

# Elections, ties with China shaped Iran’s coronavirus response

DUBAI (Reuters) - Iranian authorities ignored warnings by doctors in late December and January of an increasing number of patients with high fevers and lung infections in the historic city of Qom, which turned out to be the epicentre of Iran’s coronavirus outbreak, said two health ministry officials, a former ministry official and three doctors.

And, when the authorities did become aware of domestic cases of the flu-like virus in early January, they didn’t announce the news until weeks later, out of concern that releasing detailed information would unsettle the public ahead of parliamentary elections scheduled for February 21, according to a senior official with direct knowledge of the matter.

“The last thing we needed was a pandemic. The mood was already down,” said the senior official.

Added to that was another concern, said the senior official and one of the health ministry officials: The virus had originated in China, and Iran did not want to risk disrupting its vital trade and diplomatic ties with Beijing, one of its most important allies.

On Feb. 19, the Iranian government publicly announced its first two cases of – and deaths from - the new coronavirus, which can lead to breathing difficulties and pneumonia. Iran has now reported more than 47,500 cases of coronavirus and more than 3,000 deaths, making it the worst hit country in the Middle East. More than 900,000 infections have been reported globally, according to a Reuters tally.

The fresh details about the warnings by doctors and why Iran’s establishment didn’t disclose early on the spread of coronavirus come in the wake of allegations by some Iranians, including former officials and medical professionals, that the government has low balled the death toll. This account, based on interviews with officials and doctors in Iran, also underscores how governments of all stripes, democratic and authoritarian, in rich nations and poor ones, have made similar miscalculations.

Iran is far from alone in facing criticism over its early han-



A member of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) troops measures a temperature, following the outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) at the entrance of Qom, Iran March 24, 2020. WANA (West Asia News Agency) via REUTERS

dling of the coronavirus. From China and Japan to Italy, Spain, Britain and the United States, health experts have accused governments of initially downplaying the disease’s seriousness or failing to take swift enough action to curb it. Like the United States, for instance, Iran was hobbled by a shortage of testing kits, which could have helped the country better manage the outbreak, officials have said.

The Iranian government denies concealing facts about the outbreak. President Hassan Rouhani said during a televised speech on

March 18 that his government had been “honest and straightforward with the nation.”

In response to questions from Reuters about whether the government was aware of the virus reaching Iran earlier than acknowledged, Alireza Miryousefi, spokesman for Iran’s mission to the United Nations in New York, said: “The emergence of coronavirus and its rapid spread took every country, including the Western countries by surprise. Iran was

no exception.”

“The notion that there was intentional concealing of facts is preposterous,” Miryousefi said. He added that the World Health Organization (WHO) has confirmed that Iran’s measures are “stringent.” WHO officials said in early and mid-March that Iran’s response to coronavirus was coordinated and evolving in the right direction, but that more needed to be done.

