The southern Indian state of Kerala has come in for worldwide praise for its proactive approach to prevent the spread of the coronavirus which has caused a global pandemic. The state’s health minister, K.K. Shailaja, in an exclusive interview to Gulf News, discusses the measures that brought success.

GULF NEWS: In the light of the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, the ‘Kerala Model’ in the health care sector is getting worldwide attention. What exactly is this model? Is it linked to the ‘Kerala model of development’?

SHAILAJA: We are happy that the public health care system in Kerala and the effective intervention during COVID-19 pandemic is acclaimed worldwide. It has become possible because of the strong public health network nurtured for long in the State. The exceptional initiatives taken by the present government to fortify the public health system of the State has enabled us to deal with the present crisis effectively. Kerala has a unique and viable model of public health care system which is people-oriented and comprehensive.

Structurally, the Public Health System in the State is designed to have Primary Health Centres/Family Health Centres at the first level. They are local health institutions which not only provide treatments for minor ailments, but also conduct universal health care programmes like immunisation and impart knowledge among the people about disease prevention and healthy living. Services of one PHC are available for approximately 30,000 people in rural areas and 50,000 people in urban areas.

The primary level health network connects each and every person in the society. At the secondary level there are Community Health Centres, Taluk Hospitals, District Hospitals and General Hospitals with speciality treatments. At the tertiary sector, there are Medical College Hospitals with super speciality facilities and sector specific research and treatment centres like Regional Cancer Centre etc.
The present government has introduced an innovative and progressive mission in health sector, namely, ‘Aardram’, to make government hospitals patient-friendly by improving their basic infrastructure and services. It ensures quality health care with minimal waiting time for outpatient medical check-up and other investigation facilities. As part of the Aardham project, 170 PHCs were converted into FHCs. In the second phase, 504 PHCs will be converted into FHCs. Through Aardham project, the clinical facilities at the primary levels have been enhanced significantly.

The admirable health status of the State is the result of large scale public spending in the sector. Average 5.6 per cent of the state spending is in the areas of health and family welfare. The distinctive feature of the popularly acknowledged ‘Kerala model of development’ is on account of achievements in social sectors like education, health care, etc. This, along with the wealth redistribution programmes, has resulted in high social development indices, comparable to those of financially developed countries.

Many trace these advances to the exceptional steps taken by political forces in the past. Is land reform at the heart of this success?

Yes, land reforms greatly contributed in making Kerala a better welfare state. Indian freedom struggle had nurtured great dreams and hopes in the minds of the people for a sovereign and egalitarian India wherein wealth would be equitably distributed. In conformity with the above aspirations, the first popularly elected government in Kerala (1957-59) under the leadership of E.M.S. Namboodiripad had taken concrete steps to execute certain social development programmes such as land reforms, free universal education, free health care, etc.

The state has done a remarkable job in crisis management. In a recent public address you said from the moment ‘Wuhan’ was mentioned as an epicentre, you and the state authorities went on a war footing and took proactive steps. Please take us through this process.
We are yet to come out of the first wave and it is not proper to speak of deadly second wave. However, foreseeing such a situation, we are making adequate arrangements for addressing the challenge.

- K.K. Shailaja, minister of health and social welfare, Kerala, India

We have adopted a multipronged strategy:

(a) Testing of all persons coming to the state at the entry point itself for the symptoms of COVID-19. They were categorised and sent either on quarantine or isolation. All persons who reached the State after a particular date were asked to remain in self-quarantine for 28 days for those coming from high risk areas and 14 days for others.

(b) Strict monitoring of the situation was started since day one and 24x7 control rooms were set up in the State and at all district headquarters. Supervision of the activities is done directly by the health minister and the health secretary. Proper briefing to the media about the actual situation is done on a daily basis so that the fake news and rumours are not spread.

(d) Clear messages were given to people about social distancing, personal hygiene, usage of masks, hand washing, and complying the health directions, through awareness programmes, media, social organisations etc. A novel slogan ‘Break the Chain’ through social distancing was well received by the people in the state. This has created a collective will of the people to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Recovery of an elderly couple, aged 93 and 88 from COVID-19 on April 3 after treatment for 23 days in one of the Government Medical College Hospitals is a matter of pride to the State.

Tell us about health care centres in Kerala? This grassroot level facility has evolved into a model for others to emulate. How did such a communitarian public policy come about?

The erstwhile Travancore, Cochin and Malabar, the constituents later merged to form Kerala, had a history of public health care system, offering some treatment to poor people in certain areas. In the former two princely states there were location specific health care centres offering free treatment and medicines. Although these institutions offered limited treatment facilities, when the State of Kerala was formed, the legacy of the free health aid was protected and expanded. The first ministry in 1957 took very concrete steps to widen the network of primary health centres and strengthen higher level hospitals. An egalitarian approach can be seen in the health policy of that government. Although the duration of the first ministry was short, it laid down a solid foundation for public health which the successive governments could not violate. The left governments that came to power from time to time had taken special care to strengthen the communitarian health policy wherein the network of public health institutions are reinforced.

Did the earlier Nipah virus outbreak and the extraordinary success in overcoming that crisis help in tackling COVID-19? Are there significant differences between the two health crises?

Our previous experience in tackling the Nipah virus outbreak successfully has taught us very hard lessons but the situations related to the outbreak of Nipah and COVID-19 are fundamentally different. The infectability of the coronavirus [SARS-Cov2] is much more than that of Nipah. Although Nipah is more deadly than coronavirus, the scale of attack and the area of infection were lower in the case of Nipah. It was confined to two districts only and we could seal those districts and impose a lockdown within the districts and thereby prevent any spread elsewhere. Moreover, there was no ingress of virus from abroad. On the contrary, the COVID-19 attack is part of a pandemic and in many cases the disease has been brought to the State by travellers from abroad.

Undoubtedly our experience with the Nipah crisis helped in keeping the fatality rate less than one per cent of the infected persons; a record, compared to other parts of India and elsewhere in the world.
Worldwide they talk about flattening the curve, your thoughts? Epidemic modelling is a challenge, does such a strategy work?

Epidemic modelling is really a challenge especially when there is no medicine/vaccine available and all members of society are susceptible to the infection and the spread is rapid. There is a potential threat that the health system will be overwhelmed with the infected and eventually collapse. In order to overcome this threat proper plans are to be evolved whereby the curve can be flattened.

Is the worst yet to come, can there be a second wave? Some alarming statistics have appeared in the media, your thoughts?

We are yet to come out of the first wave and it is not proper to speak of deadly second wave. However, foreseeing such a situation, we are making adequate arrangements for addressing the challenge.

Do share some personal details. You started as a Science teacher, and now you are a cabinet minister.

