

UN experts urge Iran to abandon mass internet censorship plan

Author:

Tue, 2022-03-01 18:06

LONDON: Two UN experts have called on Iran to “abandon its efforts to enact a new law that would effectively isolate the country from the global internet.”

In a joint statement, Javaid Rehman, special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran, and Irene Khan, special rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression, warned that Parliament could soon ratify the Regulatory System for Online Services Bill.

More commonly referred to as the User Protection Bill, it grants Tehran and the military “extensive control over infrastructure that connects Iran to the global internet.”

If enacted, the legislation would force technology companies to “follow state guidelines” or be subject to bandwidth throttling and blocking. It would have a raft of implications for the rights of global companies and Iranian citizens.

The bill would likely block any remaining websites and platforms run by foreign companies still operating in Iran, require people to use IDs to access the internet, and criminalize the distribution and sale of virtual private networks, according to the UN experts.

“This bill represents a worrying step towards the consolidation of a digital wall in Iran,” they said. “It will further restrict information in an environment where the freedom of expression and other fundamental rights are already heavily curtailed.

“It also interferes with the right of individuals to participate in cultural life and have access to cultural resources.”

Internet shutdowns have long been used by Tehran as a tool to hide human rights abuses, especially at times of unrest.

In 2019, during some of the largest ever anti-regime protests seen since the 1979 revolution, the internet was shut down to hide the deaths of at least 324 people at the hands of security forces, including the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

“Shutdowns and disruption of internet services have since continued, particularly in connection with protests,” said the UN.

The User Protection Bill would further enhance Iran’s ability to disconnect its population from the outside world during times of crisis.

The UN experts said the bill would not only restrict information but also

hamper business operations and adversely impact sectors reliant on information technology, including science, education and medicine.

“It is beyond dispute today that economic and social development of societies rest on access to information and an enabling environment for the exchange of ideas and cultural resources,” they added. “We call on the Islamic Republic of Iran to re-consider this bill.”



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Iran Internet disrupted by cyber attackersCPJ slams Iran’s ‘outrageous’ media censorship

[**Government spokesman: Energy price**](#)

risers due to Russia-Ukraine crisis will benefit Egypt

Sun, 2022-02-27 18:12

CAIRO: Ambassador Nader Saad, a spokesman for the Egyptian government, said that the rise in energy prices due to the Russian-Ukrainian crisis may benefit Egypt, adding that "it is possible to export the largest amount of natural gas we have."

He continued, during television statements to ON TV yesterday evening, that "it is possible to benefit from the price difference and the hard currency," explaining that "this would be distinguished economic thinking to export the largest amount of natural gas that exists in Egypt after taking into account the needs of factories and the use of alternative energy.

"A meeting was held with the governor of the Central Bank to check on the availability of hard currency necessary to secure our needs of strategic goods, especially since the hard currency that was coming through Russian-Ukrainian tourism was affected," Saad said.

He pointed out that the Central Bank and the government are working together in these difficult circumstances to secure Egyptian needs, adding: "We hope that the crisis will not extend for a long time so that we do not put too much pressure on the budget."

Egypt is looking to consolidate its position as a gas producer for Europe, as it is working on a joint agreement with Cyprus and Greece to export gas, linking Greek and Cypriot fields with Egyptian liquefaction stations, to be a gateway for Egyptian gas to Europe.

According to a statement by the Egyptian Cabinet in mid-February, liquefied natural gas exports witnessed significant growth, reaching 6.5 million tons in 2021, compared to 1.5 million tons in 2020.

Egypt and Israel are also studying the construction of an offshore gas pipeline to the Damietta facility, and the Idku liquefaction facility in Egypt, to help export to Europe. Cairo is also working with Lebanon and Jordan on the Arab Gas Pipeline project to solve the Lebanese energy crisis, as it is expected to pump about 1.5 million cubic meters to Lebanon, according to statements by Egyptian Petroleum Minister Tarek El-Molla.

Saad confirmed the formation of a crisis room to follow up on the Russian-Ukrainian crisis and its impact on Egyptian interests, explaining that it is primarily following "the situation of Egyptians in Ukraine, led by students, then wheat and how to secure our wheat needs in light of these circumstances.

