US to impose new sanctions on Iran despite pandemic

Tehran refuses US aid to fight the new virus

The United States, with nearly 86,000 infected, has the largest number of covid-19 infected in the world, has imposed additional sanctions on an economically deprived Iran, which is grappling with the curbing of the epidemic these days. -- March 27th, 2020

This package of measures targets dozens of individuals and five companies. The US Treasury Department imposed sanctions just one day after the family of retired FBI agent Robert Levinson, who disappeared 10 years ago, said he was expected to die in custody in Iran, Al Jazeera reports.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry reported that Levinson left the country "years ago" and headed to an unknown location.

Iran applied for a $50 billion loan to curb infections.

Iran was one of the countries in China, South Korea, and Italy where the number of infected people spread rapidly. Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, therefore, called on UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres two weeks ago to pressure the US to lift sanctions on Iran, calling it economic terrorism by hampering oil exports and imports of medical equipment. They are in urgent need to stem the spread of the new virus.

The country also asked the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a $50 billion emergency loan to curb the epidemic.

The UN had called for a halt to sanctions.

"Iran supports a network of companies that finance terrorist groups across the area, thereby shedding money to Iranians by putting the needs of terrorist allies ahead of theirs," said US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin. He added that the United States would allow exceptions to humanitarian aid to Iran during the pandemic for agriculture, food, medicine, and medical equipment.

On Tuesday, the United Nations (UN) High Representative for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet called for the lifting of sanctions against countries such as Iran so that they could receive adequate medical assistance to curb the spread of the new SARSA-CoV-2 coronavirus.

Iran declines US aid.

On the very same day, Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Hamenej said in a televised address that Iran would "never accept aid from the enemy and charlatans" from the US to fight the new coronavirus. "No one trusts you. You can bring medicine to our country that will preserve the virus and prevent its eradication," Ayatollah believes.

US President Donald Trump, who has imposed sanctions on Iran over its nuclear program, offered Tehran assistance at the end of February to fight the coronavirus if the state leadership asks for it. Hamenei rejected the offer. Trump offered to help again, but Hameney replied that the US was a

"bloodthirsty and vicious enemy," and labeled the US a strange offer, as the US did not even have enough medical equipment and medicines for its own purposes.

"If you have something, use it for yourself," he told the US authorities. He urged all Iranians to strictly follow the rules to prevent the spread of the infection, "that Almighty God will end this catastrophe for the Iranian people, all Muslim nations and for all humanity."

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