I was born in Kannur district on November 20, 1956, and had my college education in Pazhasi Raja N.S.S. College, Mattannur and Visvesvaraya College, in Karnataka. I learned Biology in my pre-degree classes and studied Chemistry, Physics and Mathematics for graduation. My knowledge of biology has helped me to a great extent in understanding the changes in health science. Subsequently, I worked as a teacher at Shivapuram High School. I resigned the job in 2004 to become a full time political activist. Presently, I am a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of India (Marxist).

I have authored two books: *Indian Varthamanavum Sthreesamoohavum* and *China — Rashtram, Rashtreeyam, Kazhchakal*, both in Malayalam. My husband Bhaskaran master is a former teacher and political activist.

— Ravi Menon is a Dubai-based writer and thinker, working on a series of essays on India and on a public service initiative called India Talks.
A 9-year-old boy stares back at me through a small screen. I can see that he’s fighting back tears, and I let him know that it’s OK to just cry for a while.

We can talk when he’s ready. We do our deep breathing together. He says that he misses school. He says that everything feels wrong and he doesn’t know when it will feel right again. He’s not alone.

Moving my practice to teletherapy was the easy part. Helping kids of all ages manage their emotions, cope with profound loneliness and learn to navigate the frustration of this new world of distance learning is much more difficult.

Now is the time to figure out some techniques to decrease negativity in the home. In other words, stop yelling

Amid the changes caused by the coronavirus pandemic, technology keeps us connected, but without the safety of the school structure, countless children will suffer from anxiety, depression and loneliness.

Children worldwide are wrapped up in a grief they can’t begin to understand caused by a collective trauma with no clear end in sight.

While some kids have a support system, most do not. Mental health workers are trying to assist people of all ages with the hope that we can mitigate some of the long-term effects of extended lockdowns and school closures, but we need all hands on deck to protect our kids’ mental health.

Here are some ways parents and educators can support children and adolescents through this crisis.

Build coping skills
One thing kids and teens need to hear on repeat is that all emotions are OK. There is no right or wrong way to feel about this global pandemic. Parents should get in the habit of checking in with each child privately throughout the day to give them an opportunity to verbalise feelings and talk about triggers.

“These uncertain times are guaranteed to raise everyone’s stress levels — including our kids,” says Michele Borba, author of “Unselfie: Why Empathic Kids Succeed in Our All-About-Me World.”

“A simple, no-cost way to manage unhealthy emotions is to breathe deeply. Say: ‘Pretend you are smelling a flower, and then slowly blowing out a birthday candle.’“

Or have your child squeeze a ball of Play-Doh while you inhale together and count to four, then let go of the dough slowly while exhaling.

**MORE ON THE TOPIC**

[Coronavirus: How to combat stress and anxiety during a pandemic](#)

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This also works with a stress ball or by pretending to have a warm lump of clay in your hands. Adding this step to deep breathing helps release pent-up tension.

Other helpful coping strategies include visualisation, where the child gets into a relaxed position and the parent tells a slow, calming story rich with details while reminding the child to breathe.

Or try having children reframe thoughts (state their worry, catch the negative thought and flip it into a realistic, more positive thought). Or decorate an old shoebox with your favourite things and use it to put your worries in at the end of each day.

**Learn how to manage anger**

Now is the time to figure out some techniques to decrease negativity in the home. In other words, stop yelling.

Parents have a lot on their plates, and it is difficult to juggle work responsibilities, parenting responsibilities, keeping the family physically and emotionally safe, and running a distance-learning school.

Chances are, you feel like you might snap at times.

“It’s important to take care of yourself: good sleep, healthy eating, daily exercise, reaching out to friends, relatives and colleagues,” says Eileen Kennedy-Moore, psychologist and author of “Kid Confidence: Help Your Child Make Friends, Build Resilience, and Develop Real Self-Esteem.” “But despite all of that, you’re going to lose your patience with your kids. That’s a ‘when,’ not an ‘if.’“

Parents can come up with a signal, and a plan to implement when the signal is used, to give themselves the emotional space to work through stress and frustration.

One hand in the air, for example, can represent “Take 5,” telling kids to set a timer for five minutes of colouring, listening to music, or another quiet activity while parents engage in their own calming activity. Or create an emotional-temperature check-in station.

Color a picture of a thermometer to represent different feelings from calm (cool) to angry (boiling). Write a name for each family member on a sticky note and place your sticky note next to how you’re feeling.
If anyone places a sticky note at the boiling point, do a quick check-in to see what might help (deep breathing, exercise, walking outside) and give them space to cool down.

It’s normal to lose your cool at times of stress, and you can revisit the moment with your kids later. “Use these less-than-perfect moments to teach your kids about relationship repair,” Kennedy-Moore says. “Say you’re sorry, if necessary.

Adjust expectations

To hear social media tell it, this is a time when everyone should be enjoying every moment and learning new things as a family (a privilege not everyone shares).

And parents suddenly find themselves in the driver’s seat for their children’s education, expected to manage distance learning regardless of resources, finances, work schedules and childcare struggles.

Then there are the expectations parents have of their kids regarding learning, training for extra-curricular activities and being “productive” during this time away from school.

“Best expectations are always tailored to the child, slightly ‘one step more’ and delivered calmly,” Borba says. “Do a daily check-in on your requirements. What is the typical response from your child: acceptance and eagerness or resistance and behaviour flare-up? If the latter, chances are things need to be toned down.”

Remember that kids and teens are under stress. They are grieving the loss of their school year, sports season and other special events while trying to learn from home to move up to the next grade.

It’s overwhelming. Be realistic and flexible in your expectations to help your kids remain calm and focused.

Practice empathetic communication

There’s a lot we don’t have control over right now, and that can trigger negative emotions, but we can control how we respond to and communicate with others.
One thing I hear on that tiny screen day after day during my sessions with kids: I just want my parents to understand me.

While it’s a natural reaction to want to downplay the intensity of the problem or offer positive reassurances to gloss over a child’s negative thoughts, the best thing a parent can say is, “That sounds hard. I understand. How can I help?”

Kids of all ages tell me that they just want their parents to listen without giving them solutions or feedback. They simply want to feel heard and seen.

It can be difficult to resist the urge to fix things when kids are struggling, and parents often jump right into problem-solving mode. The good news is that kids tend to offer a lot of second chances.

As Kennedy-Moore reminds us, “Love means trying again.”

**Tap into technology, and stay connected**

Many parents spend a fair amount of time trying to manage and limit screen time. There are positives and negatives to technology, though, and now is the time to tap into the positives.

It’s still important to focus on balance and make sure that kids and teens are getting exercise and engaging in activities that don’t involve screens, but technology can be a source of support, connection and education.

“Teens report feeling lonely, anxious, and bored during school closures,” says Cheryl Eskin, program director of Teen Line, a confidential hotline based in Los Angeles.

Eskin suggests using technology to stay connected. “Our Teen Line message boards are a place for teens to feel less alone and find other people with similar struggles.” She also suggests the Teen Talk app for connecting with other teens; Calm and Head space for practicing mindfulness; and even TikTok to see coping tips from other teens.