"The third aspect is international oil prices and their effects on the Egyptian budget. We hope to bring back the Egyptian students in Ukraine today," he said.

“The eastern, southern and central regions are currently the most dangerous, and the Egyptian Embassy in Kiev instructs people to stay home because the roads have become unsafe. The Egyptians in the west of the country have it relatively easier,” he added.

Nabila Makram, minister of state for immigration and Egyptians abroad, said the government “is now studying sending Egyptian planes to evacuate students who have fled to Ukraine’s neighboring countries.

“There are 22 students who crossed to Poland, while 100 arrived in Romania and there are 1,000 students waiting to arrive in Bucharest,” she said, adding that “there is coordination between state agencies regarding the Egyptian community in Ukraine, and security precautions and the safety of citizens are taken into account.”



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Arab League to meet over Ukraine war Arab students stranded in Ukraine desperate to go home

Egyptian minister blames Ethiopia's intransigence for lack of progress in dam negotiations

Author:

Sun, 2022-02-27 17:35

CAIRO: Dr. Mohamed Abdel-Aty, Minister of Water Resources and Irrigation, has said that the Renaissance Dam negotiations are currently frozen "due to Ethiopian intransigence."

Ethiopia announced a few days ago that Prime Minister Abi Ahmed had inaugurated the first phase of electricity generation from the dam.

Egypt said that Ethiopia's decision to unilaterally start operating the Renaissance Dam is a violation of the 2015 Declaration of Principles.

Abdel-Aty said his country is keen to reach a "fair and binding legal agreement on the rules for filling and operating the dam" stressing the state's readiness to deal with all scenarios related to the Ethiopian dam crisis.

"The Ethiopian dam is large, and there must be a binding agreement, exchange of data, and cooperation with the Ethiopian side to achieve a win-win situation for all, not unilateral action," he said.

The minister said that all state agencies are working in this file, each in its own right, and the Ministry of Irrigation is only concerned with the technical part with regard to the Ethiopian dam, noting that the ministry provides for water needs by making use of every drop of water.

The Egyptian state has taken the necessary measures to rationalise water consumption, he said, and to diversify production sources to avoid any crises.

Abdel-Aty said that Egypt is one of the most water-scarce countries in the world and is 97 per cent dependent on the waters of the River Nile. "The increase in population represents a major challenge to water resources, and it is expected that the total population in Egypt will reach more than 175 million people in 2050, which represents great pressure on water resources." The population today is about 100 million people.

Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia have been negotiating since 2011 to reach an agreement on filling and operating the dam, but long rounds of negotiations between the three countries have not yet produced an agreement.



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Egypt appeals to UNSC after Ethiopia starts Renaissance Dam operations
Egypt slams Ethiopian power generation from Renaissance Dam

[Lebanese PM: 'We insist on neutrality in Arab conflicts'](#)

Author:

Sat, 2022-02-26 23:23

BEIRUT: Arab League Secretary-General Ahmed Aboul Gheit has praised Lebanon as “a beacon of knowledge that spares no effort in backing every activity that enriches joint Arab action.”

Aboul Gheit was speaking on Saturday at a ceremony held by the Council of Arab Justice Ministers in Beirut for Arab doctoral thesis award winners in

the field of law and justice.

His remarks came after comments by Lebanon Prime Minister Najib Mikati, who said at the ceremony: "We expect our Arab brothers to understand our reality and stand by us to spare Lebanon more risks and help us bear the burdens that have exceeded our capabilities.

"Lebanon, which was and will remain part of the Arab world, is experiencing an unprecedented crisis, and our government is trying to solve it with all available capabilities, relying on the support of its Arab brothers and international friends," Mikati added.

"It is unfair to burden Lebanon with more than it can handle," the prime minister said.

Mikati added: "We are unable to stand in a trench here or on a front line there. We have thus adopted a neutrality policy when it comes to Arab conflicts, and we insist on implementing it."

He said that the only loser in any regional dispute "is our Arab world, which has always been seeking unity."

The prime minister added that Lebanon's "bitter experience has taught it that fighting leads nowhere and everyone comes out a loser."

He said: "The homeland loses and the people lose. Whoever thinks they can win against their Arab partner is wrong.

"Victory can only be achieved through understanding, looking after future generations, and charting a future that fulfills their ambitions."

