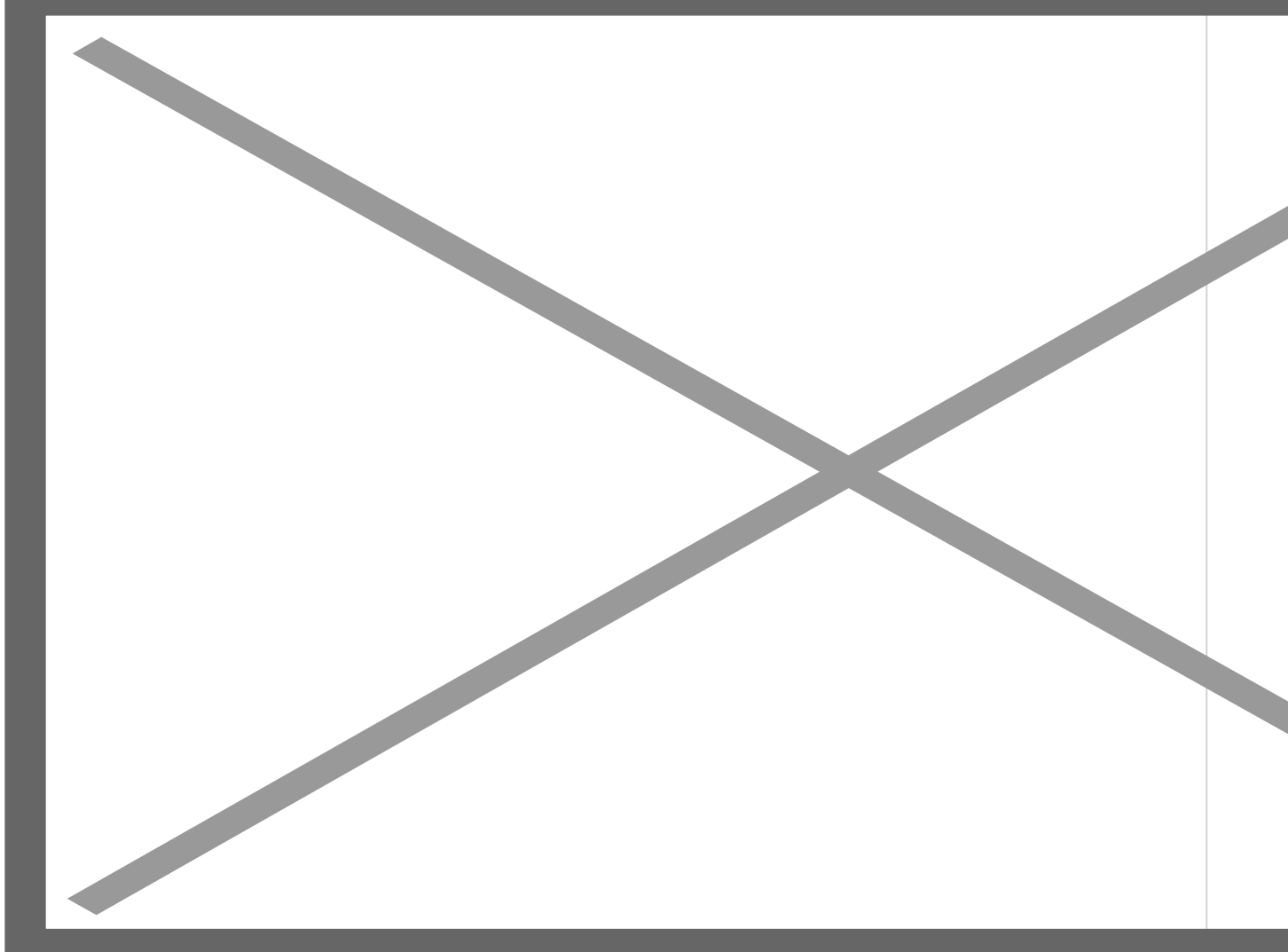


Washington's sanctions block Iran's purchase of COVID-19 vaccine

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A scientist works at a lab at Pasteur Institute of Iran. (Photo: Mehr News Agency)

Tehran, December 8 (RHC)-- The governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) says inhumane sanctions imposed by the United States against Iran prevent the country from purchasing coronavirus vaccine as the deadly virus takes its toll on the Iranian nation.

In a post on his Instagram page on Monday, Abdolnasser Hemmati said the purchase of the coronavirus vaccine should be officially made through COVAX, a global initiative undertaken by the World Health Organization (WHO).

However, he added: "So far, every method to make payment and transfer the required currency has faced obstacles due to the inhumane sanctions of the US government and the need to obtain permits from OFAC (the Office of Foreign Assets Control of the US Department of the Treasury)."

He noted that South Korea has failed to provide guarantees that the CBI's fund would not be confiscated by the US government in the course of the transfer of money via a dollar U-turn path for the purchase of humanitarian items.

"The International Monetary Fund did not even dare raise the issue of Iran's [request] for a loan at the fund's board of directors under the US pressures and threats and despite acknowledging Iran's right [to request a loan] and the existence of no economic or legal obstacles," the CBI chief said. Hemmati said Iran is pursuing "other paths" to transfer money for the purchase of the coronavirus vaccine and expressed hope that such efforts would bear fruit with timely cooperation of all responsible bodies.

Iran, one of the countries hit hardest by the outbreak, reported its first cases of the fast-spreading disease in late February, about one month after the virus first showed up.

The spokeswoman for Iran's Health Ministry, Sima Sadat Lari, said on Monday that a total of 1,051,374 individuals had contracted coronavirus across the country. She added that 284 fatalities had been registered in the past 24 hours, raising the total toll to 50,594. Lari said as many as 742,955 individuals had recovered, and that over 6,432,228 people had been tested for the virus in the country so far.

In May 2018, U.S. President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew from a UN-endorsed nuclear deal, which it had signed as a member of the P5+1 group with Tehran in 2015, and re-imposed the anti-Iran sanctions that had been lifted under the agreement.

Iran sued the U.S. at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) afterwards. The tribunal ruled that the U.S. should lift its sanctions on humanitarian supplies.

The trade of humanitarian goods, such as food, medicine and medical devices, is theoretically allowed by the U.S., but European companies refuse to do business with Iran, fearing secondary American sanctions. The bans imposed on the Iranian banking system have dissuaded many pharmaceutical firms from doing business with Iran.

Iran in March submitted a request for a \$5-billion emergency loan, which it requires to fight the coronavirus pandemic. Tehran has asked that the loan be provided under the Fund's Rapid Financing Instrument (RFI), a mechanism which is available to all member countries facing an urgent balance of payment need.

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