For younger children, Eskin suggests the Happy Color app as a relaxation tool. And I like Stop, Breathe & Think Kids for mindfulness and meditation.

*Katie Hurley is a child and adolescent psychotherapist and parenting educator, and the author of the new book “No More Mean Girls: The Secret to Raising Strong, Confident and Compassionate Girls.”*

*(WaPo)*

**Newsmaker: Kristalina Georgieva in a hard place**

IMF boss is urging nations to pay whatever it takes to get out of coronavirus pandemic

*Published: April 17, 2020 11:33*
*Mick O’Reilly, Foreign Correspondent*
I’m not sure what was on the syllabus of the political economy department at the Karl Marx Higher Institute of Economy in Sofia as Bulgaria languished under Soviet rule in the mid-1970s, but Kristalina Georgieva spent a lot of time studying there.

Whatever was on the courses she attended, she did emerge in 1976 with a PhD in Economics and a Masters in Political Economy and Sociology.

Nothing then — not even her final thesis on ‘Environmental Protection Policy and Economic Growth in the US’ could possibly help her as the director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in what she faces now.

Barely six months into her new job and the 66-year-old Georgieva faces the prospect of saving half of the world’s economy from total collapse as a result of coronavirus.

The IMF director cautioned that global economic output could fall even further if the coronavirus takes a “double trip” around the world and countries get hit by a second wave of new infections.

If ever there was need for a course combining Chaos Theory, World Economics and Global Pandemics, now is it.

World’s lender of last resort
As leader of the world’s lender of last resort, Georgieva is already anticipating things to be bad — very bad.

She warned earlier this week that 100 of the organisation’s 189 members — half of which are low-income and developing countries — have already contacted the IMF.

With widespread lockdowns and business shutdowns roiling the global economy, more than half of the world has already asked the IMF for a bailout, Georgieva told CNBC.

“This is an emergency like no other,” the IMF director said. “For that reason, we are providing funding very quickly.”

The IMF has a $1 trillion war chest to dole out emergency funding to its member countries as they try to contain the spread of coronavirus and mitigate its economic impact.

Her comments came after the IMF said on Tuesday it expects the global economy to contract by 3 per cent this year, stressing that international markets are hurtling toward the “worst recession since the Great Depression.”

**Double trip around the world**

And the IMF director cautioned that global economic output could fall even further if the coronavirus takes a “double trip” around the world and countries get hit by a second wave of new infections.

Just days earlier, Georgieva had warned the economic fallout from coronavirus was already “way worse than the global financial crisis of 2008.”

It’s a daunting baptism of fiscal fire for the woman who succeeded the elegant and high-profile Christine Lagarde who left head of the Washington-based lender that was set up in the dying days of the Second World War.

Then, the IMF was tasked with putting measures in place to rebuild the world’s economy from the chaos of conflict. Now, 75 years on, it faces another Herculean task to rebuild the world’s economy from the chaos of Covid-19.

So far, the message from Georgieva and the IMF is to spend whatever it takes to fight the coronavirus pandemic and ignore the damage for now that national support packages and programmes will inflict on precarious and fragile public finances.

“Spend what you can but keep the receipts,” Georgieva said, in a clear warning to countries that there was a risk that a chunk of the $8 trillion (Dh28.5 trillion) already committed would vanish as a result of corruption. “We don’t want accountability and transparency to take a back seat.”

When was the last time any bank told you to spend when you have to? No wonder the IMF views this economic crisis as even worse since the Great Depression. That’s at a macroeconomic level. On a micro-economic level, hold on to your money as best you can and tighten your belts. This is going to be one heck of a rollercoaster.

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**Exceptional times**
“Exceptional times call for exceptional measures,” she warned last week as some 100 countries had contacted her bank — and they wouldn’t have been inquiries to check on foreign exchange rates.

The IMF expects public finances to deteriorate in virtually every nation and anticipates a huge increase in budget deficits. In macro terms, that’s the difference between what states secure in tax revenue and what they spend.

In micro terms, it means you and I will be paying more in taxes, levies, fees and getting less for it too, as governments make up the shortfall somehow and sometime. Yes, death and taxes are the only sure thing. Increased death rates from Covid-19, increased debt rates from Covid-19, and increased taxes from Covid-19.

According the IMF, the US budget deficit is projected to more than triple from 3 per cent of gross domestic product in 2019 to 10.7 per cent this year; China’s deficit is estimated to almost double from 6.4 to 11.2 per cent of GDP; the UK’s deficit will rise from 2.1 to 8.3 per cent of GDP — the same as in Spain but slightly lower than Italy’s 9.5 per cent of GDP shortfall.

Here’s a sobering thought: Last year, for every $1 in circulation around the world — 83.3 cents of it was owed by governments. Just 16.6¢ is free and clear. Now, when Covid-19 is factored in, just 3.6¢ will be left. The remaining 96.4¢ on every $1 will be owed by governments.

And at that level of borrowing — Italy, for example already owes €1.33 for every €1.00 is has — there’s very little room for manoeuvre.

Now add in the fact that economies everywhere will also face weak demand for products around the world, lower commodity prices — oil is languishing around the $25 per barrel mark — and very uncertain conditions for months at least to come, and you get an idea of the task facing Georgieva.

At least the G20 group of developed and developing nations threw a six-month lifeline to more than 70 of the world’s poorest nations on Wednesday by agreeing to suspend sovereign debt payments until the end of the year, and urged private creditors to join the initiative on a voluntary basis.

Nothing, not even her stint heading up the EU’s budget department, could prepare her for this. Her, and everyone else as well.

Mick O’Reilly is the Gulf News Foreign Correspondent based in Europe

COVID-19: Why Dubai’s Digital Infrastructure Matters

We have minimised disruption by enabling the society to stay connected in coronavirus

Published: April 17, 2020 11:31
Ammar Al Malik, Special to Gulf News
UAE has a reputation as a leader in digital transformation and a catalyst for innovation
Image Credit: Gulf News Archives

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E-learning works — and we all must embrace it

Digital infrastructure has been a catalyst of the UAE’s economic growth and diversification for decades. It has stimulated innovation, unlocked potential and turned the country into an attractive hub for talent and investment.

Dubai’s smart infrastructure is now keeping our communities safe by enabling schools and businesses to swiftly and seamlessly adopt distance learning and remote working at a time when the world needs it most.

The speed at which this has been achieved is an accomplishment worthy of recognition.

His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President, Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai has praised the emirate’s digital transformation and robust infrastructure, which has made the country well-equipped to confront and overcome these headwinds.

Dubai’s digital infrastructure has enabled all of us to stay connected, avoid disruption and ensure continuity during the COVID-19 global pandemic. It has allowed schools to continue teaching and businesses to continue operating remotely.