# BUSINESS

## Coronavirus Silver Lining:

### Is A Quick Rebound Even Possible?

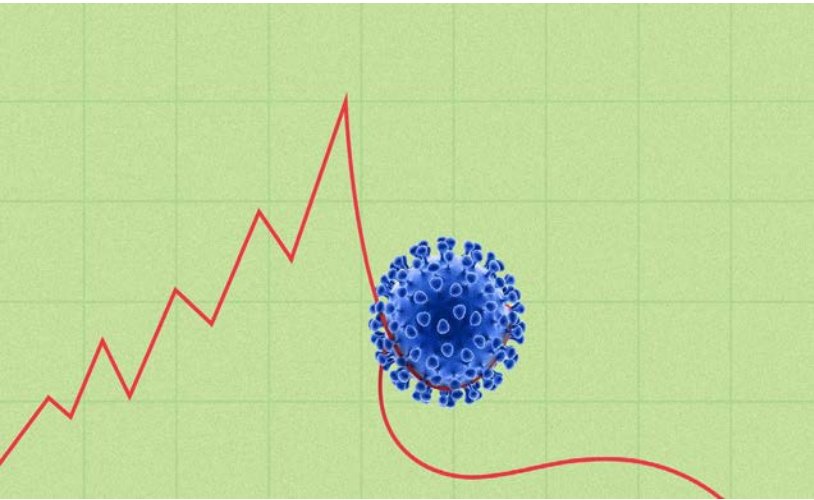


Illustration: Aida Amer/Axios

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

**A Quick Review Of Where We Are With The Coronavirus**  
News about the coronavirus is so big and coming so fast that it’s difficult to remember what happened just last week, let alone last month.

#### Below Is A Quick Reminder Of Where We Are Today – What Happened, How The Virus Expanded And Took Control

1. The first known cases in Wuhan emerged in November or December, and Chinese officials spent part of January downplaying the problem.
2. In early January, China posted the virus’ genome for all to study — and later that month, China put strict measures in place that helped eventually limit its outbreak.
3. Communities around the globe that had previous experience with the SARS outbreak prepared early and have so far avoided the worst impacts.
4. The U.S. bought itself some extra time by screening passengers from Wuhan mid-January and advising against unnecessary travel to China later that month.
5. But the U.S. squandered that time — failing to resolve the breakdown of its testing system, to ramp up production of

masks and ventilators, or to move quickly on social distancing measures.



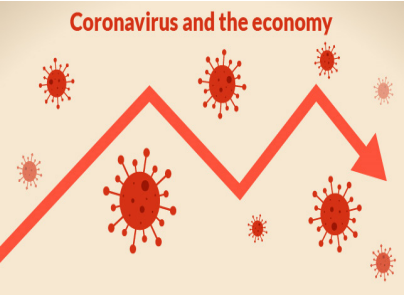
6. Invalid comparisons with seasonal flu outbreaks led individuals and leaders to downplay the virus’ danger.
7. For now, until we develop treatments and vaccines, distance and hygiene are the only weapons against the spread of this new virus.
8. Shutdowns cause widespread economic harm. So does mass illness. Economies can recover. The dead can’t.
9. Our errors have all been on the side of underestimating the virus and, despite warnings, under-preparing for the crisis.
10. Whatever mistakes lie behind us,

each day offers new chances to limit future harm.

#### Is It Way Too Early To Talk About Rebound?

The coronavirus seems increasingly likely to plunge the world into economic times worse than anything we’ve seen in decades.

- **In the U.S.**, layoffs have already started. As many as 2 million people could file for unemployment aid next week—and we’re barely two weeks into a widespread societal shutdown that could stretch on for weeks or months.
- **Deutsche Bank economists** said this week that they foresee a “severe global recession occurring in the first half of 2020,” and other banks have echoed those dire warnings, per Axios’ Dion Rabouin.



- What’s next:** The White House and congressional leaders are working to hammer out another stimulus bill, likely worth about \$1 trillion and containing a mix of direct cash assistance to workers as well as bailouts for shell-shocked industries.
- **Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell** wants to vote as early as Monday on a new stimulus bill.
  - **Many senators hope** the plan is big enough that they can stay away from Washington for a while.
- The silver lining:** It may be a while, but there’s reason to believe the U.S. economy can rebound pretty quickly once this is all over. (See “After The War” below.) Immediate pain of layoffs in service industries will be very real. But once Americans can travel and go to restaurants again, there will be demand to refill those jobs.

And our physical economic infrastructure — buildings, production plants, intellectual property, internet backbones, and the like — is not being harmed at all.

#### Related

### After The War



Illustration: Sarah Grillo/Axios

At some point, things will change and our lives will “reset.” Your normal routines, your relationship with your immediate family, your news consumption, your money, possibly your source of income — all will come back. But is a war, so it will not be immediate and things will get rough along the way.

