

Iranian president says U.S. lost historic chance to correct mistakes by lifting sanctions amid pandemic



Tehran, April 1 (RHC)-- President Hassan Rouhani says the United States lost a unique opportunity to correct some of its mistakes concerning Iran by lifting its illegal sanctions against the Iranian nation and facilitating its fight against the deadly coronavirus outbreak.

“Unfortunately, the Americans did not learn a lesson even amid these acute and tough international circumstances,” said Rouhani, addressing a Cabinet meeting in Tehran on Wednesday. “They did not realize what they had to do,” he said, adding: “This was the best historic opportunity for the Americans to retrace their wrong path [by lifting the sanctions], and tell their [own] nation, for once at least, that ‘we are not against the Iranian nation.’”

The Americans, Rouhani added, have “always acted against the Iranian people, and, today, their opposition towards the people came to be witnessed more clearly.” The U.S. administration not only

failed to ease the restrictive measures but even brought more sanctions against the country amid the outbreak under whatever pretext it could find, he said.

The United States has imposed anti-Iran sanctions against some Iranian, Chinese, Hong Kong and South African firms. Washington's insistence on retaining the sanctions came at a time when the pandemic has afflicted the entire international community alike and when all needed to join hands to curtail the fast-spreading disease, the chief executive remarked.

President Rouhani, however, said that despite the sanctions, the Islamic Republic has earmarked around \$10 million in financial aid for the country's businesses, noting that the assistance would be provided in the form of bank loans, ex gratia financial contributions, and subsidy packages.

In Iran, the flu-like virus has so far infected 47,593 people and killed 3,036 others, with 2,987 cases and 138 more deaths recorded over the past 24 hours, according to the latest updates released by the Iranian Health Ministry. Some 15,473 patients have also recovered from the virus.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Rouhani hailed the country's performance in tackling the outbreak, saying all Iranian provinces had started to witness a downward trend of the viral infection as of Tuesday.

He said the development is proof that the preventive measures observed by the people and health professionals have worked. As a result of these measures, as many as 13,000 hospital beds, including those set up in intensive care units, remain vacant, the president said.

Rouhani compared Iran's response to the outbreak to those of the Western states, some of whom, he said, are already facing shortages in the field although they came to grips with the disease later than Iran.

Rouhani said Iran's successful performance in the face of the outbreak compared to that of some advanced world countries served as a "very decisive and crushing response by the Iranian nation to the enemies' idle rhetoric and smear campaign."

He was referring to remarks by some foreign officials, including US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and various Western media outlets, which have been trying to portray an image of ineptitude and frustration in Iran's efforts to deal with the epidemic. "This is a historic test. The achievements made by the Iranians will go down in history," the president said.

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