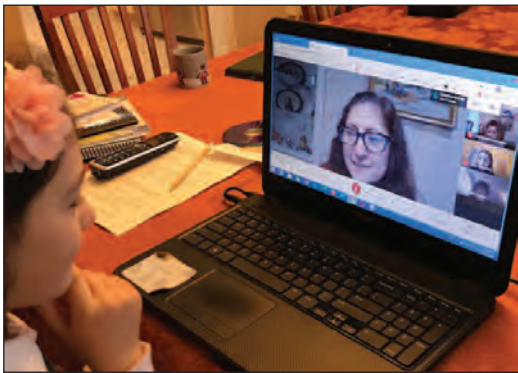


## Shutting Down a Physical Community In Watertown and Belmont

By Aram Arkun

Mirror-Spectator Staff

WATERTOWN — As the coronavirus spreads throughout the world, it begins to affect every aspect of our lives. Here in Watertown and neighboring Belmont, the Armenian community is already hunkering down, with “non-essential” businesses asked to halt operations and people to restrict their contacts with each other as much as feasible. Armenian community institutions have had to close down or radically alter their interactions with the public. So far, it appears that no Armenians have been identified as victims of the coronavirus in this area, but some at least know other non-Armenians who have self-isolated and tested positive.



St. Stephen's Armenian School student Siran Arakelian with teacher Ardemis Megerdichian

Fr. Arakel Aljalian of St. James Armenian Church in Watertown said that most of his parishioners are at home and are understandably nervous. As the Eastern Diocese

of the Armenian Church of America has recommended no clergy visits, based on medical recommendations, to avoid infecting people, Fr. Aljalian has been keeping in touch via email and making telephone calls. He has been conducting services alone, without deacons or others, out of an abundance of caution. The office staff of the church has only very limited hours, which are going to be further restricted due to new regulations of the state of Massachusetts.

During such challenging times, he said that people are stepping up and volunteering to help others. Parishioners are reaching out to individuals to see if they need help, such as for grocery shopping or getting medicine from pharmacies.

He encourages parishioners to follow the public health advisories and help each other as a community. In one of his email missives, he encouraged people with the following words, “Sometimes, it is unexpected difficulties that lead us to a real understanding of faith, courage, gratitude, sacrifice, and love.”

see SHUTDOWN, page 6

## Ambassador Nersesyan Continues Conducting Diplomacy Despite Coronavirus Constraints

By Aram Arkun

Mirror-Spectator Staff

WASHINGTON — Armenia's ambassador to the United States, Varuzhan Nersesyan, is an experienced diplomat with many years of service. He began serving as ambassador in January 2019. Now he is adding a resolute and calming voice to the coronavirus crisis as well as contributing to the furthering of Armenian-American relations.

Nersesyan said that the embassy in Washington D. C. continues its daily activity while observing the rules of quarantine and isolation regulated by the local authorities. He declared, “We as an embassy are able to conduct our activities both from the office and from our homes, so we are flexible. At this point we are able completely to maintain our functions and our regular activities.” The consular section only accepts people with emergency cases, while routine cases are done via mail or

see EMBASSY, page 16



## anoush'ella Offers Free Food to Out-of-Work Restaurant Employees

BOSTON — We need a palate cleanser during times of a global pandemic. The scenes of hoarding and tugs-of-war for paper goods make it clear that some humans have a long way to go before fully embracing civilization. Then, you have Raffi and Nina Festekjian, who are feeding out-of-work restaurant employees for free.

By Alin K. Gregorian

Mirror-Spectator Staff

In a short few years the couple has gone from opening anoush'ella, an upscale fast food restaurant featuring Armenian takes on Lebanese food in Boston's South End to adding two more locations, one at the Time Out Market in Boston's Fenway, and a second one at the outdoor MarketStreet Lynnfield mall.

see ANOUSH'ELLA, page 8



Take out orders being filled at anoush'ella

## Jeffrey Ghazarian Dies from Coronavirus

By Pierce Singgih

GLENDORA, Calif. (*Los Angeles Daily News*) — Los Angeles County's second COVID-19 death came Thursday, March 19, in a Pasadena hospital and was a Glendora resident: Jeffrey Ghazarian, 34.

Officials with Huntington Hospital in Pasadena confirmed a patient infected with the new coronavirus had died there but did not release the patient's identity.

Both of Los Angeles County's coronavirus-related deaths occurred in the San Gabriel Valley. The first was a woman visiting a family in Walnut who had recently traveled to South Korea.

see GHAZARIAN, page 4



## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Editor's Note: Heading Into Uncertain Times

Dear readers, we at the *Armenian Mirror-Spectator*, like you, are trying to make sense of the immense calamity of COVID-19 worldwide. We are continuing to publish the newspaper but please beware that while we mail issues as always, the postal service is experiencing delays because of the same crisis.

Starting with this issue we have two goals:

- To carry on with our newspaper as best as possible in order to inform you, and
- To help readers.

As a result, we are adding an online forum where readers can post what they need or what services they can offer. This service is free and intended to connect people in difficult situations with others who can offer help safely. You can send items to [alin@mirrorspectator.com](mailto:alin@mirrorspectator.com) or [tcadirector@aol.com](mailto:tcadirector@aol.com). You can also contact us through our Facebook page or our website, [www.mirrorspectator.com](http://www.mirrorspectator.com).

### Armenia Supports UN Chief's Appeal for Global Ceasefire

YEREVAN (Panorama.am) — Armenia fully supports the UN chief's appeal for global ceasefire, Foreign Minister Zohrab Mnatsakanyan said on Twitter on Tuesday, March 24.

“Armenia fully supports UN Secretary General António Guterres' appeal for global ceasefire in all corners of the world while humanity faces common enemy: COVID-19,” the minister tweeted.

Earlier on Monday, Guterres had urged warring parties across the world to lay down their weapons in support of the bigger battle against COVID-19: the common enemy that is now threatening all of humankind.

“The fury of the virus illustrates the folly of war,” he said. “That is why today, I am calling for an immediate global ceasefire in all corners of the world. It is time to put armed conflict on lockdown and focus together on the true fight of our lives.”

### US to Provide \$16M in Foreign Assistance to Armenia in 2021

WASHINGTON (Panorama.am) — The United States foreign assistance to Armenia is expected to amount to \$16 million in 2021, the Armenian Center for American Studies said in a Facebook post on Tuesday, March 24.

This is the highest volume of aid provided to the post-revolution Armenia through the Foreign Assistance program, but the financial assistance provided to the country before the 2018 revolution was greater, the center said, sharing the infographic of the planned and provided US assistance to Armenia from 2011-2021.

## INSIDE

### Frog and Toad in Armenian

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## News From Armenia

### PM's Wife Anna Hakobyan Meets with Melania Trump

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – The Office of Anna Hakobyan, the wife of the Armenian prime minister, released details from the March 4 meeting with US First Lady Melania Trump in Washington, DC.

Hakobyan's spokesperson, Hasmik Harutyunyan, said the meeting was held before the International Women of Courage Award ceremony.

"Before the award Anna Hakobyan and Melania Trump held a brief meeting. First Lady Melania Trump welcomed Anna Hakobyan's visit to the United States and highlighted her participation to the Award. In her turn Anna Hakobyan introduced the activities of the two foundations chaired by her. Both sides talked about their role and mission, and in this context emphasized the importance of the role of women."

### Premier Pashinyan Congratulates Iranian Leaders, Local Kurdish Minority on New Year

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – Prime Minister of Armenia Nikol Pashinyan sent a congratulatory message to Supreme Leader of Iran Ali Khamenei and President of Iran Hassan Rouhani on the occasion of Nowruz, the Persian new year.

He said in his letter to Khamenei, "I wish the coming year to be a year of achievements, peace and welfare for Iran. I am confident that the friendly relations and cooperation between our countries will strengthen further for the benefit of the progress of our peoples and regional stability and peace."

He said in part in his letter to Rouhani, "I also wish the friendly people of Iran good health and patience for overcoming the pandemic facing all of us with the help of God and speedy recovery from its damages."

"During these days, when the humanity is facing this challenge, I want to express the solidarity of the Armenian people with the friendly people of Iran and wish everyone good health. It's sad that as a result of this situation Armenia was unable to host our friends from Iran during the days of Nowruz this year. But I am full of hope that next year our doors will be open in front of all the citizens of Iran."

He also issued a message congratulating the Kurdish community of Armenia who also celebrate Nowruz.

### Health Minister Urges Smokers to Quit

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – Health Minister of Armenia Arsen Torosyan urged all smokers to quit as a protection from coronavirus, he wrote on his Facebook page on March 23.

"Coronavirus kills more smokers because the virus attacks the lungs which are already in a bad state at smokers. If you do not want to be severely infected with coronavirus or die from it, you have to quit smoking right now," Torosyan wrote.

### Yerevan Wine Days Pushed Back to September 4 and 5

YEREVAN (PanARMENIAN.Net) – The 2020 edition of Yerevan Wine Days has been pushed back four months to September 4 and 5, people behind the event said.

The gathering, originally set for May 1 and 2, has probably been rescheduled due to the spread of the novel coronavirus in the country,

This year's Yerevan Wine Days will celebrate the 140th birth anniversary of the great Armenian artist Martiros Saryan.

## Armenian Government Criticized for 'Insufficient' Steps to Support Economy

By Ruzanna Stepanian

YEREVAN (RFE/RL) – Armenia's parliamentary opposition parties consider the steps offered by the government to support the economy to be insufficient and call for substantial bailouts to help businesses during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

The government of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan on Thursday, March 19, unveiled an aid package of more than \$300 million in social assistance and subsidies on business loans during what it expects to be a short-term economic downturn amid unprecedented measures to stop the spread of the highly contagious and potentially deadly virus in Armenia.

The leader of the Bright Armenia party, Edmon Marukian, believes that like in the case with the previous governments acting in times of global recessions, the bank lobbying has prevailed again. In Marukian's opinion, instead of subsidizing interest rates on business loans, the government should directly compensate the losses incurred by companies because of the coronavirus crisis. The government approach, Marukian said, will only lead to businesses contracting more debts.

The state has saved some money for the rainy day and that rainy day is today," the opposition lawmaker said.

Marukian believes that besides directly assisting businesses, the government should also give support to citizens who every year travel to Russia for migrant work, as at this moment many have no possibility of entering that country because of the coronavirus pandemic. "The border is closed, but these people have problems with earning their livelihood on a day-to-day basis, which is aggravated by the burden of loans that many of them have," the oppositionist said.

Mikayel Melkumian, a lawmaker representing the other opposition faction in parliament, the Prosperous Armenia Party, also considers the steps being taken by the government to be insufficient.

He pointed to the fact that out of 610,000 workers in Armenia only 180,000 are employed in the public sector, with the government guaranteeing

their salaries during the downtime. The rest, he said, are private sector workers, with some 250,000 of them depending on their daily incomes – vendors, hairdressers, waiters, etc. "It is this group that the government must help," the lawmaker said, adding that the state could guarantee to such workers a minimal salary for a period of two or three months.

Melkumian believes that besides providing the minimum wages for people who lose their jobs the government should also think about new employment opportunities for them.

In explaining the economic aid program of the Armenian government on Thursday, Economy Minister Tigran Khachatryan said that assistance, in particular, is planned for people who find

there are 136 confirmed coronavirus cases in the country as of Friday morning. One patient is declared recovered.

The ongoing coronavirus pandemic is likely to pose significant challenges to the Armenian economic in the short term, Khachatryan has said, adding that the possible overall economic impact is yet difficult to assess.

Still, speaking at a press briefing late on Thursday, Khachatryan sought to put a brave face on the difficulties, revealing his government's optimistic approach to existing economic opportunities.

"These challenges will help us be more responsive to our long-term development goals and find better opportunities," the minister said.

Khachatryan said the Armenian government intends to provide what he described as substantial financial support to those businesses that are likely to find themselves in difficult conditions due to the pandemic-related crisis.

Earlier, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan announced that his government would allocate at least 150 billion drams (over \$300 million) to support the economy in the time to come. The aid package, according to Pashinyan, will be made available in the form of subsidizes on loans

that businesses borrow from local commercial banks in the national currency to pay salaries to employees and fulfill tax and other financial obligations during the downturn.

Part of the state funding will go for the modernization of the economy and readjustments on the market to be better suited for post-crisis realities, as well as for social assistance, the government said.

Khachatryan explained that the social aid package will help people who find themselves in dire straits because of the negative consequences of the pandemic. "If someone loses their jobs and finds themselves in difficult economic and social conditions, then the tools formulated by the government, which are yet to be finalized, will provide them with opportunities," he said.

The minister said that the first blow of the coronavirus pandemic has been delivered against the country's tourism sector and some export-oriented companies.

He assured the public that there are no delayed investment projects in Armenia because of the current nation-

ARMENIAN GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS HAVE REPEATEDLY WARNED AGAINST POPULIST STEPS SUCH AS LARGE-SCALE BAILOUTS THAT THEY BELIEVE MAY HURT THE COUNTRY'S MACROECONOMIC STABILITY AND SPUR INFLATION.

themselves in difficult conditions because of the negative consequences of the coronavirus pandemic. "If someone loses their jobs and finds themselves in difficult economic and social conditions, then the tools formulated by the government, which are yet to be finalized, will provide them with opportunities," the minister said.

Khachatryan said that the falling global markets have already hit Armenia's tourism sector and some export-oriented companies.

Armenian government officials have repeatedly warned against populist steps such as large-scale bailouts that they believe may hurt the country's macroeconomic stability and spur inflation.

Armenia declared a 30-day state of emergency on March 16 to slow the spread of the novel coronavirus. To this end the Armenian government has put restrictions on international travel and ordered closures of schools and some other public institutions. All sorts of public gatherings have also been banned in the country.

Armenia's health authorities say

## Artsakh's Foreign Ministry Issues Statement on Centennial of Armenian Massacres in Shushi

STEPANAKERT (Armenpress) – On March 23, the Foreign Ministry of Artsakh released a statement commemorating the centennial of Armenian massacres in Shushi.

"A hundred years ago, on March 23, 1920, the authorities of the newly created Azerbaijani Democratic Republic massacred the Armenian population of Shushi, the then administrative and cultural center of Artsakh. As a result of this heinous crime, thousands of Armenians were killed, tens of thousands were forced to flee their homes and the Armenian part of the city was looted, burned and completely destroyed. The surviving Armenian residents of Shushi, who made up the majority of the city's population, were completely expelled. Most of the once beautiful Armenian city was in ruins for many years. The enormous cultural heritage of Shushi was destroyed," the statement said.

The statement added, "The tragedy left such a deep mark on the city and its atmosphere that even after 10 years it caused gloomy impressions and heavy feelings, which one of the prominent Russian writers of the 20th century, Osip Mandelstam, reflected in his poem 'Phaeton Driver.'"

The Shushi massacre became the apotheosis of the two-year-long attempts of the Azerbaijani authorities to seize and subjugate Artsakh. These irrepressible and unreasonable territorial claims to Artsakh by Azerbaijan, which was created as a result of the Turkish invasion in the South Caucasus, laid the foundation for the Azerbaijan-Karabakh conflict in its modern sense. The Azerbaijani authorities tried to achieve their goal through the direct support by the Turkish troops. Subsequently, the Turkish officers and emissaries continued to assist the Azerbaijani armed forces, including in organizing the Shushi massacre of 1920, attempting to continue the Genocide of Armenians, now in Eastern Armenia.



