

THE CORONAVIRUS CRISIS IN IRAN

*Causes of the outbreak and spread:
Cover-up, deception, incompetence,
theft and corruption*



**National Council of Resistance of Iran
Foreign Affairs Committee**

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INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus (COVID-19) was first detected in China and recorded in the local office of the World Health Organization on December 31, 2019. The report prompted serious international concern over both the outbreak and its spread. Thankfully, it appears that the virus has been more or less contained in China as a result of measures undertaken by the government. Now Iran under the mullahs has become the global epicenter of the pandemic.

The scale of the virus' spread and the death rate in Iran are dire, to the extent that if not contained, hundreds of thousands of Iranians risk infection and death. This drastic situation is a direct result of the ruling regime's incompetence, lack of sufficient resources to confront the virus, and corrupt ruling elite.

The crisis affecting Iran is, of course, not contained within its borders. No less than 15 other nations are dealing with infections resulting from Iranians traveling to these countries.

CORONAVIRUS DEATH TOLL (AS OF APRIL 5, 2020):

The real figures are staggering. According to the figures tallied by the Mujahedin-e Khalq (PMOI/MEK) main opposition movement, based on information from its sources in hospitals across the country, as of April 5, the real death toll in 242 towns and cities in all 31 provinces of Iran had exceeded 18,600.

PROVINCE	DEATH TOLL	LAST UPDATED
Tehran	2,350	5-Apr-20
Qom	1,900	5-Apr-20
Isfahan	1,585	3-Apr-20
Gilan	1,510	3-Apr-20
Khorassan Razavi	1,450	5-Apr-20
Mazandaran	1,300	2-Apr-20
Golestan	810	3-Apr-20
Khuzestan	720	3-Apr-20
Alborz	700	5-Apr-20
Kermanshah	580	5-Apr-20
Hamedan	530	5-Apr-20
Lorestan	473	3-Apr-20
Ardabil	425	2-Apr-20
West Azerbaijan	390	5-Apr-20
Yazd	320	2-Apr-20
Kerman	320	5-Apr-20
Semnan	290	5-Apr-20
Fars	285	3-Apr-20
Kurdistan	285	3-Apr-20
Zanjan	280	31-Mar-20
Qazvin	275	3-Apr-20
Markazi	265	3-Apr-20
East Azerbaijan	240	5-Apr-20
North Khorasan	210	2-Apr-20
Sistan and Baluchestan	160	2-Apr-20
Ilam	135	31-Mar-20
Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad	110	2-Apr-20
Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari	70	5-Apr-20
South Khorasan	40	3-Apr-20
Hormozgan	35	2-Apr-20
Bushehr	32	2-Apr-20

CRISIS MUCH GREATER THAN THE MULLAHS ADMIT

Several indicators confirm that the extent of the crisis is far greater than what the theocratic regime has admitted. In Italy, for example, the first two cases of infection were detected 21 days before the first death; in South Korea, 29 days; and in Hong Kong, 13 days. But in Iran, the very first report on the epidemic was about the death of two infected people, without any report whatsoever on when, where or how the virus had first been detected. Considering that it usually takes a period of at least 27 days to detect visible signs of the illness, and that according to sporadic, unofficial reports, the first death in Iran took place in the city of Qom at least three days after the patient's hospitalization, and that death was announced before test results were even in, it is not surprising that the country's healthcare and hygienic system were caught totally off guard.

“The scale of the virus’ spread and the death rate in Iran are dire, to the extent that if not contained, hundreds of thousands of Iranians risk infection and death.”

On February 28, the World Health Organization announced that at least 97 persons infected in Iran had entered 11 other countries. A number had visited Iranian cities where no coronavirus infection had been reported.

According to official facts and figures, the death rate in Iran is not comparable to any other country in the world.

Dr. Massoud Mardani, a specialist in infectious diseases and member of the National Influenza Committee, told the state owned daily *Entekhab* on March 5: “Coronavirus is transmitting very rapidly. As one contaminated person can infect four others, we estimate that 30 to 40% of Tehran’s population will be infected by the virus in two weeks.” The latest Tehran population count is 12 to 13 million.

Massoud Pezeshkian, first deputy speaker of the Parliament and a former Health Minister, said on March 3: "The [official] numbers are not real, because there are a number of patients who show no symptoms. We locate 95 [infected] people and two die, so we say 2 have died out of a 100, whereas it may be that 2% of 10,000 have died."

