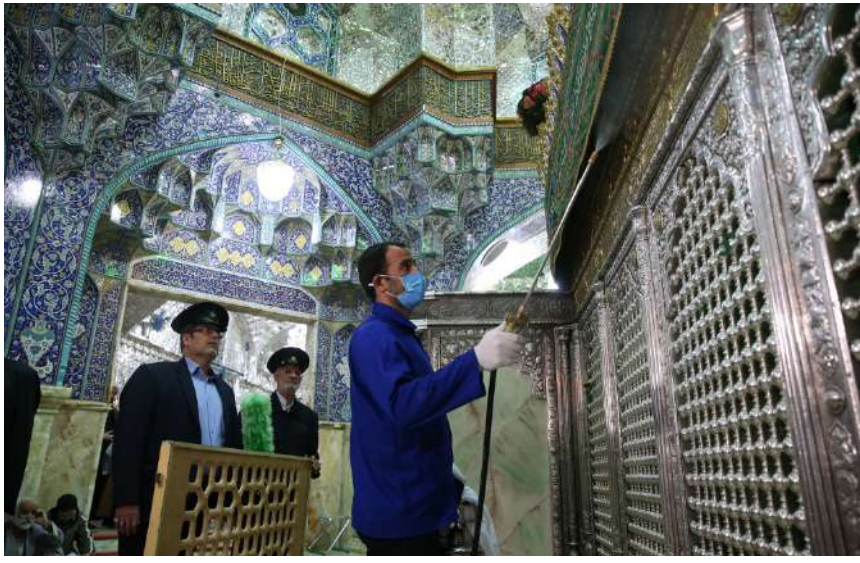


MEIWeekly.



A sanitation worker disinfecting Masumeh Shrine in Qom, Iran on 25 February to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Photo: Mehdi Marizad/Fars News Agency/AFP.

CALENDAR: UPCOMING INSTITUTE EVENTS

Suspension of Public Events

All MEI public events for February and March have been suspended until further notice, in view of the Ministry of Health's advice to cancel or defer all large scale and non-essential events.

New event dates will be announced once the situation stabilises. Please check our website and social media channels for updates.



WHAT'S NEWS: THE BIG HEADLINES THIS WEEK

Iran Emerges As Coronavirus Hotspot

Iran has grown to be one of the largest focal points for the spread of the coronavirus (Covid-19), second only to China, reported *The New York Times* on Monday (24 February). Factors such as its status as a hub for religious and commercial travel, an ill-equipped healthcare system in the aftermath of US economic sanctions and the Iranian regime's lack of transparency has led to a massive outbreak of at least hundreds of cases, with an unusually high mortality rate of 14 per cent. Experts warn that the virus is spreading to other countries in the region. Iranian authorities are scrambling to curb a growing pandemic, as even the country's own deputy health minister, Mr Iraj Harirchi, has contracted the virus.



Egyptian honour guards escort the coffin of former president Hosni Mubarak during the funeral ceremony, which was held at the Mosheer Tantawy Mosque in Cairo, Egypt on Wednesday (26 February). Photo: Khaled Desouki/AFP.

Ousted Egyptian President Mubarak Dies

Egypt's former autocratic president, Hosni Mubarak, died at age 91 on Tuesday (25 February). The military dictator ruled over Egypt for three decades before being toppled during the Arab Spring protests in 2011. He was buried with full military honours at a state funeral in Cairo on Wednesday (26 February). His regime was marked by violence, brutality and corruption since he rose to power in 1981 following the assassination of his predecessor Anwar Sadat, and his death has been met with polarised reactions. Some mourn the loss of “one of the leaders and heroes of the glorious October War” while others are indignant that he died without being held accountable for his crimes.

Airstrikes in Idlib Province Kill Civilians

Ferocious fighting continues in the Syrian Idlib province, with strikes by Syrian regime forces killing at least 20 civilians, including nine children, as reported by the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. Idlib remains the last stronghold of anti-government rebels who have been trying to take down Syrian President Bashar al-Assad since 2011. Regime forces have allegedly targeted schools and hospitals. The airstrikes, which have been described as “barbaric” and “war crimes” by organisations like the Union of Medical Care and Relief Organisations (UOSSM) and Amnesty International, continue to exacerbate what some have called the “worst humanitarian crisis of the decade”.

LOOK AHEAD: WHAT TO KEEP WATCH ON

Israel Goes to Poll for 3rd Time

Israelis will head to the polls on 2 March (next Monday) for the third time in less than 12 months. The first election in April 2019 saw current Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud Party fail to form a majority coalition in the Knesset (Israel's parliament). The winner of second election in September 2019, General Benny Gantz, also failed to form a majority coalition, triggering this third round.



OPEC Conference Meeting

The 178th (Extraordinary) Meeting of the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) Conference will be held in Vienna on 5 March (next Thursday). The meeting is part of Saudi Arabia's efforts to “closely monitor the compliance in level of fellow OPEC members and non-OPEC [oil] producers”. Given the current slump in oil prices amidst the ongoing Covid-19 outbreak, the main issues at this meeting are set to be how to push oil prices higher and ensure adherence to production quotas.

#MUSTREAD: WHAT'S POPULAR ON OUR SOCIAL MEDIA

FACEBOOK: According to a report in *The New York Times*, the body of a Palestinian militant who died while trying to plant a bomb at the Israel–Gaza border was seized by Israeli authorities with heavy machinery last Sunday (23 March). The action drew criticism from within Israel and triggered a slew of rocket attacks by Palestinian militants on Israeli territory. <https://bit.ly/2TirCSO>

Since 1967, the Israeli government has been continuously pushing for complete control over the entire city of Jerusalem through various “settler-colonial” policies. In this latest MEI *Insight*, Ms Nur Arafah identifies the motivations behind these policies, and sheds light on how they impact the lives of the Palestinians in Jerusalem. <https://nus.edu/212jSz8>



TWITTER: Last Friday (21 February), global inter-governmental watchdog Financial Action Task Force (FATF) placed Iran on its “black-list”, which increases the perceived risk of dealing with the country financially. MEI Senior Research Fellow Asif Shuja warns that this move will likely lead to further economic hardships for Iran. <https://bit.ly/2VpZFuN>

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