## INTERNATIONAL

# Stricter Restrictions on Life in Armenia as Virus Takes Hold

YEREVAN (Combined Sources) — Armenia is imposing tougher restrictions on public life in an effort to curtail the spread of the coronavirus. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said on Facebook Tuesday, March 24, addressed people there, noting that people will have to carry passports or identity cards when leaving home.

“Citizens spotted in the street should have a clear explanation of where they are going, and that explanation should fit into the logic of vital movement,” Pashinyan said.

Pashinyan encouraged the public to do their shopping online, adding that all the banks, supermarkets and pharmacies will serve people aged above 65 between 10 a.m. and midday.

He urged citizens against social gatherings and said that no more than two people should be outside together.

The number of confirmed coronavirus cases in Armenia has reached 249 as of Tuesday, March 24. Forty one new cases were recorded.

The country declared a 30-day state of emergency on March 16 and banned citizens of 16 nations from entering the country.

So far, two patients have recovered from the coronavirus in Armenia.

Pashinyan said on March 23 that his government will order the closure of all cafes, restaurants and most other businesses due to a continuing spread of coronavirus in Armenia.

Pashinyan made the announcement as the number of officially registered coronavirus cases in the country rose by 41 to 235. He described as “worrying” the fact that some of the new infections were detected at two manufacturing facilities located in Yerevan and central Kotayk province.

Dozens of people working at another Yerevan factory reportedly contracted the virus earlier this month. According to Armenian officials, a visitor from Italy was the primary source of those infections.

“In these circumstances, we have to take more restrictive measures in order to be able to stop the further spread of the virus,” Pashinyan said in a Facebook video appeal aired shortly after midnight.

For that purpose, he said, the government will close all cafes, restaurants and most other private enterprises for at least one week. A government body enforcing the coronavirus-related state of emergency in Armenia will release a list of those enterprises on Tuesday, he said.

Pashinyan stressed that food stores as well as

have reported no fatalities yet.

Some 600 Armenians were kept in quarantine and hundreds of others in self-isolation before the announcement of the latest official COVID-19 statistics. In Pashinyan’s words, more than 70 of them will undergo final coronavirus tests at the end of their two-week con-

Citizens of Armenia and foreign nationals traveling to Armenia will undergo intensive checking procedures at Armenian border checkpoints. In case relevant symptoms are identified, hospitalization, isolation (self-isolation) and/or other restrictive measures will be carried out.

province.

According to the Foreign Ministry statement, Adonts and Tian discussed the “prolongation” of the Chinese-Armenian visa regime. “The sides agreed to keep close contact regarding the issue and coordinate steps taken by both sides,” said the statement.



Taking temperatures in Echmiadzin

finement on Tuesday. He said there are “grounds to think” that most of them will test negative for the virus.

The premier did not say how many new confinement orders will be issued by the authorities as a result of the latest coronavirus cases

## Travel Restrictions

As of 22 March the list of countries whose citizens cannot enter Armenia includes: the United States of America, the Commonwealth of Australia, EU member states (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Republic of Cyprus, the Czech

All persons traveling from coronavirus outbreak high risk countries will be transferred to specially designated quarantine locations or may be subjected to mandatory self-isolation.”

## China Aid

China reportedly pledged on Monday, March 23, to provide Armenia with more medical supplies needed for containing the spread of coronavirus in the South Caucasus country.

Armenian Deputy Foreign Minister Avet

Adonts requested such aid during a video conference with the Chinese ambassador in Yerevan, Tian Erlong.

“Ambassador Tian stated that China is ready to provide additional aid to Armenia by donating protective medical uni-

forms and lung ventilation devices worth \$110,000,” the Armenian Foreign Ministry said in a statement on the conversation.

“Ambassador Tian emphasized the readiness of the Chinese side to continue close cooperation with Armenia in resolving various issues in the fight against the novel coronavirus, stressing the importance of international unity and solidarity in the fight against the pandemic,” it added.

The statement also cited Adonts as thanking Beijing for donating more than 1,000 coronavirus test kits which he said were delivered to Armenia late last week.

Tian promised that donation at a March 6 meeting with Armenian Health Minister Arsen Torosian. According to Torosian’s office, the envoy also announced that the Chinese Embassy has “allocated funding to Armenia for the acquisition of additional medical items.”

Meeting with Tian later in the day, President Armen Sarkissian said the Chinese assistance is “very important” for Armenia’s ongoing efforts to combat the virus.

The Armenian authorities confirmed the first case of the COVID-19 virus in the country on March 1.

Yerevan suspended for two months visa free travel between Armenia and China on January 31 as the virus rapidly spread in China’s Hubei

## Jail Terms

Armenia’s parliament backed on Monday a government proposal to introduce jail sentences for people defying quarantine or self-isolation orders issued by health authorities dealing with the coronavirus outbreak.

The Armenian government moved to impose these and other penalties last week following the declaration of a one-month state of emergency aimed at containing the spread of the COVID-19 virus in the country.

The National Assembly tentatively approved a relevant government bill on Friday. The bill underwent a number of changes before being passed in the second and final reading three days later.

It calls for prison sentences ranging from one to five years and fines of between 300,000 and 1 million drams (\$600-\$2000) for various types of violation of the confinement orders. The harshest punishment, 3 to 5 years’ imprisonment, is envisaged for cases where a breach of quarantine or self-isolation leads to fatal infections of other individuals.

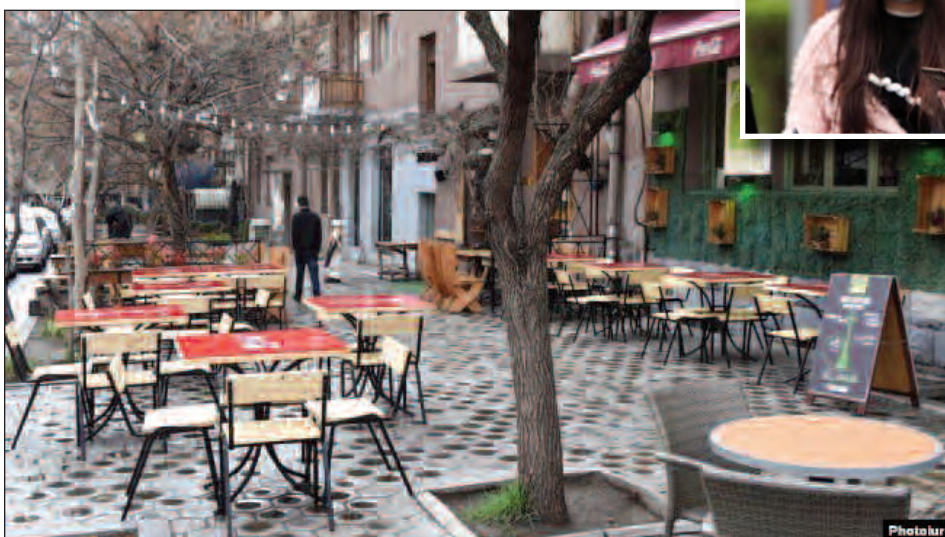
The two opposition parties represented in the parliament backed these measures after the government and the parliament majority loyal to it incorporated some of their proposals into the bill. In particular, the authorities agreed to somewhat ease their controversial restrictions on the spread of coronavirus-related information.

The bill initially stipulated that all media reports and social media posts regarding the COVID-19 virus must reflect information provided by government sources. Opposition politicians, civic activists and journalists were quick to decry this provision, saying that it legalizes censorship and puts unnecessary curbs on press freedom in the country.

The fact that at least two Armenian publications were ordered to delete coronavirus-related stories from their websites in recent days only added to the criticism. Law-enforcement authorities also controversially forced several Facebook users to delete their posts critical of the government’s handling of the coronavirus outbreak.

The final version of the bill does not make private individuals violating the social media restrictions liable for fines. But it retains financial penalties for broadcasters as well as print and online media that will disseminate unauthorized information about the deadly virus.

(Sources: PanArmenian.net, Panorama.am, Armenpress, RFE/RL)



Empty restaurants and cafes in Yerevan

firms manufacturing foodstuffs, beverages and personal hygiene items will be allowed to continue to operate for now.

“I am calling on our compatriots to stay at home as much as possible and to leave their homes only in case of extreme necessity,” added Pashinyan.

All Armenian bars, night clubs and other entertainment spots were shut down on Sunday, March 22. The government reported 190 coronavirus cases at that point.

Pashinyan stressed that only 25 of the individuals infected with the deadly virus to date are suffering from pneumonia. He insisted that their lives are not at risk.

Two other patients have recovered from the disease in the past week, according to Armenian health authorities. The authorities

Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden), Switzerland, Norway, Turkey, China, Iran, Republic of Korea, Israel, Japan, the United Kingdom, Canada, the Russian Federation, Georgia.

Those countries were named because they have high rates of infection.

Armenian citizens, their family members and legal residency status holders are permitted to enter the territory of the Republic of Armenia without restrictions.

Citizens will not be able to leave the territory of the Republic of Armenia by land, except for cargo transport drivers.



## INTERNATIONAL

## International News

## Arsenal in Transfer Talks to Sell Mkhitarian To Roma for €22m

LONDON (PanARMENIAN.Net) – Arsenal are in negotiations to sell £160,000-a-week player Henrikh Mkhitarian to Roma for 20 million (€21.7 million), The Sun says citing reports from Italy on March 18.

The Armenian has spent the season on loan at the Serie A club and has made 17 appearances in all competitions this campaign.

Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta is keen to offload the midfielder as he plots a summer overhaul of players.

The Spaniard wants to reduce the wage bill and bring in extra transfer funds in order to land his transfer targets.

Mkhitarian, 31, appears to have no future at the Emirates.

According to Italian publication Calcio Mercato, Roma are keen to make the move a permanent one despite his struggles with injuries this season.

Mkhitarian moved to Arsenal from Manchester United as part of an Alexis Sanchez swap deal in 2018 but struggled to cement his role in the side.

## Attorney Afian Appointed Ukraine PM Advisor

KYIV (Armenpress) – Artem Afian, managing partner at Juscutum Attorneys Association, was appointed advisor to Ukraine's Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal on digital economy affairs on March 20, AnalitikaUA.net reported.

"I have been appointed advisor to the prime minister having certain knowledge in that field. I am not becoming an official with this job, but I know that I am going to write regulatory acts on separate matters. I have knowledge and know how it is done in other countries and I am ready to apply it in Ukraine," Afian said.

Afian has been managing partner at Juscutum Attorneys Association since 2008.

## Schools to Remain Closed in Georgia until April 21

TBILISI (Panorama.am) – Schools around the country and high educational institutions will remain closed until April 21 to prevent the spread of coronavirus.

Lessons, lectures, trainings, conferences or seminars will only be allowed to be held online, Agenda.ge reported. The government has also banned all types of cultural and sports events, the source added.

Since February 26, 2020 Georgia has had 54 confirmed cases of the respiratory infection, including eight individuals who have recovered. As of now 3,254 people are under quarantine in Georgia, and 233 others in hospitals

## UN to Create Global Coronavirus Fund

NEW YORK (Reuters) – The United Nations will create a fund to prevent the spread of coronavirus and support the treatment of patients worldwide, Norway said on Monday, March 23.

The purpose of the fund is to assist developing countries with weak health systems in addressing the crisis as well as to tackle the long-term consequences. The United Nations could make a formal announcement this week, the ministry said.

Norway, which suggested the fund, has not committed how much money it would put into the initiative, similar to a 2014 United Nations Ebola Response Fund.

"We want to make sure that the efforts are as unified as possible and as early as possible so that we can answer up to the demands that countries will have, especially the poorest countries," Foreign Minister Ine Eriksen Soereide told Reuters.



## Military Pilots Train with New Russian Planes

YEREVAN (Armenpress) – The pilots of the Armed Forces of Armenia on March 20 carried out training flights with newly acquired SU-30SM aircrafts, press secretary of the Ministry of Defense of Armenia Shushan Stepanyan said. Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan posted footage of the flights, writing "Our Su-30SM military aircrafts watch our air space."

## Coronavirus Cases Increase in Russia

MOSCOW (Moscow Times) – As the new coronavirus that has killed more than 16,000 people continues to spread around the world, Russia has stepped up its measures to tackle the pandemic and prevent its spread within the country.

There have been 495 cases of coronavirus infections reported in Russia so far and one death.

The number of confirmed coronavirus cases in Russia as of March 24.

Russia is facing a "serious situation" as the coronavirus spreads, Moscow's mayor told President Vladimir Putin, adding that "the real number of those who are sick is much greater" than official numbers indicate.

Putin visited the hospital in Moscow's Kommunarka suburb where patients

with coronavirus are being treated, wearing a special protective suit during the visit. He also took a moment to shake the hand of the hospital's head doctor.

Moscow hospitals will receive up to 200,000 rubles (\$2,500) per coronavirus patient from the city's health insurance fund to help cover the cost of their treatments.

A 69-year-old woman suspected of being infected with coronavirus died in Moscow's Infectious Diseases Hospital No. 1, the Moskovsky Komsomolets newspaper reported. She had been hospitalized after her daughter returned from Portugal. The Moscow health department later said she died from terminal cancer and tested negative for coronavirus.

The republic of Chechnya became the first Russian region to close all restaurants, cafes and "crowded places" after it registered its first three coronavirus infections, the region's leader Ramzan Kadyrov announced. He said some restaurants popular with tourists would be allowed to stay open.

Aeroflot said it will reduce its flights to Vietnam, Thailand, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and Cuba starting March 28 due to the coronavirus.

Volkswagen will suspend its car production in Russia over a supply shortage caused by the coronavirus outbreak in Europe, Volkswagen Group Rus said. Production will be stopped from March 30 to April 10 at its car plant in Kaluga and assembly line in Nizhny Novgorod.

## Jeffrey Ghazarian Dies from Coronavirus

GHAZARIAN, from page 1  
She was taken to Pomona Valley Hospital Medical Center.

This newsgroup reached out to the Ghazarian family for a comment. His sister, Alison Ghazarian Fleming, confirmed it was her brother who had died. She said her family wouldn't be making any further statements, but the information posted on Jeffrey's Facebook page accurately tells his story.

Lauren Ghazarian, Jeffrey Ghazarian's other sister, began posting on his Facebook account on Saturday, March 14, with an announcement that her brother tested positive for the new coronavirus the day before. Her posts chronicled his journey both going forward and looking back, punctuated with Bible verses and praises for small victories, calls for prayers with setbacks.

That day of the first post, he was admitted to the ICU, where he was placed on a ventilator to treat pneumonia.

On Sunday, March 15, Lauren Ghazarian posted a "timeline recap" of her brother's condition. She said he flew to Orlando from Los Angeles on

March 2 for a business trip but extended it by two days to visit Disneyworld and Universal Studios. She said he was healthy when he left for Orlando.