Aboul Gheit added during his speech that Arab universities are still experiencing "low rankings worldwide due to their lack of innovation and seriousness in scientific research, and the dwindling volume of scientific publications."

He highlighted the need to "recover from this shortfall by increasing the budget for scientific research, providing opportunities for the youth, preparing them to face modern challenges and allowing them access to equal opportunities to compete with other societies."

The awards were first proposed during the 35th session of the Council of Arab Ministers of Justice in 2019, and were promoted by the council's Arab Center for Legal and Judicial Research to support scientific research, targeting a category of Ph.D. holders in law and justice.

Jury representative and former Lebanese justice minister Ibrahim Najjar said: "It was not easy to choose the best thesis out of hundreds that tackled various topics from all over the Arab world. This diversity shows that we can be open to different cultures and adapt to how the world is constantly developing."

Lebanese Justice Minister Henry Khoury said that the awards, which will take

place every two years, aim to “encourage applied comparative studies that deal with real issues in Arab law and justice, direct studies toward serving national needs in these fields, as well as strengthen legal and judicial studies, and raise institutional awareness in this regard.”

Algerian Justice Minister Abdul Rashid Tabbi, who was present at the ceremony, said: “The interest researchers from various universities in the Arab world expressed in the award is the beginning of an Arab scientific rapprochement between the peoples of the Arab world, and it will pave the way for other such opportunities.”

The ceremony awarded first prize to Amina Kab, second to Mohammed Mohammed Hussein and third to Safiyan Abdali.

Khoury and Tabbi signed two agreements on the sidelines of the event. The first covers judicial cooperation between Lebanon and Algeria on penal policies, while the second aims to prosecute convicts and extradite detainees between the two countries.

Tabbi said that the agreements “are the best mechanism for confronting the evasion of criminal accountability, and by signing them, we will establish for both our countries a comprehensive framework that will protect them from criminal threats.”

Meanwhile, an Iranian delegation, led by Culture and Guidance Minister Mahdi Ismaili, arrived in Beirut to inaugurate “Days of Cultural Dawn” activities in Lebanon.

The activities are scheduled to be held at the Hezbollah-affiliated Resalat Theater in south Beirut, at the UNESCO Palace in the capital and at the International Center for Dialogue of Civilizations in Rabweh.

They include a musical evening by the Rudaki National Iranian Orchestra, a craft exhibition, a symposium on cultural pluralism, a film screening, and poetry and folklore evenings.



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Lebanon president rejects claims about concessions in talks on maritime border dispute with Israel
Two years after pandemic, Lebanon succeeds in coping with COVID-19

[Ukraine Embassy in Israel calls for volunteers to join fight against Russia](#)

Sat, 2022-02-26 21:44

RAMALLAH: The Ukraine Embassy in Israel has issued a plea for Israelis and other volunteers to register and join the fight against invading Russian troops.

“If you are willing to defend Ukraine’s sovereignty, please send us a message,” the statement issued on Feb. 26 said.

A post on the embassy’s Facebook page said: “Urgent message to those wishing to participate in defense of Ukraine from Russian aggression. All our compatriots, interested Israeli citizens and citizens of other countries now in Israel. The embassy has begun compiling a list of volunteers interested in participating in the fight against Russian aggression.

“If you are ready to defend Ukrainian sovereignty, please send us a message.”

The Ukrainian embassy in Tel Aviv is asking IDF vets to volunteer to protect “[@Ukraine](#) from Russian military aggression!” Those interested should send ID #, citizenship, DOB, passport number, military specialty & contacts to defendUKRinISR@gmail.com. pic.twitter.com/lqiCnmeE66

– Noga Tarnopolsky (@NTarnopolsky) [February 26, 2022](#)

It attached email addresses for volunteers to send their details, passport numbers and military qualifications.

There are hundreds of thousands of people of Ukrainian origin in Israel, some of whom have served in the Israel Defense Forces.

In recent days, media have interviewed several Israelis with Ukrainian citizenship in Ukraine who have already volunteered and joined the fight.

“This announcement is more moral than practical and aims to make the Russians aware that Israel is on the side of Ukraine,” political analyst Majdi Al-Halabi told Arab News.



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