

[Hackers breach Iran rail network, disrupt service](#)

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Fri, 2021-07-09 16:25

DUBAI: Train services in Iran were delayed by apparent cyberattacks on Friday, with hackers posting the phone number of the country's supreme leader as the number to call for information, state-affiliated news outlets reported.

Trains were delayed or canceled as ticket offices, the national railway's website and cargo services were disrupted, with "unprecedented chaos at railway stations across the country," the state broadcaster IRIB reported. A notice on electronic boards at stations asked travelers to call a number which in fact belonged to the office of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, IRIB and the semi-official news agency Fars said.

"Long delays due to cyberattacks," said another notice on station boards, Fars added.

IRIB later quoted a state railway company spokesman as saying technicians were checking the disruptions and denying that there were major delays.



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US sanctions 34 companies over Russia, Iran, China ties

[Lebanon MPs stall lifting immunity in port blast probe](#)

Author:

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Fri, 2021-07-09 19:21

BEIRUT: Lebanese parliamentarians failed to make progress in the Beirut port blast investigation Friday weeks before its first anniversary, demanding more proof before they lift immunity for ex-ministers wanted for questioning. Hundreds of tons of ammonium nitrate fertilizer exploded on the dockside at Beirut port last August 4, killing more than 200 people, injuring thousands and ravaging swathes of the capital.

Afterwards, it emerged that officials had known about the explosive substance being stored unsafely at the port for years.

Earlier this month, the leading judge in the case, Tareq Bitar, said he had demanded that parliament lift the immunity of ex-finance minister Ali Hasan Khalil, former public works minister Ghazi Zaiter and ex-interior minister Nohad Machnouk.

He said he was also taking steps toward charging former public works minister Yusef Fenianos, as he looked at possible charges of “probable intent to murder” and “negligence.”

Deputy speaker Elie Ferzli said parliament’s administration and justice committee met on Friday and decided to “request all evidence available in the investigation, as well as all documents that prove suspicions.”

He said they would reconvene once they had received a reply, to decide whether or not to waive immunity.

Lawyer and activist Nizar Saghieh said the committee’s request went against the separation of powers between the judiciary and the legislature, and “violated the confidentiality of the investigation.”

The hashtag #lift_immunity_now began trending in Lebanon as protesters gathered outside the residence of the parliament speaker where the meeting took place.

“Immunity has to be lifted immediately,” said Ibrahim Hoteit, a representative of families of those killed in the devastating explosion. The activist, who lost his brother in the disaster, said stalling the decision was “shameful, in view of the size of the crime.”



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Lebanese judge takes aim at top politicians, officials over Beirut port blast
Lebanese minister denies request to quiz security chief over Beirut blast

[Russia allows UN Syria aid access from Turkey for 12 months](#)

Fri, 2021-07-09 18:32

UNITED NATIONS: The UN Security Council agreed on Friday to extend a cross-border aid operation into Syria from Turkey after Russia agreed to a compromise in last minute talks with the United States that ensures UN aid access to millions of Syrians for 12 months.

“Parents can sleep tonight knowing that for the next 12 months their children will be fed. The humanitarian agreement we’ve reached here will literally save lives,” said US Ambassador to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield.

The council mandate for the long-running aid operation was due to expire on Saturday. After not engaging in weeks of discussion on a resolution drafted by Ireland and Norway, Syrian ally Russia on Thursday proposed a six month renewal.

Following negotiations between Thomas-Greenfield and Russian UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia on Friday morning, the 15-member council unanimously adopted a compromise resolution that asks for a UN report on Syria aid access in six months, but that diplomats said does not require another vote in January to again extend the cross-border operation.

Nebenzia described the vote on the resolution, presented by both the United States and Russia, as a "historical moment" that he hoped could "become a turning point that not only Syria will win from ... but the Middle Eastern region as a whole."

US President Joe Biden had raised the importance of the cross-border aid operation with Russian President Vladimir Putin in June. The Biden administration warned at the time that any future cooperation with Russia over Syria would be at risk if the cross-border aid deliveries were shut down.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres appealed to the Security Council to renew the cross-border aid operation for another year, warning that a failure to do so would be devastating for millions of people.