Jeffrey Ghazarian first developed a cough on March 7 and coughed up blood on March 8, according to the timeline post. He flew back to Los Angeles on March 9, where he was admitted to the emergency room with a high fever and later diagnosed with pneumonia.

He was tested for the new coronavirus; his test results came back positive on Friday, March 13, Lauren Ghazarian wrote. He was admitted to the emergency room later that day and was transferred to the ICU on Saturday, March 14.

In a Sunday, March 15 post, Lauren said hospital staff initiated protocol for acute respiratory distress syndrome and placed him on a rotoprone therapy bed, which slowly eases patients onto their prone side.

His sister posted on Monday, March 16 that Jeff Ghazarian's X-rays had improved and that he would start anti-

viral medication. The post said the medication had been used for Ebola patients and has been helpful for some coronavirus patients.

Jeff Ghazarian received the anti-viral medication on Tuesday, March 17, Lauren Ghazarian said in an update. And in a Wednesday, March 18 update, she said her brother's condition improved and was stable.

However, the next update later that day said his condition fluctuated, and he may need to be put on an ECMO machine, which temporarily takes over the work of the heart and lungs.

According to the American Thoracic Society, extracorporeal membrane oxygenation is a life support machine that replaces the function of the heart and lungs.

At 8:58 a.m. Thursday, March 19, Lauren Ghazarian posted Jeff Ghazarian had died. He had had asthma and battled testicular cancer.

"We will miss our Jeff everyday but we are thankful for all the fun happy memories of the times we had together," she said in the post.

# Community News

## Knights of Vartan's Nareg-Shavarshan Lodge Renovates KV #106 School in Yerevan

YEREVAN/DETROIT — The Knights of Vartan Nareg-Shavarshan Lodge in Greater Detroit is continuing to make improvements at the Knight of Vartan #106 School in Yerevan, Armenia. Since 2018, the lodge has raised \$61,500 for renovation projects at this school.

The Knights of Vartan, in 1993, initiated the “Adopt A School Project (AASP)” project to financially assist public schools in the Republic of Armenia. During the early years of Armenia’s independence, the new Republic did not have the resources to adequately fund the needs of its public school system.

With inadequate teacher salaries, dilapidated school facilities and a lack of supplies, helping schools in Armenia was a worthwhile endeavor for the organization.

It was at this time the Knights of Vartan made significant improvements to School #106 in Nor Nork, Yerevan. After a few years of cooperation the school was renamed the Knights of Vartan School #10 and Past Grand Commander (PGC) Everett Berberian and PGC Ara Avakian traveled to Armenia on April 5, 1995 to attend the ceremony marking this event.

The Knights implemented additional projects in the school through the Armenian Social Investment Fund (ASIF). Some of the major renovations after Armenia’s independence at this time included installing a new central heating system, replacing the roof and many of the windows and doors and what was supposed to be renovation of the gymnasium.

In 2016 the Knights celebrated the centennial of the organization’s founding, with a pro-



New GYM opening at KV #106 school, Left to right Principal of KV #106 School Mrs. Marine Vardanyan; Grand Commander Steven R. Adams; Past Grand Commander Dr. Gary Zamanigian

gram in Yerevan. The Grand Commander that year, Steven Kradjian, reestablished a relationship with the Knights of Vartan School #106 Principal, Marine Vardanyan, and invited her to attend the organization’s official event.

Coincidentally, she was a graduate of the same school and her mother was one of the first teachers there. Therefore, her relationship with the school goes much deeper than that of an employee.

Because of her exemplary administrative skills and insight, she has raised the standards of education which have resulted in the doubling of the number of students attending the school. In addition, she formed a club to stage plays and perform recitals and created a singing and dancing group. Even with scarce resources available, she was able to purchase new desks and replace some of the windows and doors, but large amounts of money would be needed to complete the required number of necessary improvements.

see RENOVATION, page 7



Suzanne Shera shows a student and teacher how to use their Newton Color Wheels.

## Lightlab Sunday Schools Join in Science-Faith Workshop

By Laura Bilazarian Purutyan

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. — On Sunday, March 8, the five Armenian Churches of Boston — the Armenian Memorial Church (Watertown), St. James Armenian Apostolic Church (Watertown), St. Stephen’s Armenian Apostolic Church (Watertown), First Armenian Church (Belmont) and Holy Trinity Armenian Apostolic Church (Cambridge) — celebrated a day of learning and fellowship together with a Sunday School workshop for students in grades 2-8. The workshop, titled “Lightlab: Are You in His Light?,” was a collaborative effort among the Sunday Schools at no cost to families.

The Lightlab workshop was hosted by Holy Trinity Armenian Church in Charles and Nevart Talanian Hall. Attendees included 115 students, along with 30 Sunday School teachers and many parents from the 5 churches.

The Sunday School teams from all five churches collaborated with Suzanne Shera, an optics engineer, science teacher and Christian educator, who wrote “Lightlab: Lessons for Kids to Explore the Nature of Light and to Know Jesus.” Shera, who lived and received her education in Boston, now resides in Philadelphia. The aim of the collaboration was to help students from all 5 churches contemplate the light of Christ together through experiential learning. The children worked with same-age students from different churches to discover how the seven colors of the rainbow combine to produce one color. Following the hands-on activity, Suzanne related this concept to the gifts of service by many people which all work together to reflect the light and love of Christ.

Yeretzgin Arpi Kouzouian and Arpi Boynerian welcomed the participants, albeit with reminders to take health precautions with hand washing, as the public was becoming informed of the coronavirus. The team of organizers included Yn. Arpi Kouzouian (HTAAC), Arpi Boynerian and Maral Orchanian (AMC), Carol Nahigian and Susan Duffy (FAC), Nayiri Baljian and Angelique Ourfalian (SSAAC), and Yn. Natasha Aljalian and Laura Purutyan (SJAAC).

Musician John Baboian opened the program by setting a tone of joy and gratitude. John with the help of student volunteers inspired the audience to sing from the heart, including Soorp Asdadzvz, This Little Light of Mine and other songs praising God.

Shera introduced the topic of light through a 20-minute visual presentation, looking at the ways that we encounter light through the Armenian Christian culture. There are countless examples, starting with how Armenians greet one another, Paree Looys, or “Good Light.” In fact, Armenian churches, art and

see LIGHTLAB, page 6

## As First COVID-19 Vaccine Trials Begin, Manufacturer Is Preparing to Scale Production to Millions

By Alice Park

BOSTON (*Time*) — On March 16, the first volunteers in a study of an experimental COVID-19 vaccine received their first doses, and the vaccine’s developer, Moderna Therapeutics, is already thinking ahead. Although testing on the vaccine will take at least a year to complete, the work could provide valuable information about how the immune system can fight coronaviruses and could give scientists a head start if any new outbreaks of the virus were to occur.

Non-essential staff at Moderna Therapeutics’ manufacturing facility, in Norwood, Mass., including president Dr. Stephen Hoge, are working from home as recommended by public health officials, but those involved in manufacturing what may be the first vaccine against the novel coronavirus are ready to scale up production if the first phase of testing on the vaccine shows that it’s safe.

The vaccine will be studied first in a group of 45 healthy volunteers, who have not been infected with SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. In this group, scientists are looking to see if the shots are safe, and to test three different dosages to see which seems to activate the strongest immune response. If these initial subjects don’t develop any severe side effects or reactions, then researchers will recruit hundreds more healthy volunteers to confirm those results.

For the first phase, Moderna shipped hundreds of vials of the test vaccine to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), which is overseeing the study in multiple centers in the US. For the next, says Hoge, “it will be several fold, maybe five-fold larger than the first phase. We are talking thousands of vials.”

And if the vaccine proves not just safe, but also successful, the company is preparing for an anticipated “incredible demand to scale up the vaccine very, very quickly,” Hoge says, “we have already started to do work to scale up to producing millions of doses.”

That’s made possible, in part, by the non-traditional technology used to make this particular vaccine. Moderna uses mRNA, a genetic form of the virus’ genome, in its vaccine. When it’s injected into people, cells then process it so immune cells can recognize it and target it for destruction. Unlike the processes used to make most traditional vaccines, this method does not require growing huge amounts of the virus, which is time-consuming.

It’s also why the vaccine was developed in record time. Chinese researchers first posted the genetic sequence of SARS-CoV-2 in mid-January, and by February 7, Moderna had vials of the vaccine ready for the standards-testing needed before the treatment could be cleared for human trials. By the last week of February, that was completed and the company sent vials to NIH for further review by its scientists. Then both Moderna and NIH filed for a request to the Food and Drug Administration, which regulates trials of experimental therapies, to start injecting the vaccine in people for human testing.

Hogue is hopeful that his team can continue to shave time off the process while producing a safe and effective vaccine. “The original goal when Dr. Anthony Fauci [director of the NIH’s National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases] first announced the vaccine, was to get it into humans in roughly three months. We managed to do that in 63 days,” he says.

Testing on patients who have contracted the virus may still be months away, and Fauci predicts that the trials may not conclude for another 12-18 months. “From the very beginning, this was a race, a race against the virus,” says Hoge. “If there is anything we learned in the past month, it’s that we need to keep pressing every time advantage that we can.”



## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Shutting Down a Physical Community in Watertown and Belmont

SHUTDOWN, from page 1

Fr. Vasken Kouzouian, pastor of Holy Trinity Armenian Church in Cambridge, concurred that “our community is shutting down.” He said there is a fear of getting together, and even in the limited services conducted on March 22, the altar servers stand apart from one another.

The church itself essentially is shut at least till Holy Thursday. Spiritual messages and even liturgical services are being made available online to allow people to connect virtually. Facebook is used for broadcasting. Fr. Kouzouian said, “A number of them have said to me, ‘Der Hayr, this is such a boost, and I needed this.’ Good feedback means that we are on the right track.”

In addition to traditional means of communication like the telephone, his parish is trying to use more technology to combat the physical distancing. Yeretzgin Arpi Kouzouian has come up with various types of online meetings with the youth. A spiritual online or virtual “lock-in” is an example being attempted on March 27.



Bags of food that were prepared for delivery to the elderly and shut-ins at Holy Trinity

Zoom is being used with teens and young adults, which is like an online town meeting, as Fr. Kouzouian characterized it. The young adults themselves are trying to come up with programming for their age group, Fr. Kouzoian said, as well as for the parish at large, to keep it together as a community as well as spiritually.

Kouzouian added, “I think right now this is uncharted territory so we are all trying to figure out where we are and how to take care of today’s immediate needs.” Eventually, he said, the greater community and organizations will need to think about coordination. He concluded: “We reach out spiritually through social media and through personal contact, and we look to a future of hope.”

## The Armenian Nursing and Rehabilitation Center

The virus has posed a great challenge to nursing homes throughout the country. The chief executive officer of the Armenian Nursing and Rehabilitation Center (ANRC) in Jamaica Plains, Mass., Stewart R. Goff, said that following national guidelines, physical access to residents with few exceptions was cut off on March 13 even to immediate family members to protect the former from infection. This had followed quickly on the heels of prior visitor restrictions, so now Skype and telephone calls were left as the ways of contact. Furthermore, the residents’ group activities and communal dining were stopped.

There is no COVID-19 virus in the building today (March 23), Goff said. The goal is to keep the coronavirus out as long as possible through these restrictions and other measures since older adults have been identified as at greater risk for this virus.

Goff is taking the long view of the situation. He is using a timeframe of 12 weeks for planning purposes, unlike in the case of earlier short-term local disasters, like blizzards or hurricanes, though he suspects the virus danger may continue even longer. ANRC is sending out frequent messages to family members of residents, and will post updates on the Facebook pages of ANRC ([https://www.facebook.com/Armenian-Nursing-Rehab-Center-](https://www.facebook.com/Armenian-Nursing-Rehab-Center-154898211213952/)

154898211213952/) and its sponsor, the Armenian Women’s Welfare Association (<https://www.facebook.com/ArmenianWomensWelfareAssociation/>).

A major challenge at present is facing the fears of staff and residents. The staff are concerned with the decreasing supplies of personal protection equipment. Standards were changed twice over the past week by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) in order to conserve such supplied, and this means using less protective equipment than in the past. This is part of a worldwide problem, Goff noted.

The supply of gloves and gowns is sufficient for now but facemasks are scarce. Goff said that after the CDC announcement of March 17 that homemade masks can be used as a last resort, ANRC purchased a supply of bandanas.

In Goff’s March 20 dispatch — “week two” — he wrote that he is trying to train the staff about the biological response of fear versus anxiety, a mental process about the possibility of a real threat, in order to manage the stress.

In the same dispatch, he said that he believed that the elder residents felt less anxiety than the staff and family members. This, in part, might be due to only a partial understanding of what is unfolding, but also due to having overcome such great challenges in their lifetimes.

He gave the example from a past disaster, 9/11, when he was trying to comfort elders in a different nursing facility, and in response, a woman over 90 years old tugged on his sleeve and said in a soft voice to him, “Honey, we’ve been through a great depression and a world war. We’re going to be okay.”

## Schools

Like public schools, St. Stephen’s Armenian Elementary School in Watertown has been physically closed since March 13. The original closure was only for two weeks, but that was extended to April 6 following the order by Governor Charlie Baker of Massachusetts. Now, however, Principal Houry Boyamian said that she believes the closure will last a longer period and so the school is making more long-term plans. Even its 17th annual graduating class trip to Armenia, originally planned for May 16-31, is on hold.

Unlike many public schools, St. Stephen’s never stopped teaching students because it made plans even before closing the school.

Parents were asked on Friday, March 13 to pick up packages prepared by the teachers as well as the students’ textbooks and educational materials. Boyamian stated that on Monday, March 15 all teachers began teaching remotely with various platforms depending on the grades such as Google Classroom, Google Forum (for assessment), Google Meet/ Google Hangouts, and Zoom.

Kindergarten to fifth grade teachers are conducting whole class and small group instruction, she said, along with individual virtual meetings with each of their students. Interestingly, while participating in these classes some students choose to put on their school uniforms.

The preschool teachers, immediately after the elementary school ones, began conducting circle time remotely and sending videos of songs so that the students could sing along, in addition to reading books to their students.

The administration conducts regular faculty meetings remotely, as well as video conferencing with the school board and education committee. It participates in webinars offered by the Association of Independent Schools in New England. In addition, Boyamian is planning to participate in a video conference with the principals of the Hovnanian School (New Milford, NJ), Holy Martyrs Armenian Day School (Bayside, NY), and the Armenian Sisters Academy (Radnor, PA) to discuss the new situation and exchange ideas.

Boyamian is thankful both to the proactive and cooperative work of the teachers in the school as well as the partnership of the parents in the education of their children, especially the younger ones. While no one so far is confirmed as infected with COVID-19, she said that at present, the worst thing is that no one knows how long the school must be kept closed.

Armenian Saturday and Sunday schools are facing a similar situation. Erebusi Armenian School is a Saturday school in Belmont with 170 students and 13 teachers headed by Principal Armine Manukyan. Erebusi only missed one class, on March 14, but reopened on March 21 via technology. Each teacher was given a Zoom certificate to allow meeting with students at the usual class time.

