

Headline: Dangerous times

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We experienced three incidents recently that showed mankind's vulnerability to deaths of catastrophic proportions. These events are the ongoing novel coronavirus epidemic, the climate change disasters, and the heightened conflict between the United States and Iran which has brought us nearer to a nuclear war.

With these incidents happening one after the other in quick succession, and in just the past few months, we cannot fault those who conjure apocalyptic predictions in their minds. The most recent of these dreadful occurrences is the novel coronavirus outbreak now spreading worldwide. As of this writing, in China alone where the virus originated, 722 people have died and 34,546 are confirmed infected, with 4,800 in serious condition, plus 26,000 others who are "suspected" of having contracted the virus. At least 25 other countries in Asia, Europe, North America and the Middle East also have confirmed cases of infection.

In the Philippines, there are 215 people under watch for possible infection, spread out in various provinces in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. We have three confirmed cases of infection, including the first death outside of China.

The novel coronavirus is the latest of several viral diseases that have plagued humanity in recent memory. There are the continuing or sporadic outbreaks of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), swine flu (H1N1), avian flu (H7N9), camel virus (MERS-CoV), dengue, chikungunya, Ebola, and Zika, among others. Tens of millions have died, and hundreds of millions have been infected by these viral outbreaks.

One gets the feeling that, as man persistently pollutes the Earth and engages in the unabated exploitation of animals, the virus world will continue to sharpen its evolutionary abilities in its "war" against the human race, until it eventually produces lethal new strains capable of wiping out humanity.

The second set of events that recently brought catastrophes worldwide is the string of climate change disasters arising from extreme weather conditions. Powerful typhoons brought death and devastation in Africa, China, Japan, the Philippines, among others. Record-breaking heat waves caused fatalities in India, Japan, and multiple countries in Europe. Unprecedented wildfires, which are either caused or exacerbated by global warming, have wrought unparalleled destruction in Australia and have sped up the wildfire season in California.

The fast melting of ice in Antarctica and the Arctic region is expected to cause sea levels to rise, resulting in coastal flooding worldwide. The accelerated loss of snow cover in mountain ranges are causing inland flash floods, soil erosion, and drought in agricultural lands. The melting of the Northern Hemisphere's permafrost is setting in motion the release of long-trapped greenhouse gases that will further heat up the Earth.

Meanwhile, mankind goes about its destructive ways, causing unhampered pollution and the obliteration of the Earth's forest cover, unperturbed by the irreversible havoc being wrecked on flora and fauna ecosystems upon which all human life depends.

The heightened conflict between the United States and Iran — brought about by the assassination of Iranian top general Qassem Soleimani — is the third incident that brings mankind closer to another very serious catastrophe. With nuclear-armed superpowers aligned on opposite sides, humanity gets closer to yet another world war.

The US-Iran conflict has the potential to serve as the surrogate representation of the long-festering disputes involving territory, religion, trade, and ideology that polarize many countries. The conflict can serve to ignite these disagreements into full-blown military hostilities, embroiling other nations. And with so many powerful countries now ruled by harebrained leaders, the chances of disagreements regressing into military wars are high.

We are living in very dangerous times. We only have ourselves to blame if all hell breaks loose, leading to the extinction of our race.

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