**The Dreadful Year 2020**

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Only after four days, the dreadful year 2020 will come to its infamous end and forever stand consigned to history. But its miseriesand painful memories will always haunt us as nightmares.The grass must still be green on the graves of over 1.7 million people who lost their lives. More are falling like leave as the second spike launches its deadly onslaught. The invisible yet fatal virus Covid-19 has played havoc with humanity across the globe with its killing spree.

The bereaved families and friends are still shell-shocked as they bemoan the unfortunate and untimely demise of their loved ones during these pandemic times of fear, sorrow and uncertainty.

Who would have ever imagined that in the joyful fireworks of new year celebrations on Dec 31, 2019, time had loads of miseries and sorrows in store. From the Bushfire of Australian forests to the onset of Corona pandemic, death ruled the roost; tears and tribulations became a new normal that humanity was made to learn to live with. Ambulance sirens, curfews, crowded hospital emergencies, coffin boxes, an absolute uncertainty, immense fear of unknown, dead bodies, mass graves and abandoned Covid- positive patients made it all look like a horror movie on the screen.

The villainous corona walked away with its killing instinct unrivalled, uninterrupted and unquestioned.

Some years, most definitely, act as the hinges of human history. They are the pivots, years so momentous that they become the defining point when everything changed, as the Past became the Future. Marked as it is by pandemic, economic crisis and massive social protest, will 2020 be rememberedas one of those years. This has been an extraordinary year, even before you factor in the pandemic. The Australian wildfires, the Black Lives Matter protests, Donald Trump’s impeachment trial and election defeat, the explosion in Beirut – these momentous events, alongside countless others less discussed by Western media, created a historic calendar that contrasted starkly with the dullness of our dormant personal lives. It’s hard to imagine forgetting these world events when we reflect on 2020 in years to come. But without the rhythm of normal life; school holidays, annual festivals, religious gatherings, they may be all we can recall when we look back. How will we remember our own lives in such an outwardly dramatic year that changed the world only in days and in so many ways.

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Before the world was practically conquered and taken over by the tiny Corona around April, 2020, Australian bushfires rang the alarm bells immediately after the outset of this fateful year, far louder than ever before. There were touching sights and soul stirring scenes which went viral on social media. The bushfires burned more than 46 million acres (72,000 square miles) – roughly the same area as the entire country of Syria. At least 3,500 homes and thousands of other buildings were lost and 34 people died in the thousands of fires between September 2019 and March 2020. The majority of deaths and destruction were in New South Wales (NSW).

The Insurance Council estimated that between November and the middle of February bushfire losses were approximately $A1.9 billion (US$1.3 billion) in insured claims. A survey conducted in January 2020 found that 26% of Australian businesses had already been affected by the bushfires. Some estimates have stated that the overall economic impact will exceed the infamous Black Saturday fires that cost$A4.4 billion (US$2.9 billion).Several firefighters – called firies in Australia – were killed or injured. University of Sydney ecologist Chris Dickman estimates more than a billion animals – including 800,000 in NSW – perished from the bushfires.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has minced no words that COVID-19 pandemic has led to a dramatic loss of human life worldwide and presents an unprecedented challenge to public health, food systems and the world of work. Out of around 80 Million positive cases world-wide, about 1.8 Million have lost their lives. The economic and social disruption caused by the pandemic is devastating: tens of millions of people are at risk of falling into extreme poverty, while the number of undernourished people, currently estimated at nearly 690 million, could increase by up to 132 million by the end of the year. Nearly half of the world’s 3.3 billion global workforce are at risk of losing their livelihoods. Informal economy workers are particularly vulnerable because the majority lack social protection and access to quality health care and have lost access to productive assets. Without the means to earn an income during lockdowns, many are unable to feed themselves and their families. For most, no income means no food, or, at best, less food and less nutritious food. A series of credible forecasts reveal that COVID-19 is likely to cause the first increase in global poverty since 1998, when the Asian Financial Crisis hit. With the new forecasts, global poverty—the share of the world’s population living on less than $1.90 per day—is projected to increase from 8.2% in 2019 to 8.6% in 2020, or from 632 million people to 665 million people. Compare this with the projected decline from 8.1% to 7.8% over the same time period using the previous World Economic Outlook forecasts. Another way to put this is that the estimates suggest that COVID-19 will push 49 million people into extreme poverty as the curtains are drawn on 2020.

Resilience is an inherent attribute gifted by Almighty to humanity. Despite all ills and odds which the year 2020 brought, we have finally learnt to live with this new normal. We realized how to work, learn and commune remotely. We rediscovered nature and began to cherish much that we had taken for granted, the ability to embrace a friend. We appreciated works of art for their own sake, rather than their often overpowering context of place, event and travel. We planted gardens, helped one another in ways large and small. We discovered forces that connect us and divide us, both of which were underlined in a November election in America in which, despite logistical difficulties, ballot complications and very mixed messaging from political leaders, far more people voted than had ever voted before. In the end, the presidential candidate who believes in science won. We also realized that no matter how advanced our technology might grow, we continue to be creatures of biology, able to die in great numbers from a single sweeping disease in the same way that humans have died throughout history. That no amount of knowledge can benefit those who refuse to accept it, that human cells know no politics and that the driving force of any civilization should be protecting its populace, by all means possible.

As they say, there is always light at the end of a tunnel. In this tumultuous year of blood and tears, we still have one big success to cheer about and be proud of, that is Covid vaccine.

Vaccine development generally takes ages to see light of the day, but scientists stood tall and rose to save the world. Within a year, we have three vaccines developed and manufactured, and quite a few more are on the way. As we find ways and means to forget the pains and sorrows of the dreadful 2020, these scientific revolutionary happenings offer a robust hope of a more equal, decentralized, vaccinated, fairer and greener future in store for humanity across the globe. Those who live will see!

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