A POLITICALLY MOTIVATED COVER-UP

The main reason for the dramatic and rapid spread of COVID-19 in Iran has been the cover-up orchestrated by the clerical regime. Officials were informed of the outbreak in Iran two weeks prior to the February 11th anniversary of the Revolution. In view of the frequent flights to China by Mahan Air, which is affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), the probability of the virus spreading to Iran from China was certain. Owing to its strategic relations with China, however, not only did the regime refuse to cancel flights to China, but also a large number of Chinese citizens traveled to Iran following the outbreak in their own country. Despite the regime's subsequent announcement that flights to China would be cancelled, Mahan Air has continued its travels to and from China. The hundreds of Chinese students involved in religious studies in the city of Qom in fact encourage the continuation of these flights.

The French daily *Le Monde* quoted a physician in Tehran as saying that in the final days of January, two people infected with coronavirus had died. Despite this news, the mullahs insisted that there were no signs that the virus had been transmitted into Iran. This blatant lie, ordered by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, was intended to ensure the participation of a large number of people in the state-run annual march marking the anniversary of the 1979 Revolution on February 11, as well as the parliamentary election sham scheduled for February 21. In an inadvertent admission two days after the election, the regime's Interior Minister, Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli, said: "Some had recommended delaying the elections, and insisted on delaying elections in Qom. But I, as the official for the elections, refused to approve these recommendations."

"The main reason for the dramatic and rapid spread of COVID-19 in Iran has been the cover-up orchestrated by the clerical regime."

Meanwhile, the regime's cover-up over several weeks, rampant with false reports and misleading information, led to the spread of the virus across Iran and its transmission abroad. Khamenei said on March 3: "This disease is not serious; we have seen more disastrous calamities than this." He called it a "fleeting event," nothing "extraordinary." Khamenei added: "Our officials have revealed information since day one with enthusiasm, honesty and transparency, and they informed the people. But some other countries where this illness is more intense and widespread, are covering it up."

On March 2, Ali Rabii, a notorious torturer and IRGC member acting as the spokesman for Hassan Rouhani's government, claimed that the regime had had a totally transparent approach to the coronavirus outbreak.

The Coronavirus Crisis in Iran

Ten days ago, Rouhani claimed that the virus problem would be over by February 29. But, on March 4, after weeks of deceit and the cancellation of all foreign travels by state institutions, he said: "This disease has spread widely to almost all of our provinces ... From day one, once we suspected the virus had entered the country, we immediately instructed the Ministry of Health to inform the public about the numbers and relevant information. We told them not to hide anything from the public."

A member of the clerical regime's parliament, Bahram Parsai, said: "The reality goes beyond the [official] statistics... and if the world does not rush to the aid of our selfless doctors and medical staff, we will all be lost."

Ressalat daily, affiliated with the Khamenei faction, wrote: "We can't just give false assurances and deny a virus outbreak until February 19, [two days before regime's elections] and then suddenly, the next day, start beating the drum about how dangerous coronavirus is and the possibility of its spreading across the country."

On March 2, a state-run daily's editorial wrote: "What makes each of these crises more critical and more catastrophic is the loss of public trust."

The situation is now so dire that after a long delay, on March 4 the mullahs were obliged to declare a state of emergency in the province of Khorasan Razavi, cancelling Friday prayer congregations, all gatherings, and closing state institutions, schools and universities. Fearful of the virus spreading to other parts of the country, religious sermons and even Khamenei's sham religious classes have been cancelled. International gatherings and exhibitions have also been scrapped.

MINIMIZING HUMAN CASUALTIES

Since cover-ups and deception are in the regime's DNA, from day one the mullahs avoided giving real figures about the number of infected and dead. Ironically, during the press conference regarding the coronavirus, the official representative of the Iranian government, Ali Rabii, was standing alongside the deputy health minister, who was clearly suffering from the virus' symptoms and was immediately hospitalized.

Parliament Deputy Abdolkarim Hosseinzadeh admitted, "The pile of dead bodies in Qom and the helplessness of the people of Rasht are evidence of failures in notifying and alerting the people about the virus outbreak in a timely manner."

In Golestan Province, hygienic and sanitary supplies are very scarce. All hospitals are full to capacity. The Province's International Exhibition Center has been turned into a field hospital to receive more patients. The paramilitary Bassij and the Revolutionary Guards are patrolling in alleys and streets ostensibly under the guise of Coronavirus Combating Campaign to thwart any protests by an increasingly enraged public.

Ali Najafi Khoshroodi, a parliament deputy from Mazandaran, said, "The Coronavirus outbreak in Mazandaran Province, especially in the city of Babol, has reached a critical point ... The three major hospitals in Babol lack the capacity to accommodate new patients, and a shortage of basic facilities for preventive measures as well as lack of equipment and some medicines have aggravated the problems."

In Kermanshah, a cemetery caretaker said 85 corona victims had been buried in the cemetery. The Ferdows Cemetery in Kermanshah is under the IRGC and Bassij control and bodies are buried at night.

