual is responsible and contributes well and harmful to the environment.^{12,13}

Human well-being and ecological sustainability are the goals of a well-being country's economy. Long-term investments, well-being budgets, social protection, and legal and budgetary methods are all used to achieve these objectives. Breaking these destructive cycles for the Earth and human health requires legislative action, business reform, and support and incentives for individuals to make healthy choices.¹

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