As many teachers have their own children attending the school, and there are often 2-3

*continued on next page*

## Sunday Schools Join in Science-Faith Workshop

LIGHTLAB, from page 5

traditions are full of examples of light. We call Saint Gregory, who helped bring Christianity to Armenia, the Illuminator or Enlightener. The importance of light is ever-present throughout Armenia - from church windows and domes that let in light, to candles in churches, and the Bible itself; the translation of the Bible into Armenian turned Armenians toward the light of Christ. Shera pointed to 1 Corinthians 12:12 to help students connect the science of light to their personal practice of faith, “Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.”

The story of two scientists, Michael Faraday and James Maxwell, as Shera explained, was a story of two friends who shared not only a great curiosity and love for learning science, but also shared their Christian faith. Faraday invented the electric motor and predicted that light is electromagnetic, but people laughed at him. At the time he couldn’t prove his theory. Maxwell was a mathematician and proved that light travels by electric and magnetic waves. Michael Faraday said, “The book of nature, which we have to read, is written by the finger of God.” James Maxwell said, “I think men of science as well as other men need to learn from Christ, and I think Christians whose minds are scientific are bound to study science that their view of the glory of God may be as extensive as their being is capable.” Shera introduced Newton’s Color Wheel to prepare students for the hands-on activity, showing that white light is the combination of all colors, and it is energy which our brains learn to discern.

Following Shera’s lesson, students plunged

into the activity with other youth their age from different parishes. Each student created a Color Wheel and learned to make them spin, discovering how the many colors together become white. Following their experience with the Color Wheel, Shera discussed how individual gifts are designed to work in harmony, to be fruitful and reflect the light of Christ. Just as any team in school, sports or the arts needs the talents, gifts and commitment of many different people to create a whole that is beautiful and good.

Students, teachers and parents enjoyed pizza and clementines while mingling with old and new friends.

Armen Festekjian, a Boston College student, assisted students during workshop, declaring “It was great. With the apparent dichotomy between science and faith getting stronger as the years go by, it is more and more important to remind students that faith and science are compatible. The combination of the Christian faith and the spirit of scientific discovery during this gathering of young Armenian Sunday School students this past Sunday is a hopeful reminder of this truth for the youth.”

Arpi Sarian, a member of the Armenian Memorial Church and grandmother of a Sunday School student, said, “What a blessed event it was to gather 5 churches, 2 denominations and different views, united with Christ. This is beginning of Revival. Amen. May God give you new visions for his Kingdom.”

(Laura Bilazarian Purutyan is part of the Sunday School team at St. James Armenian Church, Watertown. Laura works with the MetroWest STEM Education Ecosystem as a Systems-Thinking Program Developer, currently focused on designing and piloting a regional STEM Mentorship Program that includes K12, higher ed, community organizations, municipalities, industry, youth and parents.)

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## COMMUNITY NEWS

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children from each family, the school divided into two groups of different time periods so that parents could monitor their children and teachers/parents can teach. Teachers also meet online for preparation.

Naturally some adjustments had to be made to the regular curriculum to account for the new way of interaction, Manukyan said. Fortunately, she said, all students have access to laptops.

Toddlers, 3-4 years old, benefit from art and stories via Zoom, which allows for dialogues with the little ones. The online instruction for older grades is mostly theme-based and focused on Armenian vocabulary and writing, she said.



A long-distance preschool music lesson with teacher Yelena Hakobyan of St. Stephen's Armenian Elementary School

For example, they discussed fables by Vardan Aygektsi and talked about their meaning: e.g. why the author uses animals as characters to teach a lesson. During the dialogue, the students shared their thoughts, gave some examples and talked about good and bad choices.

They also talked about Armenian traditional costumes, the difference between the Western and Eastern Armenian styles, and the specific colors that characterize them. The teachers shared a PowerPoint to visually see what was being discussed.

The remaining grades primarily follow their textbooks and the activities that go with the topic. Teachers use a whiteboard to make the instruction easier for the students. Aside from regular lessons, the classes have even discussed children's reactions to the coronavirus online and what the children have learned from the situation. Manukyan noted that online chess classes will begin this week. The teacher observes as the students play chess, as if they were in a physical classroom.

She said, "This is a new concept for us. We are learning as we go. We wanted to start sooner than later so our students won't forget what they have learned so far. It was very important for us to be proactive and do something to keep the learning going. I will tell you that the students were excited to see each other and their teacher via the computer."

### Armenian Museums, Cultural Organizations and Libraries

Armenian museums, cultural organizations and libraries are shut down too. The Tekeyan Cultural Association of the United States and Canada (TCA), headquartered in Watertown, decided to halt all public activities, and its greater Boston chapter postponed several events it was planning for April and early May. Ironically, substantial renovations were nearing completion of the Baikar Building at which some events were to be hosted.

The Armenian Museum of America in Watertown closed its doors to the public on March 13 and subsequently closed its administrative offices until it is safe for all to return to work. Some staff members will continue to work remotely.

Dr. Alisa Dumikyan, the museum's visiting scholar from Armenia, has been working on an exhibit that was scheduled to open on April 1 as part of Armenian Genocide Remembrance

Month. This exhibit discusses the role of Near East Relief (NER) and the Azgapatians, a husband-and-wife team which worked to raise money and support for the American foundation. Sadly, with the closure of the museum, visitors will not be able to physically view the exhibit at this time. However, the exhibit will be featured, in part, on the museum website ([www.armenianmuseum.org](http://www.armenianmuseum.org)) while the installation will go forward once the museum reopens.

The website will feature several images from the exhibition, along with captions and there will be a matching social media campaign. The museum's president, Michele Kolligian, stated that it will also be featuring edited videos from past concerts to bring another level of entertainment to the community while so many are feeling the isolation of this unbelievable situation.

She expressed her gratitude to the staff and said she looks forward to resuming operations with new and updated exhibitions, programs, concerts and the opening of a new elevator at the end of this crisis.

Marc Mamigonian, Academic Affairs Director for the National Association of Armenian Studies and Research (NAASR) in Belmont, said that the coronavirus has substantially affected its operations. Several weeks ago, it determined to postpone all of its public programs in Belmont and elsewhere, at least through the end of April. It had constructed a brand-new building which, like TCA's Baikar, must remain closed for the time being to the community.

Mamigonian said that the NAASR staff are working primarily from home and come in only as necessary, avoiding overlap of physical presence for safety's sake. The bookstore is still accessible online and orders are being placed and filled. NAASR, he said, has thought a little about doing online events but has not yet taken any definite steps toward it. He said, "If we were to do so, I don't think it would be an attempt to replicate what we do in our programs but rather to do something else to fill the void created by this virus." He added, "We are really looking forward to the time when we can welcome the public back to our beautiful new building."

### Armenian Restaurants/Caterers and Groceries

Restaurants in Massachusetts, as in many other states, are no longer allowed to have diners onsite. Only takeout and delivery are permitted.

Hovannes Janessian, owner of Ani Catering and Café in Belmont, said that more than two-thirds of his business has been eliminated due to the coronavirus crisis. One third consisted of catering for college and corporate lunches, and another third for parties and social gatherings. The other third included its restaurant and takeout, so at present Ani has to survive on only takeout and delivery, which has not increased. It is primarily regular customers, he said, who continue to buy meals.

Despite the difficult situation, so far he has not had to let anybody go. The staff is operating in accordance with all the new sanitation guidelines. Customers are encouraged to pre-pay so they do not wait at the counter. They can either come to pick up their orders or use curbside delivery and not even leave their cars.

Sarkis Ourfalian of Massis Bakery in Watertown said that it has been really difficult for his business to adjust. Initially, people were panic shopping. Customers who would normally purchase one loaf of bread would try to purchase ten. He and the other staff would ask them not to do it. This has decreased, he said, but could increase again with the further closures mandated by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts of non-essential businesses.

Despite this, the store still has everything in stock. Ourfalian said the distributors are still sending in supplies regularly, both locally and from the New York-New Jersey area. Even merchandise from abroad is still getting through although Europe is closed for travel.

There are more customers for cooked foods now. Although the store is quite busy, Massis has had to cut down on the number of employees working fifty to sixty percent in order to increase the necessary physical distance between them for health reasons. "With a smaller crew," Ourfalian said, "it has been that



At Massis Bakery

much more difficult to manage the amount of work, and we are also worrying about keeping these distances between customers." Right now, Massis only allows a limited number of customers inside at a time, usually five or six, with a six-foot distance from the cashier to the customer, and markers on the floor. Only one cus-

tomers is allowed per aisle.

Ourfalian said this is probably okay to implement during weekdays, but Saturdays when it is usually more crowded will be difficult.

The store closes earlier, at 5 p.m. instead of 7, in order to have time to sanitize all surfaces and do stocking on the shelves away from the customers. Ourfalian added that every half an hour or so the staff disinfect the store with sprays. All handling places are being sanitized both during and after work. Inside the kitchen, each employee has his own section away from one another.

Under these new circumstances, Massis is working on getting curbside pickup working soon so that people can call ahead of time for the order and when they come it is just brought to the car. At present, Massis does not have a delivery service.

Ourfalian said, "Some customers really understand the situation and wait, but others don't pay much attention. People just need to be more diligent. This is an unprecedented time for everyone." He said that even though the volume of business may have increased, it was an uncomfortable situation for all.

Ultimately, the current crisis is a test for what community means for Armenian Americans. What happens when physical contact and ties are not possible? This article is just a glimpse into the start of this crisis, and the Mirror will continue provide more coverage as feasible.

## Knights of Vartan's Nareg-Shavarshan Lodge Renovates KV #106 School in Yerevan

RENOVATION, from page 5

The next project in support of the Knights of Vartan School #106 was initiated by then Grand Commander Dr. Gary Zamanigian while on one of the organization's "Back to Homeland" Mission Trips in 2017. Appalled by the deplorable condition of the gymnasium, he was inspired and determined to make certain it would be renovated in 2018. He said recently "I couldn't believe my eyes when I actually saw the condition of the gym; at that moment I felt nothing is going to stop me from acquiring the necessary funds to refurbish the gym".

During one calendar year \$30,000 was raised by Nareg-Shavarshan Lodge members to complete the project. Additionally, \$2,600 was donated by the Arshavir Lodge in Worcester



The Knights of Vartan school gymnasium opening event

to purchase new gym equipment for September 2019. The Paros Foundation was contracted by the Detroit Lodge to implement the project and they did so in a manner far beyond the expectation of all who were able to see the end result.

In September 2019, the Knights of Vartan "Back to the Homeland" group, led by Grand Commander Steven Adams, attended the ribbon cutting ceremony of the renovated gymnasium. The school's younger children presented a beautiful program with dancing and acrobatics and the play "Vartanank" was preformed by upper grade students.

In the past, Mrs. Vardanyan had created a list of much needed renovations by priority. It included replacing the remaining old windows and doors of classrooms, changing all the outdated electric wires from the 1960s and a total renovation of the auditorium with a gradual incline of the floors for easy viewing.

Nareg-Shavarshan Lodge once again, with PGC Dr. Gary Zamanigian as the initiator, pledged to raise the needed funds for the final renovation. Gomidas Lodge in San Diego, having been informed of the project, has already made a monetary contribution.

In the future additional improvements will be made as needed and they will continue to be implemented by the Paros Foundation.

For more information about the Knights and Daughters of Vartan, visit <http://kofv.org>



## COMMUNITY NEWS

# anoush'ella Offers Free Food to Out-of-Work Restaurant Employees

ANOUSH'ELLA, from page 1

In this time of crisis, the Festekjians have temporarily closed the latter two locations, keeping only a skeleton crew running the South End restaurant for takeout orders. It was then that they got the idea to help.

"As we looked at our business, we realized after closing two of our units, that we had enough food to give away even though our delivery business is continuing to operate. As we started discussing the whole industry situa-

tion with other restaurants, we realized how pervasive the situation was so we have decided to provide food to workers who have lost their jobs during this crisis. We have a limited amount of resources but we can feed up to about 60-70 people a day for about three weeks until April 6. We will evaluate the situation then," said Nina Festekjian on Monday, March 23.



Raffi and Nina Festekjian

is even harder on them to be at home and not be able to see their friends but we are doing our best to keep ourselves busy," she said. It's a full house now with her parents. Though everyone feels well at this point, she said she is worried about her elderly parents needing any sort of medical care, as venturing out is not safe for them.

And she joked, "We are trying to make sure the boys are fed as it's the best way to make sure they stay home and not venture out."

"We think it's simply the right thing to do. This country has given us so much as far as opportunity, comfort, freedom and success that we feel we need to somehow give back," she added.

Any restaurant employees who have lost their jobs during this crisis, regardless of where they worked, can get meals from anoush'ella.

"In fact anyone that comes in and says they need food will provide them," she added.

The Festekjians' restaurants had 45 employees, of which they have now about six or seven working at different shifts for takeout food at the South End location.

"Many of the workers work paycheck to paycheck. We are trying to keep as many of our staff working during these difficult times," she added.

The end date was set based on Gov. Charlie Baker's order to shut restaurants until then.

The free meal program just started in the middle of last week and they are hoping that word will get out and more people will take advantage of the offer.

For someone who has spent the last few years pouring her heart and soul into this new endeavor, being home all the time can't be easy.

"We are doing the best we can. My two sons are home and our eldest is still in New York. It

She makes sure she treats her family to her recipes which have been replicated so successfully at their restaurants.

"Cooking and having breakfast lunch and dinner keeps me busy. We read together, watch movies, play some board games and make puzzles. Our plan for the coming weeks is to do a major spring cleaning and organize our basement and office since we never have a chance to do it. And we have to exercise at some point."

When asked for an easy recipe while one is at home, she said, "oh I can list so many options. The boys love pasta, home made pizzas, toasts or paninis with different toppings. For us salads with different grains and avocado is best.

She also gave the recipe for anoush'ella's



Anoush'ella South End staff

*Mudjadara*, lentil rice with labne. (See recipe below.)

Festekjian and her husband, Raffi, are both



Nina Festekjian

from Lebanon and lived through the brutal civil war there.

"It feels similar and yet it doesn't. In both situations we were hunkered down and stuck at home, stocking up on food and necessities. However, during the war there was the uncer-

pretty much safe. The other major difference is that during the war families and neighbors would get together more often, whether in shelters or otherwise, playing cards or games, watching TV, constantly discussing politics. As you know in this current situation it is complete social isolation. But thanks to technology we are in touch with everyone and getting together with Zoom or FaceTime. My fear is that this would be the next normal."

It is difficult, but Nina Festekjian said that she is coping by taking it "one day at a time and looking forward to a time when we can be with friends and family."

She is also concerned about the Armenia Art Fair, a major modern art exhibition attracting artists from throughout the world, which she cofounded in 2018.

"We are still trying to figure out what to do and reschedule it to possibly later this year or next year," she added.

"I am confident that with the Grace of God we will pull through these difficult times and will come out stronger and healthier," Festekjian concluded.