Nahid Khodakarami, head of the Health Commission of the Tehran City Council, said on February 29: "About 10,000 to 15,000 people have been infected."

On February 28, a medical expert at Beheshti University said: "At least 50,000 to 100,000 people have been infected. Of course, my own estimate is a lot higher than this."

"The criminal cover-up by the regime has not only led to the explosion of infection in Iran, but it has also caused problems for many other countries."

On March 2, Qassem Janbabai, the regime's deputy health minister, admitted to the state-run Channel 2 TV station: "We have close to 12,000 people hospitalized during this period. ... Less than 20 percent of the people infected visit hospitals and 80 percent have such minimal symptoms that they can be completely treated at home." In other words, he admitted that at least 60,000 people across the country have been infected by the virus.

In a secret report to Khamenei's office on Sunday, March 8th, Mohammad Hossein Ghorbani, the representative of the Minister of Health in Gilan Province, wrote that by Sunday, the death toll in Gilan had reached 408, including six doctors.

In another report, Ghorbani, informed Saeed Namaki, the Health Minister, that the condition in Gilan was extremely critical and that if major aid does not arrive from the Ministry, the situation would get out of control. Medical staff and nurses are exhausted due to work stress and lack of facilities. Some can no longer continue working. They have been in the hospital for many days and unable to see their families, he wrote.

On March 8, the state-run daily, *Hamshahri*, quoted Ghorbani as saying, "The situation in Gilan is not good, and the measures in the Province and by the Health Ministry are inadequate to the point of being terrifying". He acknowledged that the figures about the Coronavirus victims are announced based on a certain protocol controlled by 'Coronavirus Combat and Prevention Headquarters'.

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IRGC Brig. Gen. Mohammad Abdullah Pour, Commander of the IRGC and Basij forces in the Coronavirus Headquarters in Gilan oversees measures to counter the people's protests and uprisings, including the revelation of the actual number of victims.

Gholamali Jafarzadeh Imen Abadi, majlis deputy from Rasht, said on March 6, "The number of people infected with, or killed by, Coronavirus is horrific. Even test kits are not available... there are no beds in hospitals for new cases in Rasht and surrounding areas... we need new medical staff because many doctors and nurses have caught the virus or are so tired that they cannot provide services." Zabih Nikfar, another member of majlis from Lahijan, said: "Gilan has the worst situation in the whole country."

Kuseh Gharavi, majlis deputy from Golestan Province, said: "The situation in Golestan province is terrible and the figures given are not so realistic." Quoting university officials, he added: "The number of people infected by Coronavirus is rising exponentially... I hope special measures would be taken to bring it under control."

A specialist in infectious diseases who works for the regime's army at Hajar Hospital in Tehran said, "Currently, over 100,000 people have been infected. I say this with certainty that 1 in 10 people would test positive. This is a catastrophe that the government cannot deal with."

The criminal cover-up by the regime has not only led to the explosion of infection in Iran, but it has also caused problems for many other countries. On March 4, the *Washington Post* wrote in its editorial: "Iran's reaction to coronavirus has become a danger for the world." *The New York Times* said on March 3: "But instead of receiving government help, overwhelmed doctors and nurses say they have been warned by security forces to keep quiet. ... And some officials say [the scope of the catastrophe] will be viewed as a failure that enemies will exploit. ... The authorities seem as worried about controlling information as they are about controlling the virus, according to telephone interviews and text messages with more than a half dozen Iranian medical workers."

SUPPRESSING FATALITY FIGURES

The clerical regime has made every effort to prevent the dissemination of news regarding the real scope of the crisis in Iran, and as such has made it a security issue. Based on specific information, key members of the Headquarters to Combat Coronavirus include officials from the Ministry of Intelligence and Security (MOIS), the Intelligence Organization of the IRGC and the Judiciary. MOIS and the IRGC Intelligence Organization are actively working to prevent any leaks of accurate reports. To this end, commanders of the IRGC Intelligence Organization in each province attend meetings at the local Hygiene and Treatment Headquarters.

The IRGC, IRGC Intelligence Organization, and Ministry of Intelligence have been tasked to threaten the families of victims to keep silent in a bid to cover-up the actual number of fatalities. The IRGC's command HQ has ordered all provincial IRGC divisions and headquarters to be present at hospitals and medical and health centers to control reporting on the number of patients infected or killed due to the virus. In many cities, cardiac arrest is specified in death certificates. Families are pressured not to disclose the real cause of death.

“MOIS and the IRGC Intelligence Organization are actively working to prevent any leaks of accurate reports.”