The efficiency in which these measures have been rolled out reflects the UAE’s readiness and preparedness to rise above exceptional circumstances, such as those facing the world today.

Overcoming the headwinds
His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President, Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai has praised the emirate’s digital transformation and robust infrastructure, which has made the country well-equipped to confront and overcome these headwinds.

But the ability of Dubai’s smart infrastructure to empower schools and businesses with super-fast connectivity would not have been possible had it not been for the vision of our leaders to turn the UAE into a knowledge-based economy more than 20 years ago.

This ambition led to the creation of Dubai Internet City — the first technology hub in the Middle East.

Today, it is the region’s largest tech community, home to 1,600 companies from multinational corporations to SMEs and start-ups employing more than 25,000 people. But it is not alone.

The UAE has a strong track record of developing smart infrastructure to support the country’s digital transformation. We became the first country in the world to create a Minister of State for Artificial Intelligence, a role currently fulfilled by Omar bin Sultan Al Olama.

The vision to create a world-class economy also led to the inception of Smart Dubai, which continues to leverage emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, blockchain and data sciences to create effective and impactful change.

**UAE’s digital enterprise**

Dubai Internet City is just one part of the UAE’s digital enterprise that has collectively allowed the public and private sector to work closely together.

The software and technology developed by the Fortune 500 companies and home-grown start-ups in Dubai Internet City has enabled schools and business to follow guidelines set by the relevant government authorities on social distancing whilst simultaneously staying connected.

Companies such as Microsoft, Cisco, Oracle, Zoho Corporation and in5 start-up Munfarid have helped organisations respond rapidly to complex and challenging dynamics.

Their cutting-edge connectivity solutions have enabled organisations to react fast to an evolving situation, adjust day-to-day operations and maintain momentum.

Many of these businesses have made enterprise-level conferencing tools available for free for a limited time. In March, Zoho Corporation set up its Small Business Emergency Subscription Assistance Programme to waive fees for small businesses using its software applications.

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It has also launched a virtual productivity platform called Remotely to help businesses transition to remote working. It has been made free for all businesses worldwide.

Meanwhile, teachers across the country have deployed digital collaboration tools such as Microsoft Teams and Cisco Webex — a video conferencing tool — to create virtual classrooms.
Oracle is helping companies in the UAE navigate uncertainty with extensive online and cloud-based services ranging from supply chain management to enterprise resource planning.

Google, Dell, Hewlett-Packard, Accenture and IBM are also supporting the UAE with critical infrastructure. Globally, IBM has made its supercomputers available in the fight against COVID-19 to help researchers understand the virus, its treatments and potential cures.

Accenture, meanwhile, is helping businesses navigate the impact of the situation and make rapid decisions.

Technology from all of these companies is contributing to global efforts to beat the curve of COVID-19, which in turn is protecting jobs and the economy.

**Economic competitiveness**

The UAE has always strengthened its economic competitiveness and provided protections for businesses to ensure the country can overcome challenging times. The AED 256 billion economic stimulus package announced by the government has created the biggest financial firewall in the GCC.

It will support SMEs, mitigate uncertainty and reduce the cost of doing business. It also sends a strong message to the world that the UAE is prepared and ready to face these challenging circumstances and emerge stronger.

Many factors will contribute to the global effort to stem the rise of COVID-19. Our advanced digital infrastructure is one of them. The information technology sector is a modern foundation of the UAE’s diversified economy.

Schools, businesses, policymakers and private individuals depend on it more than ever before. It has been invaluable in these exceptional times.

The robust technological capabilities of companies who established their regional headquarters in Dubai Internet City have reinforced the UAE’s reputation as a leader in digital transformation and a catalyst for innovation.

Dubai’s world-class digital infrastructure will continue to play a key role in minimising disruption by enabling all sections of society to stay connected and safe.

*Ammar Al Malik is the Managing Director of Dubai Internet City*

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**Coronavirus: How Middle East can tackle future pandemics**

Countries with resilient economies in region were able to better confront the pandemic

Published: April 17, 2020 11:30

Osama Al Sharif, Special to Gulf News
Sooner or later the world will overcome the pandemic and life will slowly return to normality. It might take months but the threat of the novel coronavirus will be overcome.

What is crucial though, are the many lessons countries in our region are willing to learn from this unprecedented calamity.

There have been many predictions, some sombre others optimistic, about the shape of post-pestilence world from geopolitical, economic and social angles.

Humanity will adapt, as it has always done, to new norms. But the threat of a new wave of global viral threat must not be ignored.

As each country revisits its own experience in battling the pandemic, there will be a need to adopt a regional strategy to confront future health challenges.

The Middle East too has been stricken by the disease. Countries with resilient economies were able to confront the pandemic through capable public health infrastructures.

Transparent societies were much quicker in handling the crisis while closed societies were not.

**Politically divided countries**

But what is certain is that economically weak and politically divided countries presented a common threat to the rest.

For the region to recover and reopen its economies, every country must heal itself and be ready to interact with others. One stricken country will threaten others with infections.

Priorities will have to be rearranged. There will be a dire need to invest more into public health systems. While richer countries will be able to do so almost immediately, others will not.

This is why a new common approach and understanding to regional security will have to be reached.

As each country revisits its own experience in battling the pandemic, there will be a need to adopt a regional strategy to confront future health challenges.
Countries that had successfully acted and contained the spread, like the UAE, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and others, will have to document their efforts so that a new protocol in predicting, reacting and enforcing protection and containment measures is made available for others.

While some pundits talk about a new world order coming out of the pandemic, the reality is that we need to adopt a new humanitarian order, especially for our region.

One of the many lessons that need to be learned is that the disease is more likely to infect the poor, less privileged and socially unprotected people.

MORE BY THE WRITER

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By rejecting Trump’s plan, Palestinians should eye one state path

A new approach to social security, universal health insurance and societal solidarity is needed. It is as important as investing in schools, factories, ports and roads.

When society is hit the first line of defence are doctors and well equipped hospitals. No country, no matter how rich it is, is able to handle an epidemic without the right health infrastructure.

But a new humanitarian order goes beyond investing in doctors and hospitals. It should enable governments to provide health services to every citizen and while the economy is shutdown, it should provide necessary essential needs to every family under lockdown.

Failure of the League

One thing that was clear during the current crisis is that regional institutions were nowhere to be found. The Arab League failed to act and its relevant institutions were absent.

Each and every government had to deal with the pandemic on its own. The region cannot afford a repeat of this disaster. If and when a new pandemic strikes, as some health experts warn, the region, not to mention the world, must react in a different way.

Aside from what we now know: that there was a worldwide shortage in testing kits and ventilators; we also know that lengthy economic shutdowns have hurt millions of families. Not all governments were able to provide immediate assistance.

The fear of a social backlash as a result of the lockdown is real. It is a clear and present danger and such a backlash in one country will affect the national security of the entire region.