For more information on the restaurants, visit <http://www.anoushella.com/>



## anoush'ella's *Mudjadara* - Lentil rice with Labne

1 cup lentil  
1/2 cup rice  
2 medium onions chopped  
2 medium onions sliced  
1/2 cup avocado oil + some to fry the sliced onions  
1 tsp salt  
1 tsp cumin  
3-4 cups water

Wash the lentils with cold water then add it to a pot and boil with the 4 cups of water on medium heat about 15 minutes. When the lentils are soft add the washed rice, add the salt and cumin to it and cook for another 15 minutes on low heat until the water is absorbed.

In the meantime, heat the oil in a frying pan and fry the chopped onions until golden, then add them to the cooked rice and lentil and mix in gently.

Next, add some oil in a frying pan and now add the sliced onion. Fry until golden brown and crisp. Add the fried onion to top the dish of the lentil rice transferred to a serving platter for extra flavor and decoration.

Serve it with Armenian salad, pickles and *labne*.



## COMMUNITY NEWS

# Will Isolation Bring Us Back Together?

By Marian Salzman

NEW YORK (*Forbes*) — Times of crisis bring out the worst and best in humanity. I am heartened to see that—toilet paper hoarders aside—COVID-19 has been bringing out the latter in most people.

Neighbors are pulling together — if you don't tear up seeing this surprise 80th birthday celebration in Spain, you're a rock—communities are rallying around local businesses, and corporations of all kinds are mobilizing to ease isolation.

Last week, my friend and colleague Aaron Sherinian and his 17-year-old son, Adam, launched Quarantine Academy (QA). It's a genius way for as many as 300 people at once to Zoom in and learn about worthwhile topics from a variety of experts.

During daily virtual meetups at 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. EST, QA entertains and informs cloistered kids and adults with cabin fever via topics rang-

ing from Ernest Hemingway and the importance of brevity to stress-reducing origami. One teen expert schooled adults on the ins and outs of TikTok, and a pilot is on tap to take kids fascinated by air travel into a virtual cockpit.

Talk about social solidarity. Even as people are keeping their physical distance, they're managing to spend time together.

Aaron is a quintessential extrovert with an intellectually curious, introverted son. During this period of selfisolation, the father craved connectivity while the son sought stimulation. Together, they came up with a way to create that for themselves while providing a service to others.

Aaron has coined the term "pop-up generosity" to describe the ways in which individuals are devising innovative ways to contribute to the greater community — whether nearby or spanning the globe. It's not at all difficult to find examples of this generosity in action. There are the yoga and fitness instructors offering their classes online for free, community groups popping up to arrange deliveries to elderly and homebound residents, and, in Dallas, Whisk



Aaron Sherinian and his 17-year-old son, Adam are founders of the Quarantine Academy

Crepes is offering free meals to service industry employees whose incomes have been impacted by the outbreak. Even author Mo Willems — artist-in-residence at the Kennedy Center — is hopping online every day at 1 p.m. EST to read

to and draw with anxious kids.

Random acts of kindness, thankfully, no longer seem quite so random. They're everywhere.

I hadn't seen this level of communal camaraderie since 9/11 and the days that followed, when those of us living in and around New York City came together, seeking comfort and consolation like never before. It connected us, and we were all better for it. I'm feeling this sense of unity again, and not just from individuals. Companies such

as Louis Vuitton (which is using its perfume factory to make hand sanitizer to help with the shortage) are stepping in to fill the gap where overloaded governments fall short. Expect many more to follow suit in coming days.

An essential difference between the days post-9/11 and now is that back then we were encouraged to go about our daily lives as usual to support the economy (President Bush explicitly exhorted us to shop) and to show that we were undeterred in protecting our freedoms and way of life. In the current crisis, we're being told to isolate ourselves for the protection of our families and others. That is making this crisis unlike any I've experienced before.

Humans are social animals. As I wrote in my "20 Trends for 2020" report, people crave not just emotional but physical contact. Deprived of touch, we grow anxious and hopeless. We need to know we're loved and valued. That's why efforts such as the Quarantine Academy are so vital. They create solidarity amid the distance and disconnect. They allow isolated people to step back into some form of togetherness. They also allow people like Aaron and Adam to give back to the broader community in a way that is deeply meaningful.

No one is going to be heading out to a charitable gala or other in-person fundraiser anytime soon. Why not give some thought to how you can contribute in more creative and personal ways? Maybe our enforced isolation is exactly what was needed to bring our divided society back together.

## Connecticut Genocide Programs Cancelled

HARTFORD, Conn. — The Connecticut Armenian Genocide Commemoration Committee has announced the cancellation of its previously scheduled commemoration of the 105th anniversary of the Armenian Genocide which was to have taken place on Saturday April 25, in the historic Hall of the House at the Connecticut State Capitol.

Melanie Kevorkian Brown, chairperson of the Committee stated that the committee came to its conclusion to cancel with great regret only after considering all available options. "Extraordinary circumstances caused by the current COVID-19 virus and limitations on public gatherings imposed by government leaders left us no other choice. Our immediate concern in light of the current circumstances is the safety of all involved."

The committee will consider an alternative date later in the year, if circumstances permit. Kevorkian Brown stressed that the Committee continues resolute in its mission to honor the memory of the one and one half million victims, and also survivors, of the Armenian Genocide begun by the Ottoman Empire in 1915. The Committee also seeks to promote education concerning the Genocide and to present information about developments in both the Diaspora and Armenia.

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# Arts & Living

## Actor Alexander Kasparov

‘I Think Hamlet is Almost An Armenian Role!’

By Artsvi Bakhchinyan  
Special to the Mirror-Spectator

YEREVAN/SARATOV, Russia — Alexander Kasparov is a leading actor of the Slonov Academic Drama Theater in Saratov and a board member of the Union of Theater Workers of Russia from the Saratov Region. He was born in 1983, in the city of Balashov, Saratov Region, to a family of engineers: his mother is Russian and father is of Armenian-Russian origin. In 2005, Alexander graduated from the acting and directing course at the Theater Institute under the Sobinov Saratov State Conservatory (workshop of Honored Artist of Russia Anton Kuznetsov). Since 2001 Alexander Kasparov has played over 70 roles on the stage of the Saratov Academic Drama Theater.

Dear Alexander, you participated in more than 70 performances, among them classic, modern, and even fairy tales. Is there anything in common between such different characters and your performing style?

The main thing in all my performances is the spectator’s love and always looking upon him as an ally. You can be a king, a revolutionary or a villain, but the spectator for me is the main thing! If there was contact with him, the role was a success!

You are one of those lucky theater actors who had the honor of playing Hamlet at 24. On this occasion Komsomolskaya Pravda wrote (04/08/2008) about you: “He was chosen because he is able to play without a break, hysteria and unnecessary emotions, but at the same time deeply and with soul.” How do you rate this experience?

It was a very big and interesting experience. I wanted to fully show my whole temperament and skill. At the request of the director, I had to restrain myself – emotions, behavior on



Actor Alexander Kasparov

stage, because usually my roles are comic. During this work, I received a great acting education. But still, there were moments in the performance where I managed to show my Armenian character – a quiet Hamlet could not avenge for his father! I am very grateful to the theater for entrusting me with such a role.

I believe this was a modern interpretation of Hamlet using Rammstein’s music.  
see KASPAROV, page 12



Toad reads the note Frog left him.

## Classic *Frog and Toad* In Armenian Come to St. Leon Church

FAIR LAWN, N.J. — The Armenian School of St. Leon Armenian Church in Fair Lawn, New Jersey in conjunction with Cascade Press is proud to present the first-ever Armenian language translation of Arnold Lobel’s *Frog and Toad* series. The title is translated into Gorteh oo Dodosheh.

This translation project started about a year ago and seeks to set a new standard for Armenian language learning. From February to May of 2019, the upper school classes were engaged in interactive language workshops. During these sessions, these classic children’s books were translated by the students under the guidance of their teachers. In this fashion, the classroom truly came alive. As students sought to find the perfect words to capture the spirit of the original English text, they would often act out scenes from the book. Lively discussions would often ensue about word selection or about striking just the right balance between grammar correctness, colloquial speech/slang, and overall readability.

Since these books are heavy on dialogue, the students had quite a bit of fun as they channeled their inner frog and toad. But more importantly, these students were actively creating in the Armenian language. Through brainstorming, intense use of the whiteboard, and intimately connecting with the source material, the students showed that they too can create in the Armenian language.

Following the initial translation, the texts were first edited by the Armenian school teachers and then passed to Armenia for a second round of editing before yet more proofreading and final editing. The paperback books are now available in both Eastern and Western Armenian. If read out loud by a parent, these stories are perfect for ages 2 and up. As “easy reader” books, *Frog and Toad* is recommended for students ages 6 and up.

The *Frog and Toad* series consists of four books that chronicle the lives of best friends Frog and Toad. Each 64-page book consists of 5 stories that capture the essence of their friendship in clear, simple terms. Some examples of the simple adventures that these friends go on include learning how to fly a kite despite being bullied by some mean birds, tracking down a lost button, telling scary stories and tending to a vegetable garden

Although seemingly simple, each story has quite a bit of depth that will appreciated by students and parents alike. Themes of kindness, caring and mindfulness are skillfully woven throughout the books. Despite the overwhelming digital distractions

see FROG AND TOAD, page 13

## AIWA Releases Newly Translated 1883 Armenian Novel Advocating Equal Rights for Women

BOSTON — The Armenian International Women’s Association (AIWA) announces the release of its latest book, Srpuhi Dussap’s pioneering Armenian feminist novel *Mayda: Echoes of Protest*.

Published in 1883 in Istanbul, in the midst of an Armenian community experiencing a cultural renaissance, the book caused a sensation at the time, with some condemning its call for the equal rights of women as a threat to traditional Armenian values, while others praised its promotion of social justice as a progressive step for the nation.

This first book known to have been written by an Armenian woman is notable not only for its novel ideas but also for its innovative form, as one of the earliest works written in the modern Western Armenian language and therefore easily accessible to the public, rather than the classical form that had until that time been considered the only acceptable text.

With *Mayda*, Dussap provides a sharp critique of the unequal and unjust position of women in contemporary society and declares the right of a woman to a good education, to become gainfully employed, to relate with the opposite sex on the basis of mutual respect, and to have an independent role in society. She advances her ideas through this controversial novel of romance, betrayal, and reconciliation. The action is described through correspondence, mainly between an attractive but despondent young widow (*Mayda*) and her wise friend (*Madam Sira*), who offers her encouragement and advice.

While advocating equality for women is the main theme of the book, this was only one aspect of the author’s crusade for a more just and humane society. Her disapproval of the frivolity of the upper classes was clear, and she saw it as the duty of the privileged to improve the condition of the less fortunate. Her crusade for a greater role for women was based not only on her sense of social justice, but also on her conviction that enlisting the abilities of women would facilitate the nation’s progress. There is a strong strand of nationalism in her writing, and Dussap was a part of the contemporary progressive movement dedicated to advance the Armenian community through education, publications, and social participation.

Srpuhi Vahanian Dussap was born in the Istanbul suburb of Ortaköy in 1841 into a wealthy and socially prominent family. Her father passed away before she reached her first birthday, leaving her upbringing and education in the capable hands of her mother, Nazeli Vahanian. An especially well-educated woman noted for her philanthropic activities as well as her participation in the newly formed women’s associations of the times, Nazeli carefully supervised her daughter’s education, first in a French elementary school and later with tutors.

It was not until she was in her 20s, however, that Srpuhi Dussap began to take an interest in the Armenian language and literature, after she met and began taking Armenian-language lessons from the well-known Armenian poet Mgrdich Beshigtashlian. Under his influence, she wrote her first publications, poetry written in classical Armenian.

In 1871, Srpuhi married her piano teacher, Paul Dussap, a French musician at the Turkish Sultan’s court. The couple had two children, Dorine and Edgar, and they held a popular lively salon in their home that attracted local intellectuals to discuss the cultural, political, and social issues of the day. Paul Dussap encouraged his wife’s literary activities. In 1880 Srpuhi published a small work titled *The*  
see AIWA, page 13



ARTS & LIVING

# A Terrific New Thriller About a Mysterious Man And Rats... Lots of Rats

By Sarah Lyall

We all know what it's like to worry that something terrible has happened to a person we care about, as the hours pass and there is still no word and even implausible explanations (flat tire, broken phone) become increasingly unlikely. Plunging his main character into that excruciating situation — subjecting her to that “great, black maw of fear” — is the first diabolical thing that Chris Bohjalian does in his terrific new thriller, *The Red Lotus*.

The second is to force us to think about rats. The rats in this story seem a background curiosity at first, something we can ignore just as people in cities ignore the rats covertly overrunning the subways and parks. In an intermittent, parallel tale narrated by someone whose identity is concealed until the end of the book, the rats' qualities are described: their adaptability, their ubiquity, their usefulness in lab studies, their skill at building immunity to virulent pathogens.

The significance of these apparent asides becomes increasingly obvious, until it is clear that rats are vitally important to the elegant noose of a plot being tied around our necks. As Bohjalian points out, rats are “the most effective delivery vehicle for mass death ever to exist on earth.”

The human part of this novel begins on a bicycle tour in Vietnam, when a young man named Austin Harper, who works in the development office of a New York City hospital, inexplicably fails to return at the end of a day of riding. His girlfriend of less than a year, Alexis Remnick, an emergency room doctor in the same hospital who is also on the tour, senses that something is wrong. She is correct.

But the eventual discovery of Austin's battered body by the side of the road after a terrible accident is only the start of a series of increasingly weird, creepy and unexpected

developments. Alexis has very little time to adjust to the quick succession of new realities. Luckily, she is smart, perceptive and levelheaded, not one to waste her time ignoring the truth.

Reality No. 1: Her cute, loving, funny boyfriend is dead. Reality No. 2: He had told several seemingly small but puzzling lies about his reasons for wanting to come to Vietnam. Reality No. 3: He has been struck by a car, but the nasty puncture wound and broken bone Alexis spots on his hand suggest to her that he may have been tortured first.

The overriding new reality: Nothing is as it had seemed, and Alexis, an anxious person who in her youth alleviated stress with self-harm, has fallen into a new world of uncertainty and danger.

What to withhold, what to reveal, when to dole out information and in what manner — these are among the hardest decisions for an author to make in any thriller, particularly one with this many moving parts. Bohjalian strikes a fine balance between disclosure and secrecy. We soon learn more than Alexis does — including what led to Austin's death, and (after a while) what is going on with the rats — but there are many intriguing questions that Bohjalian takes his time answering.

What really happened to Austin at the bar the night he met Alexis? What is the significance of those little packets of energy gel he had with him in Vietnam? If the marks on his fingers were not cat bites, as he claimed, then what exactly were they?

