

## Welfare Ministry Targeting Malnourishment

A senior official with the Ministry of Welfare and Social Security said mothers and children of poor families subjected to malnutrition would be brought under the umbrella of the ministry as of next Iranian year (to begin March 21).

Director general of the Office for Poverty Reduction and Compensation Policies, Nejat Amini, told ILNA as per the ministry's plan, poor mothers and children aged 1-6 years old would be provided with food security as of next year.

Referring to the importance of proper dietary practices for the target families, Amini added, "If the government intends to eliminate poverty among Iranian households, it should take serious heed

of food security and try to fight malnutrition." He cited research results based on which children raised with malnourishment would have under-privileged families in the future.

"The plan would be implemented in the four provinces of Sistan-Baluchestan, South Khorasan, Kerman and Hormuzgan on a trial basis. We have called on the government to earmark \$4,000 billion for the pilot project," he said.

Amini reiterated that malnutrition is partially due to poverty and partially embedded in the unawareness of families about suitable dietary practices.

Two malnourished children in Nikshahr, Sistan-Baluchestan province



## Trachoma Uprooted

Ministry of Health, Treatment and Medical Education announced that no traces of the eye disease known as trachoma were witnessed in the country thanks to improvement of hygienic conditions, IRNA wrote.

The ministry's Public Relations Office report added that trachoma used to be a major cause of blindness in the country in the past.

Trachoma is a contagious disease of the con-

junctiva and cornea, caused by the gram-negative bacterium and characterized by inflammation, hypertrophy, and formation of granules of adenoid tissue.

The plan to examine the common causes of vision impairment and blindness shall be executed in a month and the operational scheme to prevent blindness within three months, it added. Blindness prevention scheme has been in effect in the cities of Qom,

Kashan and Varamin since 2002 and will draw to a close by March 2007.

Inborn eye disorders and preschool diseases shall be examined through a screening program. Cases suspicious of eye diseases will be referred to ophthalmologists for further examination.

About 130 eye care centers have been established in Iran which has the highest number of ophthalmologists in the Middle East.

## Coin-Operated Solar Public Lavatories

Fifty coin-operated public toilet facilities will have been established in the capital city by February.

Managing director of Tehran Municipality's Beautification Organization, Abolqasem Vahdati, told IRNA that the services operate on electronic doors which open after coins are inserted. "This will help prevent junksies from gathering in public restrooms and boost security for women who want to use the services," he stated.

According to surveys conducted by the organization, 70 percent of women in Tehran do not use public conveniences. "The reasons why women refuse to use the facilities are insecurity, lack of hygienic standards and improper locations," Vahdati stated.

He then referred to the highly efficient ventilation systems to be used in these toilets, adding, "The new ventilation systems would be 7.5 times stronger than what is used presently," he added.

Each toilet facility will cost close to 250 million rials, he said. "The lavatories' heat would be supplied through solar energy, helping save in energy resources."

Vahdati pointed to efforts to increase the number of public conveniences to 100 by the yearend (March 2005).

## 'Death Triangle' Photography Exhibit Underway

Tehran cultural houses are featuring a 10-day photography exhibition themed 'AIDS, Addiction, Hepatitis: The Death Triangle' which opened on Dec. 11, according to ILNA.

As reported by its Public Relations Office, Salamat (Health) Cultural Center sponsors the exhibition with the assistance of the

Culture Ministry's Office for AIDS Prevention and Education in an attempt to illuminate public opinion on the tragic consequences of drug addiction.

"Given that addiction has already turned into a national and global dilemma and that the Death Triangle is threatening almost all members of the society, the exhibi-

tion portrays the daily life of intravenous addicts, pointing up the threats of AIDS and hepatitis transmission," he noted.

The exhibition will be open to public from 8 to 16 everyday in the Salamat, Javan, Paydari, Eshraq, Andisheh, Banu, Olum and Qanun cultural centers and will last through Dec. 20th.

## Major Forensic Medicine Center for Tehran

Head of the State Forensic Medicine Organization said the Middle East's largest forensic medicine center would be inaugurated in Tehran in January.

Seyyed Shahabeddin Sadr, who was speaking at the 7th nationwide conference of the organization in Yazd, noted that the center would render services to peo-

ple all over the country.

Stating that an annual 1.5 million people seek the services of the organization, Sadr noted that over 80 percent of them undergo outpatient medical examination.

"Some 15 percent use the pathology laboratory services and 5 percent undergo post-mortem examination," he said. "One third of legal cases are

referred to the organization which is a large figure."

SFO head mentioned that specialized forensic laboratories would also become operational in eight cities.

"Some 2,100 people are currently working for the organization across the country, of whom 710 are specialist physicians," he stated.

## Fourth Plan Aiming At Mental Health

Close to 30,000 chronic mental cases have been identified in the country, more than 14,000 of whom have been freed into the society without undergoing any treatment, IRNA wrote.

Head of the State Welfare Organization, Mohammad Reza Rahchamani, made the remark, adding that presently approximately 16,000 patients suffering from chronic psychotic disorders are being kept

either in psychiatric hospitals or by their families.

He said leaving mental patients without care is a serious threat to the society.

"Currently, there are 4,000 beds for hospitalizing these patients in mental hospitals and psychiatric wards around the country," he mentioned.

About 75 percent of the unsupported patients would have to be brought under the umbrella of the State Welfare



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Organization by the end of the fourth development plan (2005-2010), Rahchamani stated.

## IRCS Has 2m Volunteers

About two million volunteers are presently members of the Iranian Red Crescent Society, secretary general of IRCS said.

Speaking in a ceremony held to commemorate the International Volunteer Day (Dec. 5) in Mashhad, Mohammad Hassan Qosian Moqaddam asserted that volunteer forces are engaged in humanitarian, relief and non-profit activities.