A new humanitarian order for the region is a good investment for all. It should kick in when the entire region is facing a common enemy; a plague, natural disasters and civil wars.

When millions of people in our region are affected there should be a common approach to helping those in need: the poor, the unemployed, refugees among others. Those are the collateral victims of a global or regional calamity such as the coronavirus pandemic. When the danger is lifted it is those who will continue to suffer for months if not more.

No recovery can take place if major sections of society are left unaided. And again regional security and stability is in the interest of each and every country in the region.
A humanitarian order that is based on empathy and solidarity is not a luxury. It should become a pillar of regional stability. The pandemic will end one day, but its effects on millions of people in our region will last for a long time to come.

Osama Al Sharif is a journalist and political commentator based in Amman

Let there be a global coronavirus ceasefire
UN call for armistice has got backing of many and could be a tentative step toward peace

Published: April 17, 2020 09:58
Govinda Clayton

COVID-19: The UN secretary general's call for global peace has created some useful momentum
Image Credit: Zuma/REX/Shutterstock

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Ceasefire offers Yemen rare chance to talk peace and fight COVID-19

COVID-19: UN says 74m in Arab world lack hand-washing facility

UN Secretary General Antnio Guterres made an unprecedented appeal recently for “an immediate global ceasefire” to facilitate humanitarian access to the populations most vulnerable to stop the spread of the novel coronavirus. This was the first global ceasefire request in the 75-year history of the United Nations.

The response has been swift and wide-reaching — conflict parties across 12 countries have already declared some form of ceasefire. Some 70 countries have backed the appeal, along with prominent figures like the Pope, and nearly 200 organisations.
Across the globe, this simultaneous series of commitments to suspend hostilities for a common purpose is altogether new.

**In principle, the international community is well equipped to support the delicate process of strengthening the coronavirus ceasefires, even if for now their task is complicated by the need to work remotely.**

From Colombia to Sudan, the Philippines and Yemen, coronavirus ceasefires promise a break in hostilities to allow all parties to focus their efforts on the battle against the virus, as well as providing humanitarian assistance to those suffering from the coronavirus in areas of conflict.

Yet the motivations underlying these arrangements vary. In some cases, the commitments to suspend fighting serve practical purposes beyond tackling the global spread of covid-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus.

Here are the big questions: Can these types of ceasefires be effective? And could they help resolve previously intractable conflicts?

— **Ceasefires related to diseases have happened before**

The new coronavirus ceasefires aren’t the first arrangements aimed at tackling the spread of infectious diseases.

The new ceasefire data set includes more than 20 ceasefires relating to infectious disease since 1989, mostly dealing with polio vaccination programs. This list includes ceasefires in conflict-affected areas in Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, El Salvador, Sudan and Syria.

In most cases the ceasefires appear to have been relatively effective at achieving the medical objective, often resulting in the vaccination of millions of children.

Of course, there are clearly important differences between the coronavirus threat and the danger of contracting polio.

Covid-19 appears far more contagious than other viruses, though our understanding of it is incomplete — and restrictions on travel make it hard for international organisations to respond.

But here’s what we know from these prior ceasefires. A USIP study details the efforts that worked owe their success to the neutrality of the international organisations involved, clearly drawn distinctions between the vaccination program and the wider conflict, and conflict parties not manipulating the arrangements for other purposes.

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**LATEST ON COVID-19**

- UN chief urges global unity in mobilizing efforts to defeat coronavirus
- Riyadh pledges $500 million for UN humanitarian plan for Yemenis
- Domestic violence in Arab region worsens amid COVID-19; UN

When vaccination programs were manipulated for other strategic goals, they lost legitimacy. Here’s an example, from 2011.

When people in Pakistan learned the CIA had funded a fake hepatitis B vaccination campaign to trace Al Qaida leader Osama bin Laden, this hampered future attempts to tackle polio.
Fighting infectious disease can be particularly difficult in conflict zones. The 2019 Ebola outbreak, for instance, shows the effect on public-health efforts when conflict parties fail to reach ceasefire arrangements.

The conflict parties in the Democratic Republic of Congo deliberately targeted humanitarian groups and the UN, undermining the attempts to contain Ebola — and the result was increased spread of the disease and further suffering for the civilian population.

— Not all ceasefires are created equal

In formal terms, ceasefires are arrangements in which one or more belligerents commit to stopping violent hostilities. But beyond this broad similarity, ceasefires vary greatly.

They can range from very loose, informal and unilateral arrangements to formal, multilateral agreements.

Ceasefires serve a wide range of functions that may or may not be connected to a broader peace process.

While some arrangements emerge from negotiations and are a vital step toward peace, others instead serve isolated functions altogether, such as the celebration of a religious holiday, or allowing humanitarian access.

Thus far, there are striking similarities among the covid-19 ceasefires.

Almost all are unilateral, include no provisions detailing how local or international groups might monitor the agreement, and seem to lack any clear detail on prohibited actions, managing violations or a link to the broader peace process.

This is not surprising, as more detailed ceasefires require negotiation between the parties and a broader road map for the subsequent peace process.

Instead, these temporary arrangements allow conflict parties to quarantine their conflict without dealing with the messy political issues.

Given the immediacy of the current pandemic, it’s understandable — and probably necessary — that the initial coronavirus ceasefires are relatively basic.

But such limited unilateral arrangements are always at the mercy of the conflicting parties. Each side can interpret the arrangement as it sees fit, and withdraw at any point without sanction.

— Will the coronavirus ceasefires last?

If these new ceasefires are to hold throughout this challenging period, political science research suggests that the arrangements will need to be developed.

Detailed, comprehensive ceasefires tend to last longer. But upgrading a unilateral agreement to a more detailed reciprocal bilateral or multilateral agreement requires building confidence.

The parties involved in violent conflict often have little or no trust in each other. This means they are often unwilling to even talk, let alone engage in serious negotiations.

If these ceasefires break down, or worse, are manipulated by one party, the prospects for peace might worsen. Similarly, attempts to strengthen agreements, or build confidence too quickly, risk politicising the humanitarian arrangements — which could then undermine the immediate humanitarian effort.

International peacemakers have a network of representatives in conflict-affected states, and the U.N.’s standby team of mediators has expertise in building on and developing ceasefires.
In principle, the international community is well equipped to support the delicate process of strengthening the coronavirus ceasefires, even if for now their task is complicated by the need to work remotely.

The secretary general’s call, many analysts feel, has created some useful momentum.

Over the coming months, it will become clearer whether any of these new ceasefires can achieve their specific humanitarian goal, and perhaps even provide a tentative step toward peace.

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(WaPo)

The great European project may not survive Covid-19

Pandemic opens a Pandora’s box that threatens the very economic fabric of the EU

Fallout from the coronavirus pandemic has exposed EU fault lines that survived the rupture of losing the UK through the three-year Brexit process

Image Credit: Gulf News

The nations of the European Union (EU) are facing both individually and collectively what is the gravest crisis since the Second World War in fighting Covid-19, while contemporaneously facing an unprecedented and severe economic abyss.

