From late December 2019 to January 2020, the world was struck unawares

by a new corona-virus with rapid spread and devastating consequences.

Question: Attempt a critical assessment of the impacts of the pandemic.

ANSWER.

The coronavirus disease 19 (COVID-19) is a highly transmittable and pathogenic viral infection caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), which emerged in Wuhan, China and spread around the world. Genomic analysis revealed that SARS-CoV-2 is phylogenetically related to severe acute respiratory syndrome-like (SARS-like) bat viruses, therefore bats could be the possible primary reservoir. The intermediate source of origin and transfer to humans is not known, however, the rapid human to human transfer has been confirmed widely. There is no clinically approved antiviral drug or vaccine available to be used against COVID-19. However, few broad-spectrum antiviral drugs have been evaluated against COVID-19 in clinical trials, resulted in clinical recovery.

The origin and spread of the virus is still being discussed in open conversation with scientists and biologists. Professor Stephen Turner, head of the department of microbiology at Melbourne’s Monash University, says what’s most likely is that virus originated in bats.

There is one hypothesis that the virus emerged at the Wuhan live animal market in China from an interaction between an animal and a human, Turner says: “I don’t think it’s conclusive by any means.”

Scientists say it is highly likely that the virus came from bats but first passed through an intermediary animal in the same way that another coronavirus –

the 2002 Sars outbreak – moved from horseshoe bats to cat-like civets before infecting humans. One animal implicated as an intermediary host between bats and humans is the pangolin. The International Union for Conservation of Nature says they are “the most illegally traded mammal in the world” and are prized for their meat and the claimed medicinal properties of their scales.

The theory that Covid-19 virus originated in the lab is making rounds for quite some time. US President Donald Trump last week acknowledged Fox News report that the novel coronavirus may have been accidentally leaked by an intern working at the Wuhan Institute of Virology in China. The Fox News, in an exclusive report, based on unnamed sources has claimed that though the virus is a naturally occurring strain among bats and not a bioweapon, but it was being studied in Wuhan laboratory.

The initial transmission of the virus was bat-to-human, the news channel said, adding that the "patient zero" worked at the laboratory. The lab employee was accidentally infected before spreading the disease among the common people outside the lab in Wuhan city (live mint, 2020).

There are many sharing the post are pushing a conspiracy theory falsely claiming that 5G - which is used in mobile phone networks and relies on signals carried by radio waves - is somehow responsible for coronavirus.

These theories appear to have first emerged via Facebook posts in late January, around the same time the first cases were recorded in the US.

They appear to fall broadly in to two camps:

\* One claims 5G can suppress the immune system, thus making people more susceptible to catching the virus.

\* The other suggests the virus can somehow be transmitted through the use of 5G technology.

Both these notions are "complete rubbish," says Dr Simon Clarke, associate professor in cellular microbiology at the University of Reading (BBC News, 2020).

While the U.S. is now seen as the epicenter of the outbreak — with cases surpassing 200,000, "the epicenter will shift" again, according to Teo Yik Ying, dean at the Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health at the National University of Singapore. With the changing epicenter of the disease, there is now a second wave of infections brought in via residents returning from overseas to Singapore. A similar trend is being observed in China, where the coronavirus first emerged late last year (CNBC, 2020).

To fight the coronavirus outbreak, governments across the globe have closed schools, travel and businesses big and small. Many observers have fretted about the economic costs of throwing millions of people out of work and millions of students out of school.

Now, three weeks after the United States and other countries took sweeping suppression steps that could last months or more, some public health specialists are exploring a different consequence of the mass shutdown:

-Already, there are reports that isolation measures are triggering more domestic violence in some areas

-Prolonged school closings are preventing special needs children from receiving treatment and could presage a rise in dropouts and delinquency.

-Public health centers will lose funding, causing a decline in their services and the health of their communities.

-A surge in unemployment to 20% – a forecast now common in Western economies – could cause an additional 20,000 suicides in Europe and the United States among those out of work or entering a near-empty job market.

President Donald Trump has announced that the measures the United States has taken in terms of social distancing that has undoubtedly had an impact on trade will be abandoned in favour of opening America for business in weeks and not months.

Trump’s decision comes despite an enormous surge in coronavirus cases afflicting the US, with over 143,000 confirmed cases resulting in 2,490 deaths.

Nevertheless, the virus has forced significant shut downs across the American economy with stock markets plummeting and share prices falling. Trump’s commercial instincts cannot tolerate such losses and he wants allows the American people to work again as if nothing was happening.

What this means is that, without preventative options by way of a vaccine, Trump is gambling with the long-term interests of the United States. If the virus is still an active infectious agent in a few weeks when Trump re-opens America for business, and all indicators suggest that to be the case, then the pandemic will simply continue to rip through the population, stressing the healthcare system and the economy all over again.

As the world is racked by the coronavirus, China – the epicentre of the pandemic – is slowly beginning to recover as everyone else is getting mauled. This could grant it a head start, and it is indeed already playing the role of the good Samaritan and building its influence and soft power by sending aid to countries such as Italy who have suffered tremendous human losses as a result of the virus. This has allowed Beijing to control the coronavirus narrative in the West, showing itself to be proactively assisting in alleviating suffering globally.