

SANCTIONS AND PANDEMIC: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON AMERICA'S IRAN POLICY

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[America's refusal to ease sanctions on Iran](#) even when the West Asian country is struggling hard to contain the novel coronavirus spread with limited resources shows its total disregard for the humanitarian situation in the Islamic Republic. Iran, the hardest hit by the pandemic in West Asia, has already seen [3,739 deaths and 62,589 infections](#). To be sure, Iran failed on multiple fronts in the battle. The government was initially reluctant to enforce drastic restrictions on businesses, religious establishments and people. As infections began spreading at an exponential pace, it was more than what Iran's health-care system could handle. And during the crisis, the cash-strapped, isolated regime struggled to meet people's needs. But what accentuated these failures are the American sanctions. Last year, the sanctions, reimposed by President Trump after he [unilaterally pulled the U.S. out of the Iran nuclear deal](#) in 2018, shrank the country's economy by 8.7%. The fall in oil prices and the pandemic have multiplied Iran's woes. The sanctions have also debilitated its ability to import even humanitarian goods. The U.S. rejected calls for easing sanctions, saying exports of these goods to Iran are already exempted. But it is not that easy. Most global banks, fearing U.S. retaliation and legal consequences, stay away from doing business with Iran, which makes it difficult for the Islamic Republic to find a functional payment mechanism. With the economy in dire straits, it also lacks the resources to make purchases.

The U.S., which has the [most number of COVID-19 infections](#), should be in a better position to understand Iran's woes than any other country. America has already seen about 11,000 deaths from 368,533 infections. Despite the U.S. being the world's largest economy, and home to a gigantic health-care industry, authorities there appear clueless on quick containment. Learning from its own tragedy, Washington should have suspended or at least eased the sanctions on Iran, allowing the country to import food, medicines and other humanitarian goods without restrictions. Such a decision would also have provided an opportunity to both countries — on the brink of a military conflict early this year — to resume diplomatic engagement. It is still not too late for Mr. Trump to take a humanitarian decision and turn it into a diplomatic opening. The Iranian leadership should realise that this is not the time for America-bashing. This is an hour of crisis, globally. Tehran's focus should be on getting maximum help from abroad and beefing up its fight at home to save lives. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei's recent comment that Iran "has the capability to overcome any kind of crisis and challenges" is far removed from reality. Iranians need help and the U.S. should reconsider its policy of punishing them, at least in this time of a pandemic.

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