



JEDDAH/THE HAGUE: Iran failed on Wednesday to persuade the UN's highest court to overturn punishing US economic sanctions that have brought the country's economy to its knees. The court ordered the US to lift only those measures that affect imports of medicine, food and civilian aircraft parts, leaving most of the new sanctions regime in place.

Further penalties aimed at Iran's energy sector, including the crucial oil trade, come into effect on Nov. 4.

US President Donald Trump reimposed the sanctions in May after withdrawing from Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

Iran had challenged the move in a case filed in July at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague.

The US described the court's ruling on Wednesday as a defeat for Tehran. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo pointed out that the court had not ruled more broadly against US sanctions, and in any case, the US already exempted humanitarian goods.

"The court's ruling today was a defeat for Iran. It rightly rejected all of Iran's baseless requests," he said.

Pompeo accused Iran of "abusing the ICJ for political and propaganda purposes," and announced that the US was ending a friendship treaty with Iran signed more than 60 years ago.

"This is a decision, frankly, that is 39 years overdue," he said. "Given Iran's history of terrorism, ballistic missile activity and other malign behaviours, its claims under the treaty are absurd."

The ICJ unanimously ruled that Washington "shall remove by means of its choosing any impediments arising from the measures announced on May 8 to the free exportation to Iran of medicines and medical devices, food and agricultural commodities" as well as airplane parts, judge Abdulqawi Ahmed Yusuf said.

The court said sanctions on goods "required for humanitarian needs... may have a serious

detrimental impact on the health and lives of individuals on the territory of Iran.

"US sanctions on aircraft spare parts also had the "potential to endanger civil aviation safety in Iran and the lives of its users," the ruling said.

The ICJ rules on disputes between United Nations member states. Its decisions are binding and cannot be appealed, but it has no mechanism to enforce them.

The Treaty of Amity with Iran, signed in 1955 and ratified by the US Senate a year later, lays out practicalities for unlimited economic relations and consular rights between the two countries.

The US withdrawal will have no practical effect, since the two countries no longer have diplomatic relations.

However, Iran has repeatedly quoted the treaty in previous attempts to press other claims against the US, and used it to justify its appeal to the ICJ. Oubai Shahbandar, a Syrian-American analyst and fellow at the New America Foundation's International Security Program, told Arab News the UN "perhaps ought to focus more on enforcing Security Council resolutions on the proliferation of Iranian ballistic missiles throughout the region."

Shahbandar said: "Once President Trump's directed sanctions take full effect on the Iranian oil sector by November, Tehran is going to face the specter of economic calamity. "The International Court of Justice should also take Tehran to task for the continued illegal detainment of US hostages like Robert Levinson, whose family has been waiting 11 long years to gain his freedom."

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