Why Iran Is Struggling with Coronavirus

by Dr. Frank Musmar

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Iran is struggling with a devastating coronavirus outbreak, a broken economy, and a severe shortage of medical equipment. Iran's lack of transparency about its coronavirus outbreak has resulted in a catastrophic public health risk not only to the Iranian people but also to its neighbors. Tehran has confirmed more than 47,000 cases and more than 3,000 deaths, though public health experts estimate the real toll to be significantly higher.

Rather than take responsibility and do their best to provide for the health and wellbeing of their subjects, Iran's leaders are wasting time and resources as the coronavirus crisis rages. In keeping with their longstanding policy of attempting to deflect blame by lashing out at foreign parties, the mullahs are trying to distract Iranians from their own failure to handle the crisis by spreading lies that the US engineered the virus. The Iranian media are intensifying the regime's failures by promoting false cures, which has led hundreds of Iranians to blind and even kill themselves by consuming bootleg methanol. The regime also avoided taking steps to curb mass visits to imams' tombs, a practice that exponentially spread the virus.

Iran reported its first confirmed coronavirus cases on February 19: two fatalities in the Shiite holy city of Qom. Instead of rushing to stop the spread of the virus, the regime turned the country into a vector of infection by applying such measures as these:

- Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei implored Iranians to come out to vote in the parliamentary elections, going so far as to describe the virus as a ploy to discourage people from voting. The regime threatened and imprisoned dozens of Iranians who told the truth about the outbreak.

- The government resisted imposing social distancing. On February 25, President Rouhani called the coronavirus "one of the enemy's plots to bring our country into closure by spreading panic."
- After the [first deaths](#) from the virus were reported in Qom on February 19, the regime refused to take measures that could have contained the virus. Qom is a holy site that beckons pilgrims from across Iran and abroad. The government kept the shrines of Qom open until March 17, and businesses and restaurants in Tehran remain open.
- The mullahs' airline, Mahan Air, flew at least 55 times between Tehran and China in February, transporting [religious students](#) between China and Qom. At least five of Iran's first cases of coronavirus were connected to these flights.
- The government refused all offers of aid, even revoking the [permission](#) it had granted to Doctors without Borders to set up a 50-bed field hospital in Isfahan to treat coronavirus patients.
- The regime [favored the economy over public health](#). On March 29, Rouhani said the government had to the weigh economic effects of mass quarantine on an already beleaguered economy. "Health is a principle for us, but the production and security of society is also a principle for us," he said at a cabinet meeting. "We must put these principles together to reach a final decision." In practice, the government did not attempt to find any such balance. It ignored the health side of the issue completely and focused exclusively on the economic side.

Iran is now facing a public health disaster of potentially catastrophic proportions because of the paranoia, lack of transparency, and incompetence of the Iranian regime. Tehran's official figures on the numbers of Iranians who are suffering from or have died from the virus, while high, are only a fraction of the true numbers.

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