"More than 10 percent of IRCS volunteers are on alert and can provide services in case an emergency strikes," he added.

Noting that IRCS was established more than 80 years ago, Qosian Moqaddam asserted that the society had been successful in attracting and organizing volunteer forces.

Meanwhile, managing director of Khorasan Red Crescent Society said 1,200 out of 5,000 Khorasan's volunteers were stationed in Mashhad.

Seyyed Ali Hosseini asserted that the forces were divided into four subgroups, each assigned with a different set of tasks such as support, direction,



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participation and relief. Referring to different duties of the groups, Hosseini recalled that close to 2,500 relief workers from Khorasan province rendered relief operations during the Dec. 2003 earthquake in Bam.

## Change in Australian Social Patterns

Australian families that fit the traditional "nuclear" pattern of father, mother and children are now firmly in the minority after a single generation of dramatic social change, according to a study, AFP reported.

The report, by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), maps the rapidly changing structure of families and shows the proportion of traditional families fell from 59.5 percent in 1976 to just 47 percent in 2001.

The study, which assessed more than 30 economic, health and social surveys over 20

years, attributed the decline to a sharp increase in single-parent families and childless couples.

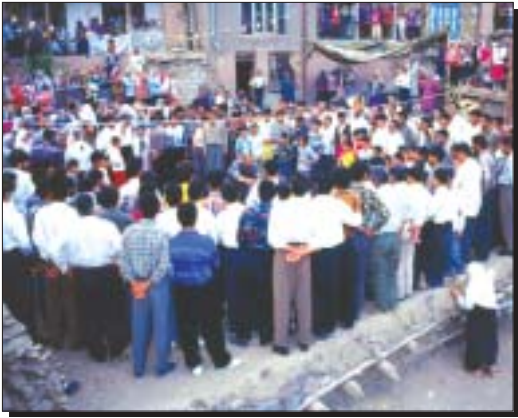
"While couple families are the most common family type, lone-parent families have become an increasingly common family type in recent decades," the report said. "Between 8 and 11 percent of lone-parent families are currently formed as a result of a lone woman having a child outside of a couple relationship," it said.

The combined studies found one quarter of all households had one person, while one-third were occupied by just two. Australians are also marrying later—the average age is now 27 years for women and 29 for men, compared with 21 and 23 respectively in 1975.

The report also found that Australian families and households are becoming smaller—from 4.5 per average Australian household at the beginning of the last century to just 2.6 now. "This decline reflects the rise in lone-person households, one-parent families and fewer children per family," it said.

The report also found that Australian families and households are

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) (570-633):  
Seek sustenance through matrimony.



Traditional wedding in one of Alamout villages, Qazvin province (Photo by Oshin D. Zakarian)

## Bulgaria: Bad News for Smokers

Bulgaria is to wage a war on smokers as of January 1st in a bid to wipe out nicotine addiction that afflicts over half the population, the health ministry said, AFP reported.

A smoking ban is to be imposed in January on all school and kindergarten staff.

Public transportation and taxi drivers will also be forbidden to smoke while at work.

Smoking will be banned in all public buildings and companies will have to provide a special room for employees to take cigarette breaks.

The number of non-

smoker tables in cafes and restaurants is to be at least 51 percent of all tables, and children will not be allowed in smoking areas.

"We cannot take more severe measures because smokers make up half of Bulgaria's population," Health Minister Slavtcho Bogoev told the newspaper

Sega.

Fines for not observing government measures range between 50 and 300 leva (26 to 153 euro) in a country where the average salary is 150 euros (\$200).

With 55 percent of the population as smokers, Bulgaria is the third highest percentage of smokers in the world and the second highest in Europe, according to the World Health Organization.

Two-thirds of all men aged between 20 and 45 are smokers, while 30 percent of all women and 18 percent of all teenagers smoke, according to WHO data. Almost 70 percent of all children are passive smokers due to the nicotine addiction of their parents, the ministry said.

## HK Makes Record Ecstasy Seizure

Hong Kong customs said they had smashed an international drug trafficking syndicate and seized a haul of Ecstasy with a street value of about US\$1.4 million, the city's biggest seizure of the drug, Reuters reported.

Officers arrested four men and seized 62,700 tablets on Wednesday, a customs statement said late on Thursday.

The drugs, weighing about 16.25 kg (36 pounds), had been concealed inside seven aquarium purifiers. They were delivered

to Hong Kong by express parcel shipment from Belgium.

"It is believed that the trafficking syndicate smuggled the drugs into Hong Kong to meet the rising market demand during the festive seasons," said Head of Customs Drug Investigation Bureau Ben Leung.

The operation was a result of cooperation and intelligence sharing between Hong Kong customs and officials in Belgium, Britain and Switzerland.

## China Suicide Hotline Busy

Nine out of 10 Chinese calling into a suicide-prevention hotline in the capital Beijing are getting the busy tone, China Daily said, adding that nationwide four people were killing themselves every minute.

So far, more than 110,000 people had dialed in to the Beijing Suicide Research and Prevention Center hotline since it was set up

in Beijing last year.

It quoted an expert as saying poverty, unemployment, bereavement, breakdowns in relationships or legal and work-related problems were all causes.

But a lack of funds meant that not everyone who needed the hotline was getting through, said Michael Phillips, executive director of the center.

"Nine of every 10 persons only hear a busy tone," he told the newspaper. "It's very dangerous because they may be at high risk of committing suicide."

Stress in urban China has increased with 20 years of economic reforms, increased competition, job losses, breakup of the traditional family unit in the cities and the dismantlement of cradle-to-grave welfare benefits.