And the great European project may not survive.

The fallout from the coronavirus pandemic has exposed fault lines that survived the rupture of losing the United Kingdom through the three-year Brexit process.
Almost nine out of ten Italians believe the EU isn’t helping Italy, seven in ten feel the EU hasn’t contributed in any way to solving the crisis, and eight in ten say they believe the EU won’t change.

But first and foremost, the EU was an economic union, the creation of the world’s largest market by allowing for the free movement of goods, services and people.

It emerged from the coal and steel treaty between France and Germany, expanded into a common market, then the European Economic Community — before evolving into the EU as know today.

But that economic strength had been weakening in the months before the pandemic. Now it is bedridden by coronavirus.

A downward economic curve

Germany has always been the economic behemoth behind the success of Europe. Before the pandemic, Germany’s gross domestic product was sluggish and in the third quarter of 2019 was just at 0.1 per cent.

By Q4, it had flatlined at 0 per cent. The story wasn’t much better in France, with a Q3 GDP of 1.4 per cent slipping to a Q4 performance of 0.9 per cent. Simply put, the general economic curve was downward in Europe.

Along came Covid-19. For the past three years, the leadership of Europe had been largely focused on Brexit — maintaining a united front in negotiations with the UK over the terms of its departure from the club while also ensuring that a growing anti-EU movement didn’t gain enough momentum to rupture the union from within.

But Brexit and the fallout was largely a political issue with economic overtones. Now, this era of pandemic carries a Pandora’s box that combines economics and politics in a febrile and volatile mix that threatens the EU.

And Italy is the weak link.

A leaky ship

Long before Brexit was dominant, the key issue that undermined Europe was a eurocrisis — the high levels of debt carried by Greece and Italy.

Greece, through three bailouts had managed up to the emergence of the pandemic to steady its financial ship and head back into the deep waters of the international money markets.

But Italy? It was a leaky ship carrying a heavy cargo of debt. Unseaworthy if not for the strict budgetary regimen required by Brussels. And Italy is where coronavirus exploded outside China.

It has seen the strictest lockdown since early February, its northern industrial hub, the epicentre of the virus clusters — four million businesses shut, no tourism income and bearing the deep psychological scars of some 22,000 Covid-19 deaths, many of them buried in mass graves.

Economically comatose

While both Germany and France can expect the pandemic to shrink their GDP between 7 and 9 per cent, in Italy, the precipitous drop will likely be in the mid-teens.
If it’s 12 per cent, that will be a relief. Even before Covid-19, Italy was economically comatose as living standards flatlined. What’s more, this catatonic state has exposed that disparities between a north breathing and a south choking on privation.

In 2019, Italy’s economic output was 5 per cent lower than the high recorded before the 2009 financial crisis. Why? Well, if you owe €1.33 for every €1 in circulation, you’re in no position to be able to offer a stimulus to spur growth. Fact is, you’re doing little more than servicing that debt to keep your head above water.

**MORE BY THE WRITER**

Newsmaker: Anthony Fauci, America’s top doctor, faces tough COVID-19 test
COVID-19: Health care workers — Their finest hour
Covid-19: Why the UK is stuck for words

**Cheap money**

Now this pandemic has made that pre-existing debt far worse and far more crippling. Greece had debt levels of €1.82 for every €1 and look how long that took to sort out.

If there are positives, they are the money before the pandemic was very cheap — interest rates were at historic lows — and now many nations will need to pay for their Covid-19 measures and some sort of accommodation will be needed for all.

But Italy too had an unemployment rate before the virus that ran at 10 per cent — one of the highest in Europe — and one-in-three of its young people under the age of 24 had no work.

Who knows what will life be like after this pandemic. Maybe, because so many Italians rely on small family-run businesses, they might prove more versatile at surviving this pandemic.

Or maybe they will fold because Italy has shut down and there are no tourists. Only time will tell — but unemployment will rise for sure. Everywhere.

**Idea of shared debt**

So when the EU did meet and talk of coronabonds as a way out of this current economic hibernation, it was Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte who warned in no uncertain terms that the very future of the EU was in danger if it didn’t act to protect the economies of all — and Italy in particular.

Germany and the Netherlands shot down the idea of shared debt now. It is they and other northern nations who have paid the lion’s share of EU bills in the past and likely in the future.

And the notion of shared debt now possibly means sharing debt in the future.

Instead, the EU does as the EU does and came up with a compromise: The European Stability Mechanism (ESM). It is essentially the EU’s bailout fund, and Italy or other nations can seek assistance there without strings attached.

**Totally inadequate tool**

Conte is far from happy, saying the ESM was a “totally inadequate tool” and Italy had no intention of applying for help from the fund.

He is not alone. In a poll, nearly half of all Italians rejected the idea of help from the ESM — they see it as “a tool to impose Greek-style austerity”.

Almost nine out of ten Italians believe the EU isn’t helping Italy, seven in ten feel the EU hasn’t contributed in any way to solving the crisis, and eight in ten say they believe the EU won’t change.

Hardly the numbers to inspire confidence in the future of the EU.

COVID-19: Heavy exercise can lower immunity
Most experts recommend only moderate level of activity during the pandemic

Recently Caleb Carmichael finished his seventh marathon in as many days, an effort to fundraise for two covid-19-related charities. Noble? Absolutely. Healthy? Perhaps not.

During the pandemic, social media has encouraged people to dive into fitness challenges.

With extra time on their hands, exercise buffs are taking up running and streaming high-intensity interval training, with the goal of reaching their fittest level ever. But there’s a case to be made for keeping things in check.

Moderate levels of exercise benefit the immune system. Going beyond that, however, could weaken it, which is not a good thing with the coronavirus sickening and killing people around the world.

Years of research into the relationship between hard and/or long efforts and their impact on immunity reveal that once you’ve crossed a certain line, you become more susceptible to illness.

Regular exercise boosts immunity, very hard efforts temporarily lower immunity, and chronic overtraining lowers immunity in more enduring ways.
A seminal study on the topic came from David Nieman, director of the human performance laboratory at Appalachian State University.

By following nearly 2,400 runners at the 1987 Los Angeles Marathon before and after the race, “we were able to identify thresholds of exercise where your immunity begins to decrease,” Nieman says.

Immunity cycle

That study touched specifically on duration of exercise and found that, for the most part, up until about the 90-minute mark, immunity remains strong.

After that point, however, it weakens. Runners in Nieman’s study who completed the marathon — an effort much longer than 90 minutes — became sick in the week following the race at a rate of 5.9 per cent higher than those who trained but did not complete the race.

