

UN team reports new evidence against Daesh in Iraq

Author:

AP

ID:

1589901421708691100

Tue, 2020-05-19 01:29

UNITED NATIONS: A UN investigative team says it has made “significant progress” in collecting new sources of evidence in Iraq against Daesh extremists, including over 2 million call records that should strengthen cases against perpetrators of crimes against the Yazidi minority in 2014. The team also reported progress in its investigations of the mass killings of unarmed cadets and military personnel from the Tikrit Air Academy in June 2014 and crimes committed by Daesh extremists in Mosul from 2014 to 2016. In a report to the UN Security Council obtained by The Associated Press, the investigative team said it is continuing to engage with the Iraqi government on pending legislation that would allow the country to prosecute war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide allegedly committed by Daesh.

“In the coming six months, the team will continue its work with the government of Iraq in order to capitalize on this opportunity, with a view to securing the commencement of domestic proceedings based on evidence collected by the team,” the report said.

The Daesh group’s self-declared “caliphate” that once spanned a third of both Iraq and Syria, has been defeated on the ground but its fighters are still staging insurgent attacks.

The atrocities its fighters and supporters committed have left deep scars. Thousands of members of Iraq’s Yazidi minority, mainly women and girls, were raped and enslaved, while men were killed. Suspected homosexuals were pushed off roofs to their deaths. Captured Americans and other Westerners were beheaded, and an unknown number of suspected opponents were killed.

A Security Council resolution backed by more than 60 countries to refer the Syrian conflict to the International Criminal Court was vetoed by both Russia and China in May 2014.

The General Assembly established an independent panel in December 2016 to assist in the investigation and prosecution of those responsible for war crimes or crimes against humanity in Syria.

In September 2017, the Security Council voted unanimously to ask the UN to establish an investigative team to help Iraq preserve evidence and promote accountability for what “may amount to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide” committed by Daesh extremists, both in Iraq and the Levant which includes Syria.

The latest report by the investigative team said that as a result of its expanded cooperation with the Iraqi judiciary, security services and Directorate of Military Intelligence, it stands “at a pivotal moment in its work.”

Cooperation with the Iraqi judiciary in obtaining call data records and with Iraqi security services in extracting and analyzing data from cellphones, SIM

cards and mass storage devices previously used by Daesh “have the potential to represent a paradigm shift in the prosecution of ISIL members,” the investigators said.

The data has provided “access to a wide range of internal Daesh documents, cell data, videos and images,” they said.

The team said it is already identifying evidence that can fill gaps in ongoing proceedings as a result of the cell phone data as well as from putting documents held by Iraqi authorities in digital form, and using enhanced discovery and evidence-management systems.

In its investigation of attacks committed by Daesh against the Yazidis in Sinjar district in August 2014, the team said the recent receipt of more than 2 million call data records from Iraqi cell phone service providers “relevant to time periods and geographic locations connected to this investigation provides a significant opportunity to strengthen case files in relation to alleged perpetrators.”

As for the investigation into the mass killings at the Tikrit Air Academy in June 2014, the team said its work has been helped by continuing cooperation from the Iraqi national commission established to investigate the crimes, including reports on the exhumations and autopsies of victims. The team said it has also obtained accounts from survivors and is seeking additional call data records.

The investigators said cooperation with Iraqi domestic courts and non-governmental organizations has further advanced its collection of evidence of Daesh’s crimes in Mosul between 2014 and 2016. Exhumations at two mass grave sites close to Mosul that began in March have been temporarily halted due to the COVID-19 outbreak and “will provide a significant focus of upcoming investigative activity,” the team said.

Looking ahead, the team said it has established two additional field investigation units to look into crimes committed by the group against Christian, Kakai, Shaba, Sunni and Turkmen Shia communities in Iraq.



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Daesh prisoners riot again in northeast Syria

[Syrian government orders seizure of assets of Assad's cousin Makhlouf](#)

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1589897340848441100

Tue, 2020-05-19 12:16

BEIRUT: The Syrian government ordered the seizure of assets belonging to President Bashar Assad's cousin Rami Makhlouf, one of Syria's richest men, as well as his wife and children, according to a government document reviewed by Reuters.

The document, stamped May 19 and signed by the Syrian finance minister, said the "precautionary seizure" aimed to guarantee payment of sums owned to the

Syrian telecom regulatory authority.

Once at the heart of Assad's inner circle, Makhlouf has quarrelled with the authorities over funds which the government says are owed by his mobile phone company Syriatel. The unprecedented public tussle has uncovered a rare rift in the ruling elite.

Makhlouf has addressed the dispute in three extraordinary online video messages in which he has appealed to Assad himself to help save his firm. In his last message, released on Sunday, Makhlouf said he had been told to quit as the head of Syriatel.