This reality is even reflected in some of the state-media reports. On February 29, the state-run daily *Ressalat* wrote: "With regards to the number of infected nurses, we cannot release any figures. The statistics are completely security related and cannot be revealed. Even the heads of hospitals might not know the number of coronavirus victims. Even if a victim goes to the hospital, the statistics are not given to the hospital supervisor. There is a special private channel and no one but the Health Ministry officials are aware of the numbers."

Nahid Khodakarami, head of the Health Commission of the Tehran City Council, said on March 1: "Yesterday, I said that in Tehran it is possible that 10,000 people have been infected with coronavirus. The IRGC intelligence unit called me and complained. They asked, why did you provide this number? I said, sir, how long are you going to cover this up? These numbers are being talked about in society and my saying it calms the situation. Let's be transparent with the people. We shouldn't make this disease a security matter. You don't need to call me and ask me why I divulge some figures. I merely provided some experts' opinions. The IRGC intelligence official told me that I should refer the matter to the Health Ministry. I said, OK, we should increase the pressure on the Health Ministry to be more transparent and to openly express themselves and tell people the facts; otherwise our reputation in the world will be eroded."

The head of Yaftabad Hospital in Tehran said on March 1: "Our primary problem in this crisis was that we did not transmit the right information to the people and we don't have the right information. Treating everything as a political and security matter, we endanger people's health. It's always been this way."

The regime has threatened to imprison people who provide news about the actual scope of the crisis. Hassan Nowrouzi, the Speaker of the Judiciary Committee of the Parliament, said on February 26 that those who “disseminate fake news regarding coronavirus” will be sentenced from one to three years of imprisonment and lashes.

QOM: GROUND ZERO IN IRAN

After identifying COVID-19 cases in the city of Qom, the regime's officials refused to quarantine the city or stop pilgrimages to the city's holy shrines. The regime's rejection of these basic measures led to thousands of infections in Qom, and the spread of infection to other cities by travelers returning from Qom. A [video clip](#), widely posted on social media on March 2 shows the critical situation in Qom's mortuary.

The head of one hospital in Tehran's Yaftabad said on March 1: "If we had limited the travel of people in Qom, since the epicenter of the illness is in Qom, the spread would not have been so extensive. You look at the map and you will see that it spread to neighboring provinces from Qom. ... [Officials] say that they avoided quarantining Qom for economic reasons. But in fact, the damage that this virus causes is a thousand times worse. If we consider economic calculations, the damage will be catastrophic. In fact, our mistake was that when we discovered that the contamination is in the city of Qom, we should have quarantined the people there and prevented its spread. If we had done so, the virus would not have spread. Dr. Abrazadeh [deputy of Dr. Mohammad Reza Qadir, head of the Qom medical sciences university] had ordered the closure of the shrine, but a number of people refused to close the Masoumeh shrine, citing religious reasons."

Nahid Khodakarami, head of the Health Commission of the Tehran City Council, said on March 1: "Two weeks ago, I told Dr. Iraj Harirchi and even Dr. Nobakht [head of the parliamentary Health Committee] that Qom must be quarantined, but they did not listen. There must be restrictions placed on Qom. Now, the entire country has been infected. Even in a small city like Khansar, three people have tested positive for coronavirus. All three had gone there from Qom. Yesterday, three people traveled from Qom to Tehran and all of them died. If we had not given priority to the concerns of the clerics, we would have been in a much better situation."

A manager of the Group of Experts of Social Factors Impacting Health at the Beheshti University said on February 28: "Almost all cases in the country have been caused by Qom. Therefore, our greatest mistake was that we did not control the source."

Massoud Pezeshkian, March 3: "We should have quarantined Qom from day one. ... This disease is not a joke, which is the way we are dealing with it. Currently hospitals are overflowing and there is no room for more patients, and it will get worse by the day. The economy and everything will be ruined; it is no joke. What would have happened if they shut down the country for 15 days? If we had done so on the first day, it would not have spread to the entire country."

"Why was the Coronavirus outbreak in Qom overshadowed by the Majlis elections? Why was Qom not quarantined to prevent the spread of Coronavirus across the country? " questioned Alireza Rahimi, a member of the Majlis (Parliament) leadership, according to State run news agency, ISNA on March 7.

The calls to quarantine Qom were strongly opposed by affiliates of Khamenei, who would not allow the city's holy shrine, one of the most sacred in Iran, to be closed. Mohammad Saeedi, Khamenei's representative in Qom, said on February 22 that the "enemy" intends to show that Qom is insecure and take revenge, but "it will never succeed." The following day, Ali Akbar Hosseini-Nejad, Saidi's advisor, said the closure of the holy shrine would send a "bitter message" and "these kinds of decisions must be made by the regime." Despite the heightening crisis across the country, Saidi said on February 26, "We consider the holy shrine a 'house of cure' and it must remain open and people must resolutely visit the shrine."