This is not a shooting war, but in important ways it looks and feels like one. Understanding the similarities and differences is a useful way to judge the potential economic consequences of the pandemic.

*“Nous sommes en guerre.”*  
— French President Emmanuel Macron

- Similarities to a shooting war:** In a shooting war, three big things tend to happen to an economy: Private-sector employment plunges, a large proportion of the labor force is injured or killed, and a substantial part of the country’s infrastructure is destroyed.
- **In the fight against COVID-19**, the central strategy of the war effort — social distancing — is forcing layoffs in dozens of industries. That’s a big similarity.
  - **The other side:** The labor force is — with tragic exceptions — largely untouched, willing and eager to get back to work as soon as it can. And the

economy’s asset base — its buildings, production plants, intellectual property, internet backbones, and the like — is not being harmed at all.



This is good news from a medium-term economic perspective, and explains why the likes of Goldman Sachs expect a sharp rebound in economic activity — and also stock prices — once America is allowed to get back to work.

- **The country’s infrastructure** might be temporarily retooled to support the war effort — GM and Ford, and maybe even Tesla, are considering moves to start making ventilators instead of cars.
- **Either way**, the core ingredients of America’s pre-crisis economic strength will largely be in place after the pandemic has run its course.
- **Between the lines:** There are far too many known unknowns to have any certainty about the medium-term economic prognosis. And since no major economy has experienced all-out war on its own soil since 1945, the ability to compare is impossible.
- **The world is also retreating** into national borders, both in terms of travel restrictions and hoarding medical supplies. This doesn’t bode well for global supply chains following the war.
- **Bottom line:** Shooting wars are horrible, devastating things, so “better than a shooting war” is not really reassuring. But wars are not that bad for capital markets, and capitalism has proved extremely resilient many times in the past. So it’s way too early to count it out this time. (Courtesy axios.com)



Editor's Choice



Indonesians carrying their luggage are escorted inside a police vehicle as they leave the mosque, during a local protest against Indonesians taking shelter at the mosque, at Jame Masjid in Imadol, Lalitpur



A medical worker adjusts his face mask before performing a test for the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in a new tent extension of Danish National Hospital Rigshospitalet in Copenhagen, Denmark April 2, 2020. Ritzau Scanpix/Niels Christian Vilmann via REUTERS ATTENTION EDITORS



A New York City Police Department (NYPD) officer stands outside Elmhurst Hospital Center during outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in New York



A medical worker performs a mouth swab on a patient to test for the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in a new tent extension of Danish National Hospital Rigshospitalet in Copenhagen, Denmark April 2, 2020. Ritzau Scanpix/Niels Christian Vilmann via REUTERS



A newborn baby is seen in a hospital wearing a protective face shield during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak in Bangkok, Thailand, April 2, 2020. Handout via REUTERS.



The separated couple, the eighty-nine years old German Karsten Tuchsén Hansen from Suederluegum and his eighty-five years Danish girlfriend Inga Rasmussen from Gallehus meet daily at the Aventoft border crossing after the border has been closed, as the spread of the coronavirus



A woman outside a temporary mortuary as work begins close to the City of London crematorium, as the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) continues, London, Britain, April 2, 2020. REUTERS/ Dylan Martinez



A woman with a face mask is demanding solidarity with refugees at the Roemerberg in Frankfurt, Germany, April 2, 2020, as the spread of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) continues.



Malaria Drug Helps Virus Patients  
Improve In A Small Study



A group of moderately ill people were given hydroxychloroquine, which appeared to ease their symptoms quickly. The study, which has not yet undergone peer review, was small and limited to patients who were mildly or moderately ill, not severe cases. Photo/John Phillips/Getty Images)

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

The malaria drug hydroxychloroquine helped to speed the recovery of a small number of patients who were mildly ill from the coronavirus, doctors in China reported this week.