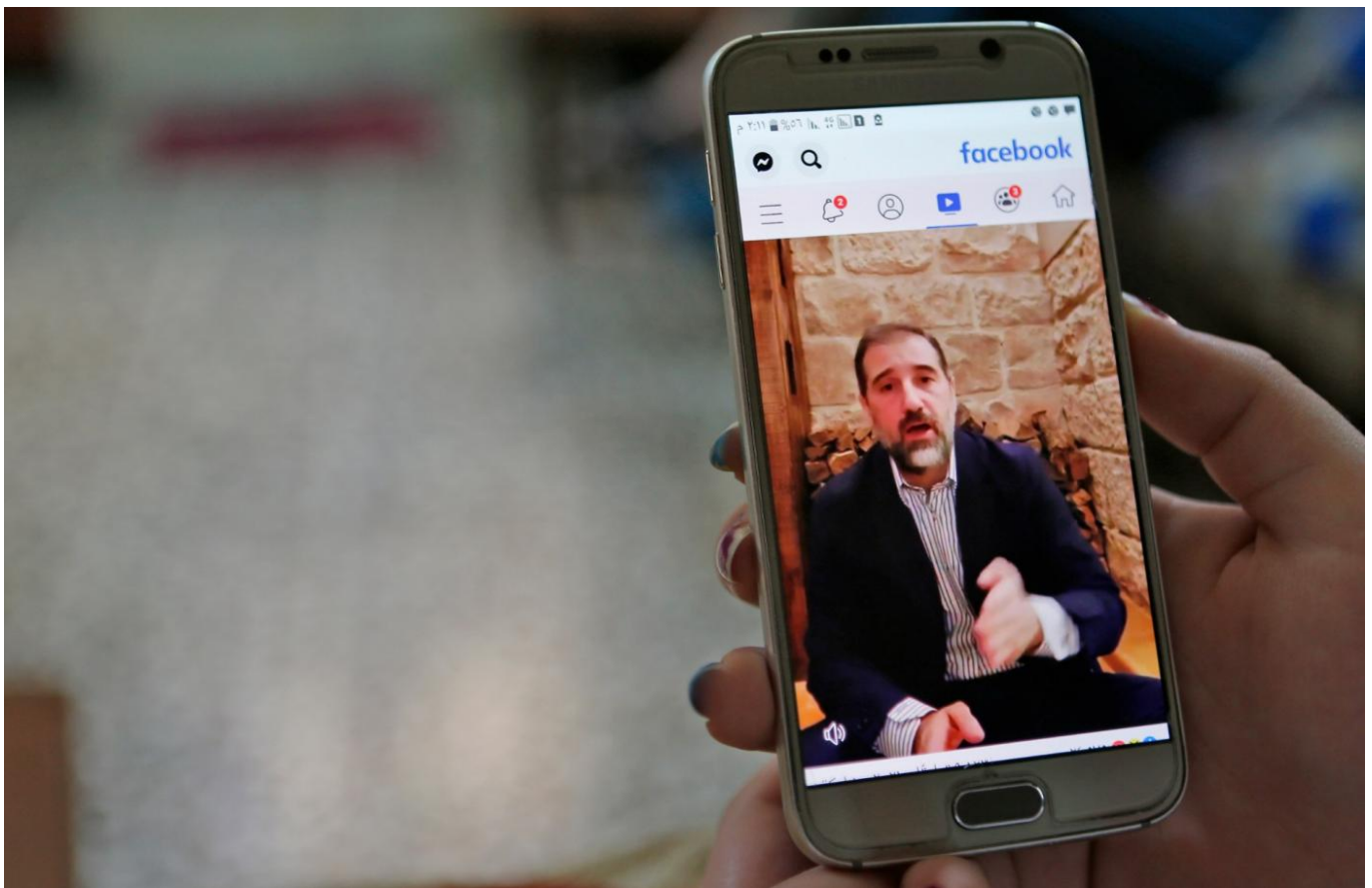
The government says Syriatel owes 134 billion pounds, around \$77 million at the current exchange rate on the parallel market.

Makhlouf on Tuesday posted a letter dated May 18 denying allegations by the Ministry of Telecoms that Syriatel had rejected payment of amounts it was required to pay in a dispute over its license.

Makhlouf, a maternal cousin of Assad, played a big role in financing Assad's war effort in the conflict under way since 2011, Western officials have said. He is under US and EU sanctions.

In addition to telecoms, his business empire spans real estate, construction and oil trading.

Syria experts say the row could mark the first major rift in decades within the family that has ruled the country since Assad's father Hafez took power 50 years ago.