Although not 100 per cent certain about why immunity decreases as duration increases, Nieman says that draining the body of its main energy source, glycogen, is probably to blame. “Your brain registers the lack of glycogen, and then you get the negative immune response,” he says.

More evidence that intense physical and mental stress can suppress the immune system came from a study of the Finnish team at the 2018 Winter Olympics, which comprised both endurance and shorter-duration event athletes.

It found that 45 per cent of the athletes suffered from the common cold during a 21-day observation period surrounding the competition. Amelia Boone, 36, an attorney and world-champion obstacle course racer from Golden, Colorado, has taken this knowledge to heart and is keeping her training in check at the moment.

MORE ON THE TOPIC

- Be Fit, Be Safe campaign launched in Dubai urging people to exercise at home
- Coronavirus: 'Work out indoors, don't run or jog outside,' advise Dubai doctors to UAE residents
- Coronavirus: How best you can exercise at home in the UAE

Doing the smart thing

“I have extra time on my hands because I’m not commuting, so it’s tempting to do more,” she says. “More training would be good stress management, too, but it’s just not smart right now.”

Not everyone is an endurance athlete, however, so what about other forms of exercise and their impact on immunity? That’s an ongoing debate, and the most recent research could not form a solid conclusion.

However, the key point of agreement is that many factors go into making us susceptible to infection when we exercise intensely. Those factors include anxiety, sleep, nutritional deficits, exposure and travel. The CDC warns that the coronavirus outbreak can be stressful to many people.

“Regular exercise boosts immunity, very hard efforts temporarily lower immunity, and chronic overtraining lowers immunity in more enduring ways,” says Brad Stulberg, a top performance coach and author of “The Passion Paradox.” “Right now, you want to keep your exercise program in the first two buckets, and ideally, the first.”

Another reason to prioritise moderate exercise, Stulberg says, is that it will lessen the risk of injury at a time when physical therapists, massage therapists and other practitioners are unavailable for hands-on visits.
Nieman sees exercise along a risk-benefit continuum. “It’s important to find the sweet spot,” he says about the pandemic. “I recommend getting out every day and engaging in a moderate level of activity, but don’t take it to a point where you are chronically tired.”

Also, he says, “you may have the virus and not know it. If you exercise hard, that’s not a good strategy.” And if you have any symptoms at all, he warns: “Do not exercise.”

Fitness gurus have been able to identify thresholds of exercise where your immunity begins to decrease
Image Credit: iStock

Level of exertion

Nick Bracciante, a physical therapist and CrossFit coach continues to train clients through remote programming. “I have an ongoing conversation with clients about tracking their intensity,” he says.

“I like them to use a perceived level of exertion, and then we monitor that over time to recognise trends.”

If he sees too many high-level workouts in a client’s log, Bracciante reols them back in. “With newer clients, in particular, I try to have them follow a three-two-one rule,” he explains. “In every three-day cycle, two of them should be moderately intense workouts, followed by a day of rest.”

Stulberg suggests “sticking with simple movements, like squats, push-ups, lunges and plank” to avoid injury. “It’s important to remember that every bit counts right now. A brisk walk in an uncrowded space will get you 99 per cent of the way there.”

For Boone, moderation means monitoring her heart rate to ensure she’s in an easy range and adding in low-level exercise such as hiking, walking and riding her Elliptigo — a mobile version of an elliptical machine — to round things out.

“This is where I am for the duration of the pandemic,” she says. “I’m trying to impress upon people that this situation has impact on our bodies and stress levels, so getting out to exercise at an easy pace is what’s important.”
For seven-marathon-runner Carmichael, the next few days to a week will look like a lot of sleep and very short, low-intensity exercise. His efforts have raised somewhere in the range of $6,000 for a local food pantry, which he says is worth his calculated risk.

“I needed to do something that would be crazy enough to get people's attention,” he says. “I ran at a very reserved pace throughout the effort, and I was very conscious of getting enough sleep and the right nutrition.” But, he adds, “I'll definitely be taking care of myself from here on out.”

*Amanda Loudin is a noted health and fitness writer*

*(Wapo)*

**Next US president will inherit a huge mess**

We will be in the end stages of a brutal pandemic, faced with the worst economy

Published: April 16, 2020 10:02

*Daniel W. Drezner*

Joe Biden has had a very good week. [In the Age of Coronavirus, do days have any significance?]

On Monday, Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders endorsed Biden for president, a move that came much more quickly than the last time Sanders ran for president.

He subsequently gave an interview with the Associated Press where he was pretty emphatic about his support.

*Joe Biden might be more adept at both politics and policy than outside observers recognise*
That freed up former President Barack Obama to endorse Biden on Tuesday. One would expect other Democratic Party heavy hitters like Hillary Clinton to quickly follow suit.

Furthermore, the latest polling shows Biden putting a very powerful move on Trump, besting him nationally and in key swing states. It would appear for the moment that Democrats are in array.

All of this would normally be grounds for optimism for those Americans who think the current president acts more like the Toddler in Chief than the commander in chief, and yet Donald Trump continues to be the president and dominate the political stage.

**MORE ON THE TOPIC**

- US election: Bernie Sanders endorses Joe Biden for president
- Battle for the American leadership commences
- Obama endorses Biden for president to ‘heal’ America

**Trump’s rants**

As *Politico*’s Blake Hounshell tweeted: “Yesterday we had two real news stories: Bernie endorsing Biden, and the surprising results in Wisconsin. Both obliterated by a news conference where we learnt nothing new about the virus or this president.”

To the extent that there is a strategy to Trump’s madness — and I think this is way more about Trump’s impulses than any strategy — it is that his antics, combined with the current unpleasantness, force Biden to fade into the media background.

For his critics on the right and the left, this fits into their preconceived notion of Joe Biden as a man destined to be a loser.

After all, he ran for president twice before and did not distinguish himself during either run.

Even with a paucity of data points in modern presidential politics, it is easy to lump Biden into the same category of seasoned politicians who earn their party’s nomination without much enthusiasm and then crash and burn during the general election against a sitting incumbent. Walter Mondale, Bob Dole, John Kerry, Mitt Romney — you know this list.

This is certainly a possibility, but perhaps it is worth considering an alternative: that Joe Biden might be more adept at both politics and policy than outside observers recognise.

One of the reasons Sanders endorsed Biden relatively quickly was that he genuinely likes him.
Sanders’ endorsement is a big step toward avoiding the rancor that marked the end of the 2016 Democratic primary

Image Credit: AP

Age of Coronavirus

Furthermore, Biden has acted pretty quickly to reach out to Sanders’ foreign policy team with his own. Which is good, because the Age of Coronavirus is likely going to be longer than any of us wants to acknowledge, with more significant consequences to our daily lives. Biden will need all the help he can get if he is the next president.

Maybe the best parallel to Biden isn’t Kerry or Romney, but George H.W. Bush. They share a fair number of qualities. Neither man is terribly eloquent — both have been prone to getting tongue-tied.