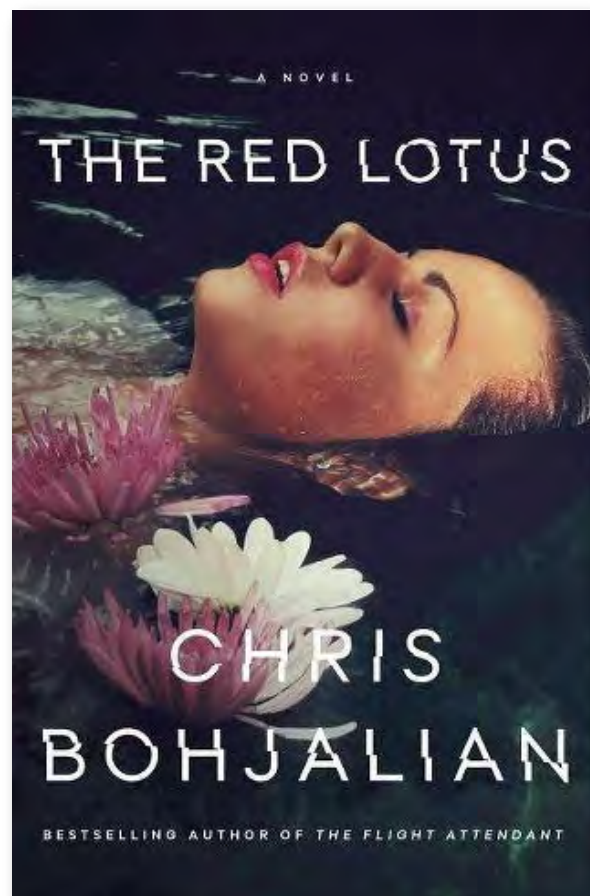
And, perhaps worst of all: Why did the backpack he carried with him the day of his fatal bike ride contain, among other things, a dress for a woman who was size zero, when there is no way Alexis could fit into something that small?

Alexis becomes an amateur detective of sorts, but she is also a fully-realized character. Haunted by the sudden death of her father when she was little, at odds with her high-achieving, overly critical mother, she is well suited to her job in the E.R., which constantly reminds her of life's fragility, of how close we live to the abyss.

“She felt no need to tend to herself,” Bohjalian writes, “when she was tending to people who, at least that moment, were dramatically worse off than she was.”

There's an array of pleasantly unsettling characters here. A special shout out to Douglas Webber, champion darts player and rat enthusiast, and to Oscar Bolton, his nervous, younger sidekick, and to a couple of people determined to help Alexis discover the truth. Ken Sarafian — a private investigator and ex-cop who has grim memories of his time serving in Vietnam and who recently lost a daughter to cancer — proves to be a particularly satisfying ally, with his psychological acuity, his sixth sense for deception, his dogged research skills and his Glock semiautomatic pistol.

Bohjalian is a pleasure to read. He writes muscular, clear,



*The Red Lotus* by Chris Bohjalian, 383 pages, Doubleday, \$27.95. A version of this article appears in print on March 20, 2020, edition of the New York Times, Section C, Page 11 of the New York edition with the headline “Rats Crawl Around a Thriller’s Mysteries.”

propulsive sentences. Even his unlikely scenes ring true, as in a tour-de-force climactic episode set inside a rat-research lab in which three of the four characters present are suddenly incapacitated in different ways. (The reasons feel a little close to home, in Alexis's case. “She was feeling fuzzy, lightheaded and febrile. Weak. Was it the flu? Maybe.”)

As suspenseful as it is, *The Red Lotus* is also unexpectedly moving — about friendship, about the connections between people and, most of all, about the love of parents for children and of children for parents. Bohjalian is a writer with a big heart and deep compassion for his characters.

## Knights and Daughters of Vartan

### Armenian Genocide Commemoration in Times Square

**Sunday April 26, 2020 at 1:30 p.m.**

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**Friday April 24, 2020 at Noon**

<p><b>New York City:</b> March for Justice                  From: St. Illuminator's Cathedral (221 E. 27<sup>th</sup> St)                  To: Turkish Consulate General of NY (605 3<sup>rd</sup> Ave)                  Sponsored by: Armenian Revolutionary Federation                  Homenetmen Scouts, NY-NJ                  Armenian Youth Federation</p>	<p><b>New Jersey:</b> Bergen County Courthouse Green                  10 Main Street Hackensack, NJ                  by: Bergen County Officials                  Sponsored by: Knights &amp; Daughters of Vartan                  Bakradouni Lodge, NJ                  Sahag Anoushtyag, NJ                  Hovnanian Armenian School, NJ</p>
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**Armenian Flag raising in FORT LEE, NJ to honor the Armenian Martyrs of 1915**



# Actor Alexander Kasparov

KASPAROV, from page 10

When people saw Rammstein [a German heavy metal band] in the play's program, many thought that the performance would not be as deep and serious for perception as it ended up. My father said the same thing at the beginning. But, when he watched this performance, he became proud of my work and he liked the action on the stage. Everything was harmonious. Rammstein in our Hamlet was a move to attract young viewers.

**In general, what role does music play in the life of an actor, and in particular, for you?**

According to Alexander Pushkin, "Of life's enjoyments, music is surpassed, by love alone; but love is a melody." Music is a tool that can evoke any emotion! But I also love silence.

**And what about the movies? I saw you only in a small role in Christophe de Ponfily's film "The Star of the Soldier." Are there any others?**

Employment in the theater does not allow me to act in films often. When the opportunity arises, I sometimes star in TV shows in Moscow. There were big roles in the series "Trace" (in episodes "Doublet" and "In the Gateway We Are Waiting for a Maniac") and "Signs of Destiny" (in episode "Lodger"). Last summer I starred in two music videos. But I consider these works as an experience of filming and an opportunity to earn a little.

**What are the advantages of a Russian actor with blue eyes and an Armenian nose?**

A wide range of roles and attention from girls (laughs).

**Perhaps you are tired of the question of the surname and family relationship with Garry Kasparov?**

I am often asked this question, but my father said that there is no direct evidence of kinship. On my father's side, my great-grandfathers had the surname Ter-Gasparyan. But the father does not deny that perhaps there is some kind of relationship.

**Where are your Armenian roots from?**

My paternal grandfather was pure Armenian. His name was Levon Tevatosovich Kasparov. He passed away when I was 9 years old and I remember him very well. My father told me a lot about his family and our roots. So, according to my father, my great-great-grandfather Alexander Ter-Gasparyan, originally from Artsakh (Karabakh), was of princely origin and lived 107 years and was killed by the members of Basmach movement [a group which undertook a protracted uprising against Russian Imperial and Soviet rule by the Muslim peoples of Central Asia - A. B.]. At one point he lived in Tashkent and was one of the richest people in the city. During the revolution, he sent two wagons of grain to Petersburg, for which he received some kind of high letter of thanks. Black and white photographs of my then-young grandfather Levon, his brother Raphael, aunt Anush and her two sons have been preserved.

**The famous Russian actor Dmitry Kharatian, like you, a quarter Armenian, once said that he has a sultry Armenian temperament that affects his acting. Can we say the same about you?**

Of course! In the theater they say that in a second I can go to my maximum temper, and for many people it is a mystery: how do I do this?

Have you ever collaborated with artists in Armenia?

Unfortunately not. But the best, faithful and reliable friends of mine are the Armenians!!! When I lived with my parents, our neighbors were a large Armenian family. This was an example of family communication. They always asked about our health and wished a good day. And they treated me when I met them in the city center, where they sold delicious snacks and drinks.

**Have you ever played Armenian heroes?**

I think Hamlet is almost an Armenian role! I do not mean only his name, so popular in Armenia (laughs), but of course, on the plot about his father, the temperament of the hero. I also acted in a play by William Saroyan. The per-

# Recipe Corner

by Christine Vartanian



## Armenian Mixed Vegetable Dolma

This updated version of Armenian dolma is from a recipe from the late Dr. Harold H. "Buzz" Baxter at <http://www.thegutsgourmet.net/armenian.html>, his comprehensive Armenian and international food and cultural website.

In Armenian and Middle Eastern cultures and cuisines, dolma refers to a family of stuffed vegetable dishes, most often wrapped in grape or cabbage leaves. You can use the same meat and rice filling to hollow out and stuff zucchini squash, eggplant, tomatoes, onions, and bell peppers. "If there's anything Armenians love to stuff it is fresh vegetables. Armenians will stuff just about any part of a lamb, from stomach to head. And we even stuff meat with meat like koftah," Baxter said. "Dolma is considered the most cherished Armenian dish because it is part of our rich Armenian culture, and because Armenians love dishes made of chopped meat and all possible variations of stuffed fresh vegetables," he added. Dr. Baxter's website is dedicated to his beloved mother, Gladys Baxter, who was born in Fresno on July 1, 1908. She descended from Armenian immigrants from the Bitlis area of Turkey. "My mother was the youngest of eight children, and had five older sisters who were excellent cooks, too, as was her mother. She naturally learned from them and became one of the most respected Armenian cooks in the San Joaquin Valley. She had no difficulty in cooking for two or two hundred people. She seldom consulted a cookbook and measuring devices were rarely used in her cooking. A pinch of this and a scoop of that was all that was needed to perform magic in her kitchen."

In 1930, Gladys married Avedis Baxter, an auto mechanic from Fowler, Calif. They had two sons to whom she taught her culinary and domestic skills. Ironically, she spent her last few years with Alzheimer's disease that caused her to forget her amazing art and skills in Armenian cooking. Dr. Baxter added, "I felt it incumbent upon me to celebrate my mother's deep love of cooking by sharing many of her traditional Armenian specialties such as this dolma recipe."



### INGREDIENTS:

- 3/4 cup rice or fine bulgur, or a combination
- 1 1/2 lbs. ground lamb or ground round or 3/4 lb. each ground lamb and lean ground top round
- 3/4 cup flat-leaf parsley, chopped
- 1/2 medium green bell pepper, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 medium yellow onion, finely chopped
- Cayenne pepper or paprika to taste
- 1 teaspoon each dried basil and dried mint
- 1 teaspoon each salt and black pepper
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 8 oz. crushed tomatoes or tomato sauce
- 2 cups water or 2 cans chicken broth or beef broth, or enough to cover the vegetables

### PREPARATION:

Wash and prepare the vegetables of your choice, including red, gold, and green bell peppers. Or choose from grape leaves, cucumbers, large zucchini squash, summer squash, tomatoes, potatoes, onions, apples, cabbage leaves, quince, and small eggplant. Scoop out vegetables leaving an opening for the filling about 1 1/2-2 inches in diameter and 2-3 inches deep. In a bowl, combine the rice or bulgur, lamb or ground round, parsley, bell pepper, garlic, tomato paste, onions, and spices. Add lemon juice and mix all ingredients to combine; check seasonings. Fill vegetables with some filling mixture and place upright in a large pot, Dutch oven, or covered casserole. (Scoop out portions of vegetables may be grated or processed, and added to the broth to make it thicker, or it can be used in another dish, such as a vegetable soup base.) Pour crushed tomatoes or tomato sauce over the stuffed vegetables along with water or broth. Add more liquid, if needed, and bring to a boil. Reduce heat, cover, and cook for 45-60 minutes, until vegetables, rice or bulgur are tender. Allow dolma to rest for 20-30 minutes. Transfer to a platter and season lightly with salt and pepper. Spoon remaining sauce over dolma, and serve with rice, lentil or bulgur pilaf, Armenian yogurt, and fresh pita bread or lavash. Serves 6 to 8.

See: <http://www.thegutsgourmet.net/dolma.html>.  
<https://www.thearmeniankitchen.com/2009/04/dolma-armenian-meal-in-vegetable.html>

PsychoSymmetry (Detail)

Website: [johnavakian.com](http://johnavakian.com)

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ARTS & LIVING

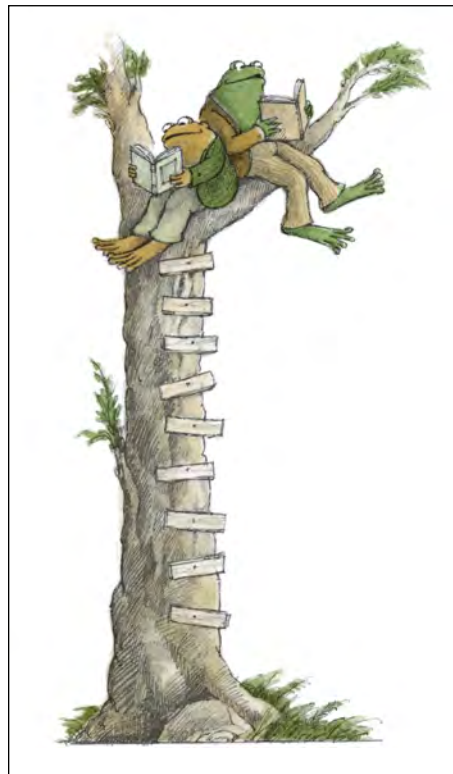
# Classic Frog and Toad at St. Leon Armenian Church

FROG AND TOAD, from page 10 that a student encounters today, Frog and Toad shows that sometimes what is most important is listening to your thoughts and truly understanding who you are.

St. Leon Armenian School Principal Nora Vartivarian Balekji recently sat down to discuss the translation project in greater detail.

**HN - Where did the idea for the translation project come from?**

NB - Engaging the true and full attention of the student has always been the goal of the teacher – be it in the newly formed classrooms of our grandfathers and grandmothers that survived the genocide, the schools of our parents throughout the middle east and Europe,



Reading on a tree

students of the past 10 years simply have too many distractions. Armenian school ranks very low on their priority list. Sports practice, music lessons, video games, social media – all of these prove to be very difficult to overcome.

**HN - So, you had to somehow make Armenian language lessons take priority in the mind of the students?**

NB – Exactly. Students took no pride in learning conjugations and declensions. They were bored as they would bluntly (and often) tell us. So, we needed to make language acquisition something fun. The students needed to feel in control. Not simply learning grammar rules – the students needed to feel that they were creating something themselves – that they were in control of their learning.

**HN - And how did it go?**

NB - It was like a dream come true. The students absolutely loved the fact that they were doing something that had never been done before. For many of them, Frog and Toad was a childhood favorite. For them to be translating this book was a true source of pride.

**HN – Why did you choose Frog and Toad?**

NB – The reading level of the Frog and Toad perfectly matched the needs of our students. To be honest, there aren't many new Armenian books being published each year. Those that are being released are either too easy (a few words per pages) or too advanced (like some of the translations being released in Armenia). Our students need a stepping-stone to get to the more advanced material. The FROG AND TOAD books are perfect “easy reader” books. Each page has about 5 to 10 sentences and beautiful illustrations. The grammar and syntax are simplified so that the student can master core competency in reading and comprehension. Also – when a student completes a book, it truly is a big accomplishment for them as each book is 64 pages!

**HN - Do you have further plans for translations?**

NB - Yes. Going forward, we plan to translate two books per year. Now we want to translate children's picture books. We are considering a publication of Right Now, written by David Kherdian and Nonny Hogrogian. It's a very cute book about mindfulness and making the most of the present moment – no matter what has happened in the past and no matter



The two friends eat cookies.

what may come.

**HN – I like that! Embracing the here and now...which is precisely what you have done with this translation initiative !**

We have a job to do, and we won't take NO for answer. We must teach our students to create. We must give them the confidence to

proudly use the Armenian language. We cannot simply wait for an artist/writer/poet to magically appear. As teachers, it is our duty to cultivate the future writers that will keep our language alive for centuries to come.

The books are available from <https://www.cascade.press/frog-and-toad>

## AIWA Releases Newly Translated 1883 Armenian Novel Advocating Equal Rights for Women

AIWA, from page 10

Spoken Armenian Language and began contributing articles about women's issues to the Armenian press.