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[Rami Makhlouf](#)

Syrian tycoon Makhlouf says security forces are arresting his employees
Murdered prisoner's image in TV series outrages Syrians

Gaza girl, 13, teaches neighborhood children during school closure

Author:

Reuters

ID:

1589880891157526700

Tue, 2020-05-19 09:21

GAZA: In a wooden shack in the Gaza Strip, a 13-year-old girl holds classes for neighborhood children who have missed out on their studies since schools were closed in March due to the novel coronavirus crisis.

Only 20 people have tested positive for the virus in the Hamas-run Palestinian enclave, where cross-border traffic has long been limited by Israel and Egypt and those entering Gaza in recent months have gone into quarantine.

Fajr Hmaid, who hopes to become a professional teacher one day, provides English, Arabic and math lessons to a class that has grown from four pupils to 15.

"I wanted to bring them here and teach them, this is my talent," Hmaid said, wearing a white head-covering in the religiously conservative enclave.

"I have one girl in first grade. If she is absent from school for a period of time, she will forget how to grab the pen and how to write."

Gaza teachers have also been giving lessons online during the health crisis. Fajr's father, Bandar Hmaid, said he was fine with the role his daughter has taken on.

"I said okay – but don't make noise," he said.



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Over 250 global artists urge Israel to end Gaza blockade
Ramadan roles help the unemployed in Gaza

[UAE extends night curfew by two hours ahead of Eid](#)

Author:

Mon, 2020-05-18 21:20

DUBAI: The UAE will extend a nightly curfew by two hours starting this week after reporting an increase in the number of COVID-19 cases. The curfew, which currently runs from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m., would start at 8 p.m. as of Wednesday until further notice, Saif Al-Dhaheeri, spokesman for the National Emergency Crisis and Disaster Management Authority, said on Monday. The renewed restrictions will also cover the Eid Al-Fitr holiday, which is set to start on either May 22 or 23. Malls and shopping centers would be open from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. as part of the

changes, Al-Daheri said.

Supermarkets can continue to operate 24 hours, as well as restaurants, which can continue to provide takeaway meals.

Authorities urged people to avoid handing out “Eideya” money – a sum given to children in celebration of Eid – to avoid physical contact with money where possible. It is advised to use electronic transfer instead.

The UAE on Monday reported 832 new infections and four deaths from the virus to take its overall count to 24,190 cases with 224 deaths.



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UAE confirms 698 new coronavirus cases, more recoveries and fatalities
UAE coronavirus infections top 20,000 with 725 new cases

[**MBC Group condemns attack on Iraq**](#)

offices, asks authorities to investigate

Mon, 2020-05-18 15:56

DUBAI: The Middle East media giant, MBC Group has condemned the attacks on its Iraq offices in Baghdad on Monday. The attacks left considerable damage to the equipment and studios, and the group asked local authorities to investigate the matter. There has been no official statement on the perpetrators of the attack yet.

MBC Group strongly condemns the deliberate attack that has targeted MBC IRAQ's studios and offices in Baghdad today, which has resulted in severe damage to studio and office property. In terms of immediate action, MBC Group places the matter in the hands of the Iraqi authorities, trusting in its security protocols, as well as judicial process, in order to protect MBC IRAQ's employees and the organisation, which operates in Iraq in accordance with the laws and regulations of the country. MBC Group hopes to receive full details of the circumstances of the attack at the earliest, and work with the authorities to hold the perpetrators accountable, as well as bring them to justice, in order to prevent similar attacks in the future.

Iraq's Ministry of Interior released a statement on their website, which stated that they will investigate the matter and find the perpetrators.

While we affirm and guarantee the right to peaceful protest by legitimate means, we reject any outlawed aggression or behavior against the media or private and public property and it will be dealt with in accordance with the laws in force. Ensuring the freedom and security of the media is part of the responsibility of the security forces, and the regulation of the work of the media is the responsibility of the Communication and Media Commission, which started with legal measures to address what was issued earlier from the Middle East TV network (MBC)

Dozens of demonstrators were protesting in front of the channel's headquarters in Baghdad as they considered the channel's portrayal of slain Iraqi paramilitary commander Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis an "insult," local media reported.

The Al-Hashd Al-Shaabi leader was killed alongside top Iranian general Qassem Soleimani in a US drone strike in Baghdad on January 3. MBC has aired a program – called Malek Beltawila – which discussed in one of the episodes how the wife of a famous Arab poet was killed in the 1981 attack

on Iraq's embassy in Beirut, Lebanon. The show said that Al-Muhandis was involved in the planning of the attack.



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Iraq security forces arrest armed men after protester killed
New Iraq PM releases protesters, promotes respected general