INCOMPETENT CRISIS CONTROL

The regime has been utterly unable to control or stop the spread of COVID-19. Many physicians do not have sanitizers or masks for their own use. This has led to infections among a significant number of doctors, nurses and medical workers in various cities. In turn, this has led to a shortage of medical staff, i.e., those infected do not receive proper medical care.

The shortage of resources and medical equipment has worsened the regime's inability to deal with the situation. For example, while there should be two nurses for every patient in urgent care, currently there is one nurse for every four beds, and they suffer from a lack of sufficient resources to treat the sick. In Tehran's Yaftabad Hospital, which suffers from a lack of sufficient medical resources, many infected patients have been released. The hospital has only limited means to provide rooms and beds for quarantines. They don't even have test kits. One of the physicians working at this hospital said that at least 20 had died in one day.

According to a confidential report, a senior official in Golestan Province said on March 4: "So far 46 people have died in the province. Since Sunday, February 28, the number of patients has been rising and some 100-130 people are hospitalized. For instance, we hospitalized 141 in our province. With each passing day, I feel the situation is becoming more critical and respiratory cases are on the rise. One major problem is that there are almost no IC beds available in the entire province. The other major issue is protective masks for medical personnel, known as the L95 mask. This is a serious shortage we are facing every day. This ailment is increasing every day in the province and it is going to become worse from tomorrow ... The number of our patients is rising every day at an exponential rate."

On February 29, the parliament deputy from Rasht said that people are dying in the villages; they are buried and there are no doctors. He added, there are many houses with infected people quarantined in them. "All of my relatives are also at home and infected,"

A member of the IRGC in Tehran said on February 26: "The Islamic Republic always exploits crises and blames perceived enemies of the people. In the end, despite damages and casualties, it refuses to accept any responsibility for the problems."

THE IRGC'S ROLE IN THE VIRUS OUTBREAK AND SPREAD

Many in Iran consider the IRGC as the source of the outbreak of COVID-19. On February 26, one of the IRGC commanders in Tehran in a confidential report wrote that while there are disagreements about how the virus entered Iran, what is certain is that the IRGC is being blamed for it. This is because Mahan Air, a special IRGC service company, has continued its operations with China. Moreover, some media outlets have reported that the virus entered Iran through Chinese theological students in Qom. Reportedly, over 700 Chinese students entered Qom with the support of the IRGC and are studying at the al-Mostafa Community.

The role of Mahan Air is rather unique. While it presents itself as a private company, in practice it is controlled by the IRGC. Mahan Air and a number of its directors have been placed on U.S. sanctions lists and as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SGDT)



Mahan Air controlled by the Qods Force of the IRGC maintains flights to four Chinese cities; Flights have not stopped.

In an October 2017 investigative report, the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) revealed that Mahan Air is an arm of the IRGC's extraterritorial Quds Force. Its chief directors were appointed by Qassem Soleimani, the former Quds Commander who was eliminated by the U.S. in January 2020. The CEO of the company, Mohsen Arabnejad, who like Soleimani was born in Kerman, had been under Soleimani's command in the IRGC since the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s. He was appointed as the CEO of Mahan Air by Soleimani after the establishment of the company.

Mahan Air has regular flights to the Chinese cities of Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Shenzhen. At the time of this report, Mahan Air has coordinated at least 55 flights to China since the identification of the coronavirus. Indeed, even after regime officially banned flights to China, Mahan Air has continued its flights, including on March 5 to Shanghai.

“Many in Iran consider the IRGC as the source of the outbreak of COVID-19.”

Despite the regime’s efforts to justify limited flights to China by claiming that they carry humanitarian aid, investigations show that those flights have been by passenger aircraft rather than cargo planes. There have been also flights from Tehran to multiple destinations in addition to China. While almost all airlines have stopped their flights to China or severely restricted them, it appears that Mahan planes flying to China are also used for other destinations, providing the means for wider dissemination of the virus.

IRGC & SETAD HOARDING MEDICAL SUPPLIES AND EQUIPMENT

The medical market is monopolized by the IRGC and economic powerhouses controlled by the office of Khamenei, such as the HQ for Implementation of the Imam’s Order (aka SETAD), a financial conglomerate under the supervision of the Supreme Leader. When reports about COVID-19 first emerged, the IRGC began hoarding and controlling the government sale and distribution of medical equipment to other countries. Out of the nearly 52 million masks that were bought, a portion were sent to China as a gift, some were sent to Iraq for the Popular Mobilization Front militias, and the rest were sold on the black market at exorbitant prices.