With the publication of *Mayda* (and two additional novels furthering her ideas, *Siranush* in 1884 and *Araxia* in 1886), Dussap became an idol for a young generation of Armenian women who were inspired by her life and ideals. In 1889, accompanied by her daughter Dorine, she went on an extended trip to Paris, where the two enjoyed the cultural life of the French capital. But Dorine had contracted tuberculosis, and soon after returning home, in 1891, she died at the age of 19. Srpuhi Dussap could not recover from this crushing blow, and never again wrote for publication. She withdrew from society and passed away in 1901.

However, several of the young generation of Armenian women who had been inspired by Dussap as a role model went on to distinguished literary careers. Following her example, they created a brilliant body of literature in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Almost forgotten for a century, the lives and works of these women are becoming increasingly the subject of attention today, not only among Armenians striving to meet the challenges of modern times, but in broader circles interested in understanding the evolving roles of women in society.

*Mayda* was reprinted in 1924, but AIWA's edition is the first translation of the text into English. It marks the latest work to appear in the organization's “Treasury of Armenian Women's Literature” series, following AIWA's previous publication of three works by an admirer of Dussap, Zabel Yessayan (*The Gardens of Silihdar*, *My Soul in Exile*, and *In the Ruins*).

*Mayda* includes an introduction by Prof. Valentina Colzolari, of the University of Geneva, who places the work in the context of women's emancipation and Armenian litera-

ture in contemporary Istanbul. The translator is author Nareg Seferian, graduate teaching assistant at the Virginia School of Public and International Affairs, and the editor is Dr. Lisa Gulesserian, who teaches Armenian language and culture at Harvard University's Department of Near Eastern Languages and

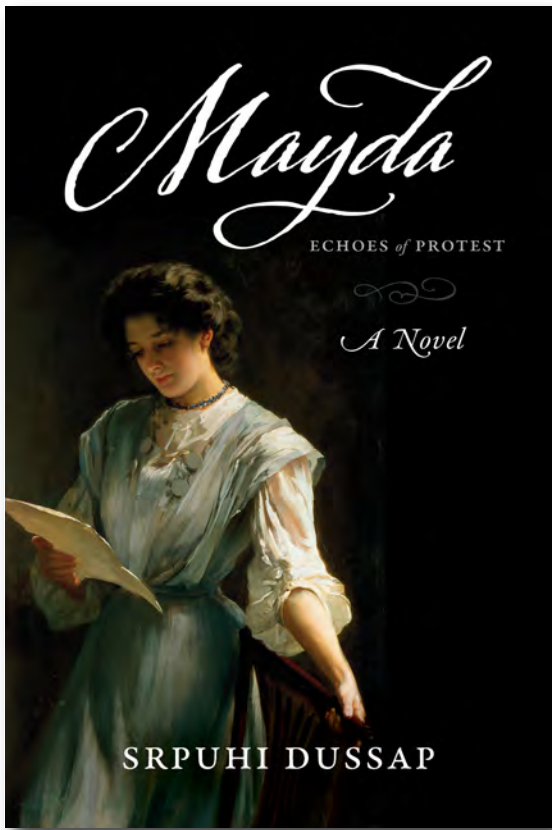


The translated books

## CALENDAR

### MASSACHUSETTS

**MAY 1-3 – The Global Cinema Film Festival of Boston** has been postponed until this date. We urge our film festival family and community to take care of themselves and their loved ones. Ticket (s) already purchased can be used for future dates, as we do not anticipate any major changes to our program. Please contact [lobalcinematfilmfestival@gmail.com](mailto:lobalcinematfilmfestival@gmail.com) with any questions or concerns.



Civilizations. Assisting in the editing was AIWA's publication team of Barbara Merguerian, Joy Renjilian-Burgy, Judith A. Saryan and Danila Jebejian Terpanjian.

*Mayda: Echoes of Protest* is available for purchase (at \$20 each) directly from AIWA, from Amazon Books, or from booksellers specializing in works about Armenia and Armenians. For more information about AIWA books, or generally about AIWA's programs to advance the roles of women in society, contact the organization at 65 Main St., #3A, Watertown, MA 02472; [info@aiwainternational.org](mailto:info@aiwainternational.org).



## COMMENTARY

## COMMENTARY

# An Alternate Brave New World

By Edmond Y. Azadian

Certainly no one wants to hear or read more about coronavirus. Yet, despite being glued to TV screens, despite the profusion of news stories and narratives about the virus, all of humanity is tuned in to avariciously learn more about the virus, hoping to get a glimmer of hope, a ray of light at the end of the tunnel.

Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany, now herself in self-isolation because of exposure to the virus, compares the current situation with World War II, when humanity was engaged in a self-destructive conflict. But that was a manmade calamity and it was in everyone's subconscious that the conflict could be controlled, reshaped or even brought to a halt through sober thinking and will. But the current pandemic is beyond human control, and that is why it has halted all human actions. It is an invisible and invincible enemy, which as of yet cannot be defeated, only avoided if one is lucky.

The living organisms populating the globe inherently carry the agents of their self-destruction, namely viruses.

Medical research has made great advances, bringing about incredible breakthroughs in healing and recovering. But today's pandemic proves yet again that much lies beyond the grasp of science or human comprehension.

Historically plagues and pandemics have wreaked havoc on populations, killing large segments of human society. But mankind has continued to survive and find cures for those ills, even if only after the fact. Society has seldom acted proactively; it has only reacted after the fact and has been able to come up with some remedy, or preventative procedure, although that kind of universal threat has always been predictable, not just in terms of past experience but historic record.

Bill Gates, a humanitarian but by no means an expert in public health, had sounded the alarm long ago to warn the world of the possibly of just such a crisis as we see today. Yet, all major countries have been crippled by myopic policies, investing in and manufacturing military hardware, powerful enough to destroy their perceived enemies, and seldom thinking beyond their enemies to see the kind of pandemics that threaten the entire species.

And we are currently at that juncture.

Gates had warned in a TED talk in 2015 that the world is not prepared for future pandemics. "If anything kills over 10 million people in the next few decades, it is likely to be a highly infectious virus rather than war," he said.

He also blamed the major powers for having invested tremendous resources in nuclear deterrence, paying less heed to potential pandemics. As a precedent, in his talk he cited the case of the Spanish Flu, which killed some 50 million people between 1918 and 1920, including 195,000 in the US.

Incidentally, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has allocated \$100 million toward the COVID-19 response, it announced last week.

Governments now are engaged in a race to develop a vaccine for COVID-19. At the time of this writing, there is no medicine yet to cure the thousands infected worldwide.

Relief could come in two ways: healing the infected population and immunizing the rest.

Estimates vary at this time regarding when such medications can be approved by the Food and Drug Administration in the US and put to use by the medical community. The most optimistic guesstimate is that a vaccine can come within six months. Others believe that it may not be ready before a year and a half. In the meantime, defenseless patients are suffering. There is a shortage of ventilators and masks and people are dying. The healthy ones are gripped by fear that the invisible enemy may seep into their bodies and infect them.

By the beginning of the 21st century, technology and biology had recorded great advances. Gene therapy had offered tremen-

dous potentials to cure or prevent illnesses thus far believed to be incurable. Despite those advances, we now realize how much there still is to learn.

This raises an inherent question whether there is a built-in self-destruct button, which has to surface at one point in the development of society to create a balance between the population growth and the means to sustain that growth. It brings to mind the Malthusian Catastrophe, a theory about the population of the earth outpacing the planet's ability to provide food. The theory was developed by Thomas Malthus, who believed that the human population always grows faster than the food supply, until war, disease and famine reduce the population again.

Despite the failure of Malthus' theory, many proponents of his logic have come up with similar theories.

Today, those theories do not stand up to scientific truth but they continue stirring fear into people's minds that population growth one day will result in some global catastrophe. COVID-19 is just that kind of disease which fuels fears that humanity is at the edge of its finite existence.

Whatever used to overwhelm our lives ordinarily has become insignificant in light of this pandemic. It has become irrelevant that US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo is in Kabul to cut a peace deal with the Talibans, nor does it interest anyone that Turkish and Russian military are monitoring Idlib jointly, to avoid another flare up. Fear and death are around us, or perhaps also, in us.

Those who believe in human ingenuity will look back and real-



ize that every time a pandemic has threatened human existence, mankind has come up with a means of its survival, albeit at the cost of high casualties.

As the coronavirus spread from China, perhaps the Chinese adage can also bring some hope. Indeed, it is said that the word for crisis in Mandarin has two meanings: distress and opportunity. We already have experienced distress and maybe opportunity is around the corner, with many labs in the world working in overdrive and collaborating with governments that are ready to pour millions into the research and development of drugs necessary to fight the crisis.

It is also time to remember another old adage: necessity is the mother of invention.

We are at the forefront of a Brave New World, but not the kind that Aldous Huxley imagined, where humans reduced other humans to robots but rather a world where humans liberate themselves once again from the universal force of nature.

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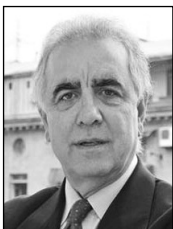
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COMMENTARY



My Turn

By Harut Sassounian

## Erdogan's Denial of Coronavirus Crisis Risks the Lives of 80 Million Turks

The world as we knew it changed dramatically in the last few weeks due to the unexpected spread of the deadly coronavirus. Hundreds of millions of people around the world are isolated in their homes, scared of coming in contact with anyone who might be carrying the virus.

Several autocratic heads of states were slow to react to the virus denying that it was a serious problem in their countries. Eventually, as more and more people were infected with the virus, these leaders finally saw the light and started to take urgent measures to protect their people.

One such irresponsible leader is the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Michael Rubin, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, wrote a lengthy article in the March 16, 2020 issue of the National Interest, titled: "Gambling with 80 Million Lives: Why Erdogan Lied about Coronavirus."

Rubin referred to Ergin Kocylidirim, a Turkish pediatric cardiothoracic surgeon at the University of Pittsburgh's School of Medicine, who described in an essay "both the Turkish government's claim to have established an effective testing kit and the fraudulence of its claims."

Even though the Turkish Health Minister initially denied that there were any coronavirus cases in Turkey, after widespread claims of the spread of the virus, Turkish author-

ities arrested the whistle-blowers. Another 64 Turks were jailed after being accused of disseminating false and provocative information. Furthermore, members of the state-controlled Turkish press panel insisted that "Turkish genes rendered most Turkic people immune," Rubin reported.

Rubin attributed Erdogan's lies about the absence of the coronavirus in Turkey to his "dangerous combination of arrogance and ignorance.... A larger motivation may be fear. While Turkey's demography is shifting in Erdogan's favor as conservative families from Turkey's Anatolian heartland grow relative to the Europeanized Turks from central Istanbul and the Mediterranean coast, the economy is faltering. In 2010, Erdogan promised that by Turkey's 2023 centennial, Turkey would be one of the world's top-10 economies. Even before coronavirus, Turkey would be lucky to remain in the top 20 as corruption, nepotism, political interference in business, and broad mismanagement have combined to send confidence in Turkey's economy into the gutter."

Another reason Rubin gives for Erdogan's cover-up of the spread of the coronavirus in Turkey is his fear of the collapse of the tourism industry. "In 2018, the Turkish tourism industry accounted for nearly \$30 billion. Just a year ago, Erdogan promised that Turkey would host 50 million tourists, raising that figure by at least 20 percent. Add into the mix Turkey's investment of approximately \$12 billion in a new Istanbul airport, expected to be the world's largest, and one in which Erdogan and his family are reportedly heavily invested. It seems Erdogan sought to downplay reports of coronavirus in order to encourage tourist dollars to continue to flow. In doing so, he sought not only to play Russians, Europeans, and Americans for fools, but also endangered their lives. Unfortunately for Turkey, it will be Turks who will most pay the price as Turkey threatens to become the virus' next big cluster. One Turkish doctor estimates that as many as 60 percent of Turks may now be infected and that Erdogan is retarding testing in order to prevent the scale of the catastrophe from becoming known. Deaths were inevitable, but Erdogan's dishonesty will likely cause many thousand additional deaths in his country added to the dozens Turkey reportedly has

already experienced but will not officially report."

To make matters worse, as in several other countries, the Turkish public has invented fake cures for the coronavirus. Nazlan Ertan wrote in the Al-Monitor website that Turks are now resorting to cannabis and sheep soup to fight the vicious virus.

Abdurrahman Dilipak, a prominent Islamist columnist for the daily Yeni Akit newspaper, suggested that cannabis "can create a major barrier to the global spread of the virus." Dilipak, who has 700,000 Twitter followers — about six times more than his newspaper's circulation, also urged his Turkish readers to avoid receiving any vaccines from overseas because they would likely contain sterilization agents, linking such vaccines to an Aryan plot.

After a Turkish professor suggested the kelle pacha (sheep soup) cure, many Turks flocked to local restaurants preferring the soup to social distancing. "The outbreak of coronavirus led to high demand for kelle pacha," Hurriyet reported on March 16. "After the news articles, the kelle pacha orders both at the restaurant and as take-away have increased," said a waiter at Ismet Usta, a popular restaurant in downtown Izmir.

"All of these remedies — from gorging your throat with vinegar to whatever soup, has no use," Mehmet Ceylan, the president of the nongovernmental Infectious Diseases Association, said in an NTV news program on March 16. "These are unscientific and should not be spread [through the media or word of mouth]."

Fortunately, in recent days, there has been a turnaround in the approach of Turkish officials to the virus. They are now urging the population to stay indoors in self isolation to avoid more infections. I hope that these measures are not too late and millions of Turks are not already at risk. The announced numbers of 1236 infections and 30 deaths due to the coronavirus do not reflect the real figures.

At this critical time, we wish everyone good health, regardless of nationality, religion or skin color. We hope that this malicious disease has inadvertently helped to bring people and nations closer to fight together the common invisible enemy.

# Global Pandemics And Beyond Nation States?

By Prof. Alan Whitehorn

So far the responses to the global COVID-19 pandemic have been for the nation-states of the world to mobilize resources and close their borders with other countries, even long-time neighbors. The intended goal is to isolate from outsiders who are perceived to be more sickly and thus a threat. Even in

Today, I think about the millions of vulnerable inhabitants in overcrowded refugee camps in Syria, Turkey, Palestine and elsewhere. I worry about how, if at all, they will cope with the highly contagious and deadly COVID-19 pandemic. Will countless numbers of them become inevitable victims and become a catalyst for a second pandemic wave? The role of United Nations relief organizations and the World Health Organization is crucial in this regard. We need a global response to a virus that transcends national political borders. As Ernst Haas penned in his pioneering 1960s book Beyond the Nation-State: Functionalism and International Organizations, we will have to focus on a profound increase in the scope and capacity of international organizations that more effectively address critical human needs and functions.

Catastrophic events can become catalysts for profound paradigm change. Out of the muddy blood-filled trenches of World War One, idealism was rekindled in the creation of the League of Nations. Emerging from the nuclear devastation

reflect my ongoing concern about how we treat others and view the world.

## Catastrophe and Rebirth

Catastrophic events can become catalysts for profound paradigm change.