Cough, fever and pneumonia went away faster, and the disease seemed less likely to turn severe in people who received hydroxychloroquine than in a comparison group not given the drug. The authors of the report said that the medication was promising, but that more research was needed to clarify how it might work in treating coronavirus disease and to determine the best way to use it.

The study was small and limited to patients who were mildly or moderately ill, not severe cases. Like many reports about the coronavirus, it was posted at medRxiv, an online server for medical articles, before undergoing peer review by other researchers.

But the findings strongly support earlier studies suggesting a role for the drug, Dr. Schaffner said.



“I think it will reinforce the inclination of many people across the country who are not in a position to enter their patients into clinical trials but have already begun using hydroxychloroquine,” he said.

Previous reports from China and France that the drug seemed to help patients, along with enthusiastic comments from President Trump, have created a buzz around hydroxychloroquine and the closely related chloroquine, which are decades-old drugs used to treat malaria and autoimmune diseases like lupus and rheumatoid arthritis. A resulting spike in demand has led to hoarding and shortages, and left patients who rely on the drugs for chronic diseases wondering whether they will be able to fill their

prescriptions.

With no proven treatment for the coronavirus, many hospitals have simply been giving hydroxychloroquine to patients, reasoning that it might help and probably will not hurt, because it is relatively safe.

Among health officials who declined to endorse the drugs, and who called for clinical trials, were some members of the president’s coronavirus task force — including Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, and Dr. Stephen Hahn, commissioner of the Food and Drug Administration.



**Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases**

The new study, of 62 patients with an average age of about 45, did have a control group. It was conducted at the Renmin Hospital of Wuhan University, in Wuhan, China. The patients were carefully chosen to exclude people with medical problems that could be made worse by hydroxychloroquine, like abnormal heart rhythms, certain eye diseases, and liver or kidney problems. Half the subjects — the controls — received just the usual care given to coronavirus patients, and half had usual care plus hydroxychloroquine. The usual care included oxygen, antiviral drugs, antibiotics and other treatments.

Their disease was considered mild, even though all had pneumonia that showed up on CT scans. After giving informed consent, they were assigned at random to either the hydroxychloroquine or the control group. They were treated for five days, and their fevers and coughing were monitored. They also had chest CT scans the day before the study treatment

began, and the day after it ended.

Coughing and fever eased a day or so earlier in the patients who received hydroxychloroquine, and pneumonia improved in 25 of 31, as opposed to 17 of 31 in the controls.

The illness turned severe in four patients — all in the control group.



Two patients had minor side effects from hydroxychloroquine: One had a rash and another had a headache.

If the drug is helping, it is not clear how. There are two possible ways. In laboratory studies, it can stop the virus from invading cells. But hydroxychloroquine can also dial back an overactive immune system, which is why it can treat autoimmune diseases. And a powerful immune reaction to the coronavirus is suspected of playing a role in some of the severest cases of the disease.

“We don’t know which of the pharmacologic aspects of hydroxychloroquine are most active, the antiviral part, or the immunomodulatory part,” Dr. Schaffner said. “We don’t know, but it does reinforce the notion, as the authors say briefly, it reinforces the thinking about the nature of many of these pneumonias we are seeing, which seem to have an immune basis, as opposed to being secondary bacterial pneumonia, which we see so often in influenza.” (Courtesy https://www.nytimes.com/)

**Related**  
**Hundreds of Scientists Scramble to Find a Coronavirus Treatment**



A worker checking the production of

**chloroquine phosphate in China last month. There has been “anecdotal evidence” that chloroquine, a drug used to treat malaria, might work against the coronavirus. Two dozen of the medicines are already under investigation. Also on the list: chloroquine, a drug used to treat malaria. (Photo/FeatureChina, via Associated Press)**

One drug on the list, chloroquine, kills the single-celled parasite that causes malaria. Scientists have long known that it can also attach to a human cellular protein called the sigma-1 receptor. And that receptor is also the target of the virus.