Standard detection kits for the virus were allocated to regime officials at the Pasteur Institute and Khomeini Hospital, while non-standard kits that were domestically manufactured are being sold to average citizens at ten times the regular price (700,000 Tomans as opposed to 70,000 Tomans).

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On February 29, according to the IRGC-affiliated Fars news agency, the regime's Health Minister, Saeed Namaki, said in a letter to Rouhani: "I predicted the probability of the coronavirus coming into the country in a letter to customs and requested that the export of masks be prohibited until further notice. I instructed my colleagues to purchase domestic products at a rational price and store them for the worst-case scenario. Unfortunately, despite many follow-ups, a small number were purchased and the rest of the country's products entered the black market. Unfortunately, after about 10 days, only a million masks were provided, and I do not know where the rest have been stored. My colleagues are forced to search various markets on a daily basis and play the role of middlemen to purchase these products at astronomical prices from smugglers. On what basis does this opportunistic and unreasonable network dare to stand up to the people and officials and simply declare it can provide 200 million masks in the span of 24 hours in this or that market at this or that price?"

"When reports about COVID-19 first emerged, the IRGC began hoarding and controlling the government sale and distribution of medical equipment to other countries."

According to analysts, he was referring to SETAD, which acts as Khamenei's personal coffer. It is one of the largest economic conglomerates in Iran; its assets were estimated at 95 billion dollars in 2013. It has muscled its way into the pharmaceutical business in Iran in recent years. SETAD is on the US sanctions list.

The head of SETAD, Mohammad Mokhber, said on February 27 that it had signed a contract for the production of 50 million medical masks, the first batch of which would be distributed in Tehran soon. Later news reports indicated that the masks were imported, at the same time that Health Ministry officials announced that they did not need to import any masks.

SETAD's public relations director, Hojat Niki-Molki, told *Jam-e Jam* newspaper on March 2 that the masks were purchased from a European country and that 17 million had entered the country on March 1 and would be delivered to the Health Ministry.

A standard mask in the EU costs about 20 to 40 cents at retail outlets. Local Iranian news outlets reported that masks are selling for \$1.50 to \$2 US on the black market in Tehran.

IMPACT ON THE REGIME'S OWN OFFICIALS

At least 23 members of the regime's Parliament, i.e. 8 percent of Parliament deputies, have contracted coronavirus. Deputy Health Minister Iraj Harirchi, in charge of combating the

coronavirus; the advisor to the Judiciary Chief Mostafa Pourmohammadi, who was Justice Minister during Rouhani's first term; the chairman of the parliamentary Security and Foreign Affairs committee Mojtaba Zolnour; and vice president Masoumeh Ebtekar, who was a spokeswoman of the Followers of the Imam students during the 1979 U.S. embassy takeover, are among those who have been contracted the virus.

A number of senior officials have died, including Seyyed Mohammad Mirmohammadi, a member of the Expediency Council; the former ambassador to the Vatican, Hadi Khosroshahi; two newly appointed members of parliament, Mohammad Ali Raemzanzadeh and Fatemeh Rahbar; a member of the Swimming and Water Polo Federation, Javad Karimi; the head of the Mojtahedi seminary and member of the Supreme Council of Seminaries of Tehran Province, mullah Habibi; the former head of the Organization of Deeds and Properties Registration and advisor to Judiciary chief Ebrahim Raisi, Ahmad Toyserkani; and Hossein Sheikh ol-Islam, a former Deputy Foreign Minister.

Qom as the center of the epidemic has led to the infection and death of many regime officials. The IRGC's ideological-political unit had established a training session for IRGC commanders in Qom. Attendees have infected other provinces and the IRGC itself. IRGC member Ebrahim Alizadeh, who had gone to Qom for a week-long ideological class, has been infected and is bedridden at home. Other IRGC members who have returned from Qom are quarantined in their houses and will not report to work for at least two weeks. In Ardebil Province, five IRGC commanders who returned in one vehicle have been infected and quarantined. One infected IRGC member fainted at the Ardebil airport. IRGC Brig. Gen. Farhang Mostaed Hesari, deputy commander of the IRGC in the province, and Jalil Babazadeh, another IRGC commander, are quarantined.

IRAN, THE NEW SOURCE OF THE PANDEMIC

The current COVID-19 crisis in Iran is not limited to the Iranian people; Iran has become the epicenter of the spread of the virus to other countries around the world, including Canada, Australia, New Zealand, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Lebanon, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Oman, Bahrain, Georgia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Kuwait.

On February 28, authorities of the Queensland state in Australia said that a 63-year-old woman who had recently come from Iran was diagnosed with COVID-19. In a similar development, according to New Zealand authorities, the first person diagnosed with the coronavirus had come from Iran.