Both had long careers in public service. Both men assiduously reached out to others and talked about working across the aisle. Both served as vice president. Indeed, if Biden wins, he would be the first vice president to win the presidency since Bush 41.

There are two other similarities that might come into play. Biden, like Bush, possesses a thorough understanding of the inner workings of government.

Being a senator for decades and a vice president for eight years will do that. This matters, because the challenges confronting the next president are enormous.

As Tom Wright and Kurt Campbell note in the Atlantic, “The country will probably be in the end stages of a brutal pandemic and faced with the worst economy since the Great Depression.” He will likely inherit a complete mess.

This leads into the other possible parallel. Both men are moderates in a time of disruption. Bush had to navigate the end of the Cold War; Biden will have to navigate the United States from a pandemic to a post-pandemic world. Bush handled his challenges pretty well.

One hopes that this analogy extends to Biden in January 2021.
Our cruel treatment of animals led to coronavirus
Humans inflict horrific harms on animals and the results are here

There is the obvious and then there is what should be obvious. The obvious is that the coronavirus pandemic has brought much of the human world to a standstill. Many countries are in lockdown.

So far, more than 2 million have been infected, over 100,000 have died, and billions live in fear that the numbers of sick and dead will rise exponentially. Economies are in recession, with all the hardship that entails for human well-being.

What should be obvious, but may not be to many, is that none of this should come as a surprise. That there would be another pandemic was entirely predictable, even though the precise timing of its emergence and the shape of its trajectory were not.
And there is an important sense in which the pandemic is of our own making as humans. A pandemic may seem like an entirely natural disaster, but it is often — perhaps even usually — not.

**Jumped species barrier**

The coronavirus arose in animals and jumped the species barrier to humans and then spread with human-to-human transmission. This is a common phenomenon. Most — and some believe all — infectious diseases are of this type (zoonotic).

That in itself does not put them within the realm of human responsibility. However, many zoonotic diseases arise because of the ways in which humans treat animals. The “wet” markets of China are a prime example.

They are the likely source not only of Covid-19 but also of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and some outbreaks of avian influenza, for example. (Another possible source of the coronavirus that causes Covid-19 may be one of the many mixed wildlife-livestock farms in China, but humans are responsible for those, too.)

The “wet” markets, which are found not only in China but also in some other East Asian countries, have a number of features that makes them especially conducive to spawning infectious zoonotic diseases.

Live animals are housed in extremely cramped conditions until they are slaughtered in the market for those who have purchased them.

**Easily trasmitted infections**

In these conditions, infections are easily transmitted from one animal to another. Because new animals are regularly being brought to market, a disease can be spread through a chain of infection from one animal to others that arrive in the market much later.

The proximity to humans, coupled with the flood of blood, excrement and other bodily fluids and parts, all facilitate the infection of humans. Once transmission from human to human occurs, an epidemic is the expected outcome, unless the problem is quickly contained.

Global air travel can convert epidemic to pandemic within weeks or months — exactly as it did with the coronavirus.

It is these very conditions that facilitate the emergence of new infectious diseases and that also inflict horrific harms on animals — being kept in confined conditions and then butchered. Simply put, the coronavirus pandemic is a result of our gross maltreatment of animals.

Those who think that this is a Chinese problem rather than a human one should think again. There is no shortage of zoonoses that have emerged from human maltreatment of animals.

The most likely origin of H.I.V. (human immunodeficiency virus), for example, is S.I.V. (simian immunodeficiency virus), and the most likely way in which it crossed the species barrier is through blood of a non-human primate butchered for human consumption.
Similarly, variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease probably had its origins in its bovine analogue — bovine spongiform encephalopathy (B.S.E.), or “mad cow disease.” The most probable mechanism of transmission is through human consumption of infected cattle.

In the future, we should fully expect our maltreatment of animals to wreak havoc on our own species. In addition to future pandemics, we face the very real risk of breeding antibiotic resistance.

The major contributor to this is the use of antibiotics in the animal agriculture industry, as a growth promoter (to bring animals to slaughter weight as quickly as possible) and to curb the spread of infections among animals reared in cruel intensive “factory farmed” conditions.

MORE ON CORONAVIRUS

- COVID-19: Why China’s wet markets should not be shut down to fight coronavirus
- Photos: COVID-19-hit Wuhan cautiously revives amid thicket of control
- COVID-19: Wuhan reopening offers hope to the world
- 100 days of coronavirus that changed the world

It is entirely possible that the human future will involve a return to the pre-antibiotics era, in which people died in droves from infections that have been effectively treated since the discovery of penicillin and other early antibacterial agents.

If so, it may turn out that the antibiotics era was a brief interlude between two much longer periods in human history in which we succumbed in large numbers to bacterial infections. That prospect, which is even more awful than the current crisis, is no less real for that.

We, as a species, know about this problem, but we have not yet done what needs to be done to avert it (or at least minimise the chances of its happening).

What these and many other examples show is that harming animals can lead to considerable harm to humans. This provides a self-interested reason — in addition to the even stronger moral reasons — for humans to treat animals better.

Remarkably little wisdom

The problem is that even self-interest is an imperfect motivator. For all the puffery in calling ourselves Homo sapiens, the “wise human,” we display remarkably little wisdom, even of a prudential kind.

This is not to deny the many intellectual achievements of humankind. However, they are combined with many cognitive and moral shortcomings, including undue confidence in our ability to solve problems.

In general, humans respond to pandemics rather than act to prevent them — we attempt to prevent their spread after they emerge and to develop treatments for those infected. The current crisis demonstrates the folly of this approach.

The closest we come to prevention is the effort to develop vaccines. But even this sort of prevention is a kind of reaction. Vaccines are developed in response to viruses that have already emerged.

As the coronavirus experience shows, there can be a significant lag between that emergence and the development of a safe and effective vaccine, during which time great damage can be done both by the virus and by attempts to prevent its spread.
Real prevention requires taking steps to minimise the chances of the virus or other infectious agents emerging in the first place. One of a number of crucial measures would be a more intelligent — and more compassionate — appraisal of our treatment of non-human animals, and concomitant action.

Some might say that it is insensitive to highlight human responsibility for the current pandemic while we are in the midst of it. Isn’t it unseemly to rub our collective nose in this mess of our own making?

Such concerns are misplaced. Earlier warnings of the dangers of our behaviour, offered in less panicked times, went unheeded. Of course, it is entirely possible that even if we are now momentarily awakened, we will soon forget the lessons.

There is plenty of precedent for that. However, given the importance of what lies in the balance, it is better to risk a little purported insensitivity than to pass up an opportunity to encourage some positive change. Millions of lives and the avoidance of much suffering are at stake.

_David Benatar is a professor of philosophy and public intellectual. His most recent book is “The Human Predicament: A Candid Guide to Life’s Biggest Questions.”_

_(NYT)_