



## President's Message



### Welcome to December 2020 Issue

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Viruses have become a big issue in recent years. Not only new viruses and new viral diseases are emerging, but previously known viruses that used to cause mild infections now appear to be acquiring more virulence. Let me give two examples, both from South East Asia. The Nipah virus is a zoonotic virus with fruit bats as their primary reservoir. Although outbreaks of this virus have been seen in Singapore, Malaysia, India, and Bangladesh, the highest mortalities have been observed in Bangladesh in winter. During the winter months, rural people in Bangladesh tap date palms to obtain sweet palm juice, which is relished by both humans and other creatures like bats. The tapping process includes shaving thin slices of the bark and the pith to make the juice flow, which is collected in earthen containers overnight and drunk cold in the morning or made into various types of sweets. Fruit bats also have the habit of drinking this juice from the containers during the night. This has been going on for time immemorial without any ill effects on humans or bats. But in the last two decades, it seems that when bats partake of the juice, the juice gets contaminated with Nipah virus. It is fatal for humans to drink the virus-contaminated juice, and a number of mortalities are now occurring in Bangladesh every year from drinking virus-contaminated date palm juice. The second example concerns the Chikungunya virus, which is transmitted by mosquitoes, the main feature of the viral infection even a few years ago being intensive pain in the joints. But in recent years, not only the virus has spread to newer countries and continents, the viral infection also incorporates appearance of more rashes, increases in severity of pain, and mortalities. The change has been attributed to increase in viral virulence as a result of mutations. There are a lot of theories behind emergence of new viruses and increase in virulence of viruses, theories ranging from deforestation, reforestation, increased contact between humans and natural viral hosts, environmental pollution, and global climate changes. Interestingly, no therapeutics have been discovered yet against either Nipah or Chikungunya or so for that matter against the vast majority of viruses affecting human beings. In this context, it has to be asserted that pharmacognosists have a vital role to play and needs the support from all sections of society. It is expected that this Journal will be instrumental in creating the necessary awareness to contain present and future viral diseases including the COVID-19 pandemic.