The Iranian regime's state-run media outlets also wrote on March 1: "Canadian officials said last week that seven of their citizens returning from Iran had been diagnosed with the coronavirus."

CORONAVIRUS IN IRANIAN PRISONS

Coronavirus is spreading in Greater Tehran Prison, Rajaii-Shahr (Gohardasht-Karaj), Karaj's Central Prison, Qezel Hesar, Urmia, Sheiban and Kashan prisons. Because of overcrowding, inmates sleep on the ground in corridors, often close to sanitary facilities. They are deprived of medical masks and disinfectants. In some prisons, including Qezel Hesar, even simple detergents or soap are not available. Some prisoners in Karaj's Central Prison do not have cells and spend time in the prison yard. The lack of hygiene is aggravated because political and ordinary prisoners, including addicts, are kept together. This situation has accelerated the spread of the coronavirus.

The dire conditions in Evin Prison portend of another humanitarian catastrophe. A significant number of political prisoners are suffering from Coronavirus symptoms, such as severe coughing and high fever. No measures have been taken to treat or quarantine them, however. The guards avoid entering the cells for the daily census in fear of being infected and count the prisoners outside the cells. There is an absolute shortage of hygienic and disinfectants and Coronavirus test kits are non-existent. Prisoners are told to purchase the necessary hygienic supplies from outside the prison.

-- GREATER TEHRAN PRISON

The 5th block of Greater Tehran Prison is allocated to those arrested during the unrest of November 2019, mostly youths who protested fuel price hikes and poverty. Several among them are already infected with coronavirus. As of March 1, more than 40 inmates of the 5th block were quarantined in hospital. Out of hostility towards these political prisoners, the regime's Judiciary is still not agreeing to their temporary leave, which endangers all prisoners.

Amir Hossein Moradi, 25, who was sentenced to death for taking part in the November 2019 uprising, has contracted coronavirus in ward 2 of Fashfouyeh Prison in Tehran. The ward has not been disinfected and there is no medical equipment or products for the prisoners. Moradi was transferred to Khomeini hospital after contracting the virus, but was returned on February 29. He has been taken to an unknown location. He also suffers from paralysis and his immune system is severely weakened. His cellmates have all been quarantined.

Moradi has a diploma in computer science and before his arrest sold mobile phones, computers and software in Tehran.

On Friday, February 28, Amnesty International called for urgent action to save the lives of three protestors who took part in the November uprisings: Amir Hossein Moradi, Saeed Tamjidi, and Mohammad Rajabi. AI added that the three had been tried in an unjust trial and have been tortured.

-- *EVIN PRISON*

Inmates infected with coronavirus have been seen in wards 4, 7 and 8. As a result, all activities outside of the wards have been canceled, and the wards placed under quarantine. There is no news about the many political prisoners and prisoners of conscience being held in this prison.

-- *URMIA CENTRAL PRISON*

At least one inmate, Fariq Mohammadi, 47, has died; five others have been transferred to medical centers. The minimum essential hygienic products are not available in this prison, where overcrowding forces inmates to sleep on the floor in the proximity of sanitary facilities.

Nurses in special protective clothes transferred an inmate from ward 14 to a medical center out of the prison on suspicion of coronavirus infection on February 27. There is no information about his whereabouts. One of the prisoners in ward 3 has contracted the virus. There are about 900 prisoners in wards 3 and 4.

-- *KARAJ'S CENTRAL PRISON*

Family visits were cancelled in Karaj's Central Prison last week because of the spread of coronavirus. The ward allocated to political prisoners and prisoners of conscience has been turned into the quarantine space for the infected. Prison authorities have placed political prisoners in the workers' ward. The prison's hygienic conditions are catastrophic. In each prison hall, only 100 prisoners have beds. From early morning, the rest spend time in the prison courtyard and during the night sleep on the floor in the corridors adjacent to the sanitary facilities.

-- *QEZEL HESAR PRISON*

At least seven inmates are infected with COVID-19 in Karaj's Qezel Hesar Prison. Not only have the authorities refused to take care of them, but they have also provided no information about their condition. The identities of three are: Said Hemati, Meisam Monouri, and Mohammad-Hessam Rahimi.

Not even detergents are made available to prisoners in this prison. Given the severe overcrowding of the facility, prisoners suffer from lack of fresh air in the rooms and the risk of infection is high.

-- *RAJAI-SHAHR PRISON (GOHARDASHT)*

Prisoners suspected of being infected are kept in public wards in Rajai-Shahr Prison in Karaj, and are returned to the public wards after simply taking their temperature, despite severe

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coughing and fever. Inmates say that despite authorities' denials of new prisoner entries, new prisoners have routinely been taken there in recent days and even transfers to courts and judicial centers continue. On February 26, several inmates of the workers' ward of Greater Tehran Prison were transferred to Rajai-Shahr to maintain services such as cooking. Given the spread of coronavirus in Greater Tehran Prison, the risk of infection is high..