Out of the muddy blood-filled trenches of World War One, idealism was rekindled in the creation of the League of Nations.

Emerging from the nuclear devastation and bombed-out ruins of World War Two,

the hope of the United Nations was born.

In the aftermath of the deadly global corona virus COVID-19, what lessons might we learn and what would we do?

Let us hope that they will be positive and visionary.

## Waiting for the Virus

They say the virus is really dreadful  
and will be coming ever so soon.  
I don't know what to do.

How can I prepare?

How bad will it become?

They say it will affect us all

and in so many ways.

And thus, in a national television address  
the American president warned us.

He claimed it is a foreign virus  
that comes from overseas.

He ordered the closure of our borders  
to protect ourselves from them.

But, I fear the virus is already here.

It is amongst us.

It can be found  
in what we say  
and who we fear.

We've begun to close our hearts  
and even our minds.  
The virus is killing our humanity.

Somehow we must stop it,  
before it is too late.

TODAY, I THINK ABOUT THE MILLIONS OF VULNERABLE INHABITANTS IN OVERCROWDED REFUGEE CAMPS IN SYRIA, TURKEY, PALESTINE AND ELSEWHERE. I WORRY ABOUT HOW, IF AT ALL, THEY WILL COPE WITH THE HIGHLY CONTAGIOUS AND DEADLY COVID-19 PANDEMIC. WILL COUNTLESS NUMBERS OF THEM BECOME INEVITABLE VICTIMS AND BECOME A CATALYST FOR A SECOND PANDEMIC WAVE?

large, affluent countries, such as Canada and the United States, we are struggling with the magnitude of the overlapping medical, financial and economic crises.

As bad as things currently are in Europe in countries such as Italy and Spain and are likely to become in North America, I cannot help but think about smaller, less developed countries and how desperate conditions will become. In the recent past, during the Ebola crisis that greatly afflicted parts of Africa, the largely unaffected rest of the world was able to provide a critical helping hand.

But today, over 160 countries of the United Nations are undergoing dangerously turbulent times. As a political science professor, I learned to study and reflect on the Hobbesian realms of revolution, war, dictatorship, genocide and, to a lesser degree, post-conflict reconstruction.

As the grandson of an orphan of the Armenian Genocide, I recall hearing and reading about the long and painful precarious years in refugee camps in Greece, the Caucasus and the Middle East. Conditions were desperate. There was woefully insufficient food, shelter and medicines. Malnutrition and disease were rampant. The humanitarian organization Near East Relief provided an urgently-needed lifeline.

and bombed-out ruins of World War Two, the hope of the United Nations was born. In the aftermath of the deadly global corona virus COVID-19, what lessons might we learn and what would we do? Let us hope that they will be positive and visionary.

### Politics and the Arts

Poems are part of our collective culture and should reflect on the world and its discontents. The artist, as a literary figure, has a leadership responsibility to be a voice for the vulnerable and less powerful. In so doing, one can help foster social change for the better. This is in the politically engaged tradition of twentieth century authors such as Bernard Shaw in the United Kingdom and Bertolt Brecht in Germany. As the grandson of an orphan of the Armenian Genocide, I have sought to convey the breadth and depth of the Armenian suffering, both past and present generations. Contemporary Turkish state genocide denial and menacing threats against those who write on genocide and human rights have added to the urgency and reasons for speaking out. My 2009 book, Just Poems: Reflections on the Armenian Genocide, was a response to such Turkish threats and misdeeds. These two poems

(Alan Whitehorn is a professor emeritus of political science at the Royal Military College of Canada. In the 1990s, he was the JS Woodsworth professor of Humanities at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver. Over the past two decades, he has lectured extensively at Armenian universities and government departments. Recently, he received the Narekatsi medal from the Writers' Union of Armenia and was selected as an Aurora Forum Goodwill Ambassador. This column originally appeared on the website 168.am on March 24.)



# Ambassador Nersesyan Continues Conducting Diplomacy Despite Coronavirus Constraints

EMBASSY, from page 1

postponed in order to prevent the spread of the virus. The consular section responds rapidly to questions placed to its hotline (202-674-9348).

He continued, “Unfortunately, the coronavirus affects all aspects of our lives, including our diplomatic activity. We cannot have our regular meetings with our counterparts as was the case just a week ago, but nevertheless we remain in touch by phone, videoconference and email. We maintain our contacts and make sure that our embassy fulfills its mission irrespective of the crisis.” Postal communication with Armenia so far continues to operate uninterrupted.

One of the aspects of international diplomacy that has been affected is the work of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Minsk Group, which works for a negotiated peaceful solution to the Karabakh issue. The spread of the coronavirus has led the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Ambassador Andrzej Kasprzyk, to announce a temporary halt of monitoring at the line of contact and at the Armenian-Azerbaijan border. The OSCE Co-chairs also made a statement, noting that they “appeal to the sides to reaffirm their commitment to observe the ceasefire strictly and refrain from any provocative action that could further raise tensions during this period. Recognizing that the region’s medical resources should be dedicated exclusively to combating the spread of the virus and treating those affected, we urge the sides to exercise the greatest possible restraint to lessen the risk of escalation including by making maximum use of the existing direct communication links” (<https://www.osce.org/minsk-group/448837?fbclid=IwAR2phrp6T0VG9LafUwNJmkEpcHwgAePXeVl4Gs2mBzbTUzbeSKcMgk4Uf4>).

As the United States is one of the co-chairs of the Minsk Group, Nersesyan maintains regular contact with the US co-chair, though embassies do not participate in the negotiating process. Nersesyan stated, “I hope that the opposite side [Azerbaijan] will not use this situation for provocation or escalation.”

On the other hand, Nersesyan said that the ceasefire has largely been self-monitored since 1994 and in the meanwhile, he was sure that the co-chairs of the Minsk Group irrespective of travel difficulties continue their activities on a daily basis and are in touch with the parties to the conflict. Consequently, he said, “Any issues that will come up will be dealt with by the co-chairs despite the temporary suspension of the monitoring.” He emphasized that this crisis was not only about Armenia, Artsakh and Azerbaijan but was a global one, and hoped that everybody understood and would act with restraint. In any case, he said, the Armenian and Karabakh armed forces remain on high alert and control the overall situation at the line of contact.

## Community Relations Concerning the Virus

The embassy, in addition to its role in governmental diplomacy, continues to maintain contact with the American-Armenian community. Nersesyan said that he held a conference call on March 19 with Bishop Daniel Findikyan and Archbishop Anoushavan Tanielian to understand what the situation was in the church parishes and communities on the East Coast. The ambassador regularly discusses with the consul general of Armenia in Los Angeles conditions in the community on the West Coast.

Nersesyan also participated on March 19 in a video conference with the Armenian American Health Professionals Organization (AAHPO) and several other Armenian associations to understand the efforts being made to help Armenia in the current situation and what can be done to coordinate these efforts. Contacts with the community and its leadership will be actively maintained, Nersesyan said. He added that the efforts of AAHPO and the Armenian-American community’s leaders served as a good example of cooperation with representatives of Armenia which help protect the health and safety of our communities in both the diaspora and Armenia.

Nersesyan urges Armenian citizens to register with the consular section of the embassy and the Armenian Ministry of Foreign Affairs so that they can help citizens in case of necessity. This is purely voluntary, he pointed out.

The website of the embassy (<https://usa.mfa.am/en>) as well as the consular service hotline provide information about how one can travel back and forth to Armenia under the present limitations on travel. The routes available are changing over time, so this information is continually updated. The embassy recently assisted a group of Armenian students at the Tufts Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, in Medford Mass., and another group from Luther College in Decorah, Iowa, to return from the United States to Armenia safely.

The website also provides useful information about US Citizenship and Immigration Services changes affecting Armenians, such as the possibility to apply for the extension of visas in the current crisis.

## Coronavirus in Armenia

On March 23, there were 192 cases of confirmed coronavirus in Armenia, Nersesyan reported. So far, Nersesyan said that Armenia is in fairly normal shape, and authorities are providing all of the necessary supplies and services to its citizens. A one-

month state of emergency was declared last week.

Nersesyan said, “In case we do have a deficit of certain supplies, we definitely will apply to our diaspora and the diasporan organizations. We appreciate that the US Armenian community has always stood by Armenia in all difficult situations. I am sure that this time as well the community is going to stand by Armenia if necessary.”

One area of the Armenian economy which may be impacted by the coronavirus is tourism, one of the biggest industries of the country which recently has been expanding. The recent opening of flights by budget airlines was an indicator of this. Nersesyan declared, “One thing is clear: the government of Armenia is taking very serious measures to support our businesses, including the hotel and restaurant industries. The government has already allocated a 300 million US dollar support package for Armenian businesses.” He said that the Armenian government is trying to adapt itself to the situation but it is premature to conjecture about the way it will evolve by the summer.

## Cultural Diplomacy

To commemorate the centennial of US-Armenia diplomatic relations, the embassy organized a series of cultural events over a period of about two weeks (from February 29 to March 14) called Armenian Odyssey: The Color of Pomegranates (<https://mirrorspectator.com/2020/02/25/armenian-cultural-days-are-coming-to-washington-d-c-video/>). Nersesyan remarked, “We were lucky that most of this took place before the outbreak of the coronavirus crisis. Only the closing event dedicated to Rouben Mamoulian [at the National Gallery] was postponed. The rest was a set of events here in Washington, DC, celebrating diplomatic relations through culture.”

There were film and concert events at the Freer Gallery and the Bible Museum of the United States, but the central event was a concert at the Washington National Cathedral on March 4 that was sold out. It featured noted Armenian musicians Narek Hakhnazaryan and Jivan Gasparyan together with the Post Classical Ensemble of the Cathedral performing music by composer Vache Sharafyan, commissioned exclusively for this event, with the participation of conductor Angel Gil-Ordonez and artist Kevork Murad. The festival



Ambassador Varuzhan Nersesyan

was underwritten by the Anna and Hrair Hovnanian Foundation, with Aso Tavitian and Noubar Afeyan serving as festival co-chairs and Ameriabank as the corporate sponsor.

Around 800 people attended the concert, with high level guests from various branches of the American government, including US Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs Marie Royce, the Washington diplomatic corps and the Armenian-American community. The Armenian prime minister’s wife Anna Hakobyan came to Washington to be the guest of honor.

The ambassador assessed this event, and the festival as a whole, as successful, with positive notices in the media helping place Armenia and its culture back in the spotlight. He said, “Our aim is always to demonstrate our cultural heritage and continue to promote the Armenian nation and Armenian people through culture as part of our regular diplomatic activities. This is one of our priorities.”

The next big event the embassy will help support is an exhibit at the Museum of the Bible (<https://www.museumofthe-bible.org/>) in Washington next year to be called the “Breath of God” (the literal translation of the name of the Bible in Armenian). Nersesyan said, “We are planning to organize a big exhibition of the Armenian Christian heritage and Armenian Bibles at the Bible Museum. It symbolizes values that both we the Armenian people and the American people maintain together. We will work together hopefully once this crisis is gone and life returns to normal to continue to organize this next big cul-

tural event here in Washington.” Two khachkars have already been donated to this museum, one from the people of Armenia and a second from the IDEa Foundation.

## US-Armenia Relations and US Aid after the Velvet Revolution

Armenia’s foreign policy has not changed drastically after the Velvet Revolution. Nersesyan said, “Our basic premises of foreign policy have remained in place because nothing in our geopolitics have changed. Of course, there are adjustments. There are new approaches.” The movement for democracy in Armenia, Nersesyan said, “has created new opportunities for our diplomacy worldwide, especially with the Western world, with the United States, the European Union and with Western institutions in general. Armenian democracy is being appreciated and recognized and this is what creates a better opportunity for Armenia in the modern world to deepen our relations and to create more opportunities for our country.”

When it comes to the United States, Nersesyan said, “Of course we attach great importance to US-Armenia relations since the US has been one of the greatest supporters of Armenia since our independence and US assistance has been directed to so many areas for development in Armenia and we highly appreciate this.”

Nonetheless, after the revolution, he said Armenia hoped for an increase of assistance at this important junction in its history because of its progress in fighting corruption and developing democracy. One of the priority areas of the embassy’s work, he elaborated, has been continued US humanitarian assistance to Artsakh. The humanitarian mine clearance project that has been implemented for almost 20 years has saved many lives and significantly contributed to stability. Therefore, the embassy together with Armenian-American organizations and the Republic of Nagorno Karabakh’s office in the United States, he said, is consistently working with relevant American institutions for continued US involvement in humanitarian projects in Artsakh.

Discussions on aid for the following fiscal year for Armenia have begun in the US Congress but again, due to the coronavirus, it is not clear how long this will take.

The improvement in the Armenian economy as assessed by the World Bank has led to Armenia no longer being eligible for the US Millennium Challenge Corporation’s aid grants. Nersesyan said, “In general terms, we are also looking to switch in the medium to long run toward the idea of ‘from aid to trade,’ because we understand that aid cannot last forever. We are a country that has big ambitions for development. We are seeking to incrementally switch from aid to trade, for mutually beneficial trade and economic relations between the United States and Armenia, and we are developing institutional foundations for this. It is a part of our priorities in the US to try to raise attention toward Armenia to attract investments, and I am sure that we are going to have success in this in the future.”

Last year, Nersesyan said, marked a positive course for US-Armenia relations, with meetings taking place at high levels. First, a US-Armenia Strategic Dialogue was instituted, and the first meeting was held in Yerevan on May 7. Five deputy assistant secretaries of the United States traveled to Armenia for this purpose. New programs of assistance and cooperation were agreed upon (<https://am.usembassy.gov/strategic-dialogue/>). Nersesyan participated in this dialogue. He said that when the coronavirus situation permits, there will be a second meeting this year in Washington to which Armenia looks forward.

In addition to this, last year two US Congressional delegations traveled to Yerevan. Armenia became a part of the House Democracy Partnership, which is a very important form of collaboration between the legisla-

tures of countries. Several delegations traveled from Armenia to Washington, including that of the president of the National Assembly of Armenia, Ararat Mirzoyan, in July. Furthermore, Deputy Prime Minister Tigran Avinyan traveled to New York and Boston to meet with the leadership of the Armenian community, while Majority Leader of Parliament Lilit Makunts headed a delegation of the National Assembly’s Armenia-US Friendship Group to Washington to meet with Congressional members and American-Armenian organizations. The signing of a memorandum of understanding with the US Congress as a result is being discussed by the leadership of the Armenian Caucus as well as working towards new legislative initiatives to support Armenia.

Foreign Minister of Armenia Zohrab Mnatsakanyan traveled twice to Washington in 2019, and during the course of his visit for discussions on Nagorno Karabakh met with US National Security Advisor John Bolton to discuss this and broader issues of US-Armenia relations.

While Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan traveled to the US in September 2019 in the framework of the United Nations General Assembly, he also met Governor of the State of California Gavin Newsom in New York with whom he signed a framework agreement between the Republic of Armenia and the state of California to promote trade and investment.

Nersesyan said that as soon as the virus situation gets back to normal, Armenia looks forward to the continuation of high-level contacts this year because these represent substantial discussions of a significant agenda.