Chloroquine has been much in the news this past week, thanks to speculation about its use against the coronavirus — some of which was repeated by President Trump at a news briefing at the White House on Friday.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, followed the president’s remarks with a warning that there was only “anecdotal evidence” that chloroquine might work.

Only well-run trials could establish whether chloroquine was safe and effective against the coronavirus, Dr. Fauci said.

On Wednesday, the World Health Organization announced it would begin a trial on chloroquine, among other drugs.



And on Sunday, Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo of New York announced that the state had obtained large amount of chloroquine and the antibiotic azithromycin to start its own drug trial. Nevan Krogan, a biologist at the University of California, San Francisco, who led the new study, warned that chloroquine might have many toxic side effects, because the drug appears to target many human cellular proteins.

“You need to be careful,” he said. “We need more data at every level.” (Courtesy https://www.nytimes.com/)



半个城里人



人至中年，一半的时光在农村，一半的时光在城里，我是半个城里人。

我出生的小村子，离最近的小城三十里。母亲十七岁做为知青从小城来到村里，嫁给了父亲。五十年的时光并未离开村子，母亲是农村人了。

国家有政策知青返城，那时母亲已是几个孩子的母亲，她放弃回城，但把她和几个孩子的户口转为城市户口。对不能返城的知青，国家给三百元的建房补助。村里收回母亲和我们姐妹的耕地。父亲因此同母亲大闹，没有土地，对父亲来说就意味着失去了生存的依据。

户口的改变，让父亲内心不安，家似乎被切割两半。我们姐妹四个，依父亲的主意，两个孩子改成城市户口，两个留给他，依旧是农村户口。母亲不同意，坚决的把我们姐妹的农村户口转为城市户口。农村太苦了，她要自己的孩子以后到城里生活，户口最为关键，那不亚于一张永久居住的绿卡。

读小学时我有了小小的优越感。母亲说话的声音与村里人不同，带着城市的味道。我说话的语气很像母亲，同学说我说话的语气像城里人。我的衣服文具多是城里的小姨买给我，洋气，使得

同学羡慕里有些妒嫉。而我真就觉得与同学不同。

村里只分给父亲一个人的耕地。母亲和我们姐妹的口粮在根本上，吃粮要花钱到城里的粮店去买。这是父亲不能接受的，家里没有那份钱。父亲起早贪黑硬是用铁锹尖镐在村外开垦出几块荒地。全家人的生计在土地上，每粒粮食都是汗水换得。在我十来岁就同大人一样在田里干活。一首《悯农》道不完劳作的艰辛。那时我已深深懂得劳作之苦。

想离开村子不在受这劳作之苦，只有两条路，读书，嫁人。后者对我容易些，因为我的城市户口。城里人找农村媳妇，那个姑娘必是模样出众的农村姑娘也以嫁到城里为荣耀。在我的心里，早早认定自己将来就是城里媳妇终有一天离开这村落，过上城里人的生活。

叔叔的儿子第一年高考落榜，叔叔没有责备他，只是让他每天到地里干活，劳作的苦让他叫苦不叠。叔叔只一句话，想不在农村吃苦，读书是唯一出路。叔叔的儿子回到学校苦读。

读中学时，班里一个男同学的母亲同是留在村里的知青，他也是城市户口

。那时我们男女同学之间是不说话的，但在我们俩心里有种亲近感，自觉与别人不同，那点优越感依然存在。在同学眼里，我俩是最为般配的人。那个害羞的男孩，大大的眼睛，一笑便脸红。老师让我每天检查同学们的迟到情况，我曾掩护过他一次。他对我笑的时候，我们的脸一样的红。

因为母亲是知青，我是城市户口，二十岁那年通过小姨的帮忙我进城里工作。从那时起我在村里小小的优越感被击的粉碎，卑微的如一粒尘土。我曾自豪的城市发音带着乡土气息，在别人的嘲笑里，我有着自卑。