-- KASHAN PRISON

Cases of infection have been detected in ward 3, where the infected inmates are kept with others with no quarantine. Reportedly, on February 25, a dying inmate was transferred out of the prison. Nothing is known about his fate.

-- AHVAZ SHIBAN PRISON

In Ahvaz Shibani Prison, at least two inmates, Milad Baghlani and Hamid-Reza Makki, have contracted coronavirus and have been transferred to prison quarantine. There is no information about their situation.

-- ARDEBIL PRISON

The healthy inmates of one ward of Ardebil Central Prison have been evacuated and prisoners that show symptoms of the virus have been transferred to this ward. There are a large number of political prisoners in this prison.

-- ZAHEDAN PRISON

A number of prisoners in Zahedan Prison who contracted the coronavirus have been transferred to unknown locations. The virus has spread in ward 4, where at least one prisoner has been transferred out. A large number of political prisoners are being held in this ward and are in danger of contracting the virus. A number of prisoners from other wards who had been infected were transferred after a delay of several days and after their conditions had worsened. There is no news about their whereabouts. Prison officials cancelled all visits last week.

-- KERMANSHAH AND SANANDAJ PRISONS

On March 3, a prisoner in the public ward of Kermanshah's Dizelabad Prison was transferred by health workers outside the prison after his condition worsened. On the same day, another prisoner was transferred out of Sanandaj Central Prison under tight security.

CONCLUSION

1. The virus had begun to circulate in Iran, but regime officials had direct orders from Khamenei to withhold information from the public because of the February 11 anniversary of the Revolution and the February 21 election charade. It was not until late February that officials acknowledged the infections, but that was too late. The regime was the main culprit causing the spread of the coronavirus in Iran.
2. The regime has consistently under-reported the number of people infected or killed by the virus and has turned the issue of statistics into a security matter, thus covering up the extent of the public health crisis facing Iran and the world.
3. The public has strongly rejected Rouhani's and Khamenei's remarks questioning the seriousness of the crisis, while the regime is trying to feign normalcy. Despite the denials, it has been forced to cancel parliament meetings, its Friday prayers, and several other gatherings, indicative of the extent of the crisis.
4. Evidence shows that the IRGC has been complicit in the spread of the virus to the city of Qom and from there to other cities. The consequent epidemic demonstrates the incompetence of this regime.
5. The medical supplies that already existed in Iran and could have been sufficient to counter the virus have been grossly mismanaged due to corruption and hoarding by the IRGC and government agencies affiliated with Khamenei. There is a shortage of medical supplies, to the extent that even medical personnel do not have the minimum supplies to fight the virus and protect themselves.
6. The epidemic has been very costly to the regime. It has been a total disaster politically, has squeezed the regime further economically, and aggravated public disgust of the regime to unprecedented levels.

IRANIAN RESISTANCE'S POSITION:

Mrs. Maryam Rajavi, the President-elect of the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), said the mullahs' regime had been aware of the spread of the virus to Iran for some time, but on the order of the regime's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, it resorted to a cover-up to ensure a high turnout for the anniversary of the 1979 Revolution and the sham election. The virus rapidly spread to different parts of Iran because people were kept in the dark.

Mrs. Rajavi reiterated that the country's medical and health care resources, which are monopolized by the ruling mullahs, the IRGC and the security forces, must be put at the disposal of the Iranian people, hospitals, and physicians.

The NCRI President-elect added that the regime was repeating the same narrative regarding the coronavirus as the one concerning the downing of the Ukrainian airliner, albeit on a much larger scale. She called on physicians, nurses and hospital staff to publicize their information quickly in order to save the lives of the Iranian people and to thwart the regime's cover-up and misleading information. She emphasized that the United Nations, World Health Organization, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and other international human rights organizations must condemn the clerical regime for its continued criminal cover-up of the spread of Coronavirus in Iran. She said they must compel the religious fascism ruling Iran to make public all the facts and figures regarding COVID-19 and provide them to relevant international organizations in order to save the lives of the people of Iran and other countries in the region.

She also urged them to prevent a major humanitarian catastrophe by taking immediate action to save the lives and health of prisoners, particularly the political prisoners who are under torture and face added pressure and limitations.

Mrs. Rajavi said the only thing that matters to this regime and its officials is to keep their grip on power. People's lives, health, and resources have no value for the ruling mullahs. The Iranian people have suffered the greatest damage and losses under their rule, as a result of external war, domestic repression, poverty, unemployment, and illnesses.