厂里举行演讲比赛，稿子自己写。这难倒了许多城里女孩，我的稿子被选中。演讲会上我慷慨激昂的话语不带一丝乡土气，我为自己争得第一个尊重。

厂里的姐妹给我介绍城里的一个青年，高高的个子，面容清瘦白皙，笑起来很好看，有点像我的中学同学。我有些担心单薄的话以后能帮我的父母干农活吗？那时的我就是如此纯朴。

好在没让我担心太久，他的母亲盘问我的家里情况，在我的回答里，脸色变得越发阴沉。彼此初见，没有感情，

分手是很自然的事。

我的城市户口使我进入城市，但并不被城市接纳。城市户口是件华丽的外衣，披着它我惶惶进入城市，包裹的身体依然是农村人。没有勇气脱下外衣，注定在城市里挣扎。

我嫁到了城里，丈夫是小姨介绍的。结婚不久，主动和邻居亲近。农家孩子心性纯朴热情。邻居嫂子问“你是有粮本的人吧”？是，我是城市户口。有城市户口就是同类人，可以亲近。自此，羞于说自己是农村人。

城市生活没有想像的轻松美好。用母亲的话说，吃棵葱要钱，喝口水要钱。在城市的角落安下身，城市的喧嚣里奔波着疲惫的身体。城市的外衣紧贴身体，我的轮廓渐渐地有了城市的影子。

叔叔的儿子凭着优异的成绩进入了城市，有了光鲜的城市外衣，娶了城里媳妇。

母亲说，叔叔的儿子每次回村都开着车子，在车子的后备箱里拎出许多城里买来的东西，惹的邻居们羡慕不已。叔叔的儿子在城里买了房，升了职，说话的语气硬得很。

叔叔的儿子央求母亲帮忙，劝他的

父亲去城里住。叔叔院里养了七八头牛，院子又脏又乱，孙女不愿到爷爷家里来。小孙女和爷爷说，外婆说了爷爷是农村人，很穷。叔叔不穷，家里养了牛，又有瓦匠手艺。叔叔的脸色难看，任谁也劝不动，想儿子孙女却没去城里住过一天。看儿子卸下一堆东西，不愿在家里住下，车子扬起一路尘土驶出村外。叔叔的儿子在切割与村子的关联，父亲是他最后的一根纽带。苍老的叔叔呆呆的站在门口，长长低叹口气，是孤独是对儿孙的不舍，还是对当初自己的决定后悔？

回母亲那里，我是坐公交车的，下车后要走上二十分钟的路，村里人见我打着招呼：“咋回来的？”我回答：“做公交车。”回答的没啥底气，手里拎的东西变轻了，自己是城里人还是农村人呢？

村子几年前拆迁过一次，家家新房，院落宽敞，装修气派，村里的街道同城里一样的水泥地面。每次回母亲那里，喜欢在院里坐上一会，抬头看着天空，看着满院的蔬菜，听听花狗的叫声，发觉这样的日子才舒坦。二十几年努力去做城里人，说话做事，生活习惯，骨子里我还是农村人。

和母亲聊天，问起村里有些人家的铁皮大门生了锈迹，门口长了荒草咋回事。母亲说那些人家几年前去了城里，没有在回来过。托村里的人想卖掉房子，可村里的年轻人家里条件好些的都在城里买了房，房子卖不出去，就任它荒败。

二十几年前，我拼命逃离农村。如今仍有人在离开土地，村子不在是我离开时的样子，富裕的村子依旧没能留住它的孩子。

随着年龄的增长，人不由地喜欢怀旧了，越来越恋起母亲的院子。不知道以后的日子里我会不会回到小村里生活。没人说我是农村人了，城市的外衣下我已变的光鲜，可我只是半个城里人，在村里的土地上有过我的汗水，父辈留给我的勤劳善良在我的骨子里。

且做半个城里人，村落是我的另一半.....