The council first authorized a cross-border aid operation into Syria in 2014 at four points. Last year, it whittled that down to one point from Turkey into a rebel-held area in Syria due to Russian and Chinese opposition over renewing all four.

Russia has said the aid operation is outdated and violates Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity. In a swipe at the United States and others, Russia and China have also blamed unilateral sanctions for some of Syria's plight.



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[Syria](#)

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[Bab Al-Hawa crossing](#)

Red Crescent warns of 'inhuman' Syria aid route closure
Threat to flow of aid to Syria is a 'life-and-death' issue

[Israeli settlements amount to war crime: UN rights expert](#)

Author:

Reuters

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1625842407530172800

Fri, 2021-07-09 14:37

GENEVA: Israeli settlements in east Jerusalem and the West Bank amount to a war crime, a UN human rights investigator said on Friday, calling on countries to inflict a cost on Israel for its "illegal occupation."

Michael Lynk, UN special rapporteur on human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory, was addressing a session of the UN Human Rights Council, boycotted by Israel which does not recognize his mandate or cooperate with him.

"I conclude that the Israeli settlements do amount to a war crime," Lynk said.

He said the settlements violate an absolute ban on an occupying power transferring part of its civilian population into an occupied territory, thereby meeting the definition of a war crime under the Rome Statute founding the International Criminal Court (ICC).

"I submit to you that this finding compels the international community ... to make it clear to Israel that its illegal occupation, and its defiance of international law and international opinion, can and will no longer be cost-free," Lynk told the Geneva rights forum.

Many countries consider the settlements a breach of international law. Israel disputes this and cites Biblical and historical connections to the land, as well as security needs.

In a separate statement, Lynk said Israeli settlements were "the engine of Israel's 54-year-old occupation". There are now close to 300 settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, with more than 680,000 Israeli settlers, he said.

The United States, Israel's closest ally which has observer status at the council, was not on the speakers' list for the debate.

Lotte Knudsen, the European Union's ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, said the settlements were illegal under international law, echoing the position of most countries.

"Such actions as forced transfers, evictions, demolitions, and confiscation of homes will only escalate an already tense environment."

Palestinian Ambassador Ibrahim Khraishi said Israel detained 5,000 Palestinians, some of them for more than 20 years.

Palestinians want to establish an independent state in the West Bank and Gaza with East Jerusalem as its capital, but the issue of Jewish settlements on land captured by Israel in a 1967 war has long been a stumbling block in the peace process. The last round of peace talks collapsed in 2014.



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Israel razes home of Palestinian shooting suspect's estranged wife
Jordan, Israel agree to water deal, more West Bank trade

[Lebanese minister denies request to quiz security chief over Beirut blast](#)

Author:

Reuters

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1625834063829372800

Fri, 2021-07-09 15:41

BEIRUT: A Lebanese minister has denied a request by the judge probing the Beirut port explosion to question a top security official, a document seen by Reuters on Friday showed.

Meanwhile attempts to deliver justice over the catastrophe continue to

flounder.

Nearly one year after the Aug. 4 explosion, which killed more than 200 people, wounded thousands more and devastated swathes of the capital, many ordinary Lebanese are furious that no senior officials have been held to account.

The blast was caused by a massive quantity of explosive chemicals that had been stored unsafely at the port for years.

The request from Judge Tarek Bitar to question Major General Abbas Ibrahim, head of the powerful General Security agency, was rejected by caretaker interior minister Mohamed Fahmy in a letter to the justice minister.

In a statement, Ibrahim said he was subject to the law like all Lebanese. But he said the probe should take place "far away from narrow political considerations."

Bitar became the lead investigator into the blast after his predecessor, Judge Fadi Sawan, was removed in February following requests from two former ministers he had charged with negligence over the blast.

Sawan had charged three ex-ministers and the outgoing prime minister Hassan Diab with negligence. But they refused to be questioned as suspects, accusing him of overstepping his powers.

A parliamentary committee convened on Friday to study a request by Bitar for immunity to be lifted from former Finance Minister Ali Hassan Khalil, former Public Works Minister Ghazi Zeaiter and former Interior Minister Nohad Machnouk.

Families of the victims protested nearby, some clutching photos of their relatives.

After being charged by Sawan, Diab said his conscience was clear, Khalil said he had no role in the blast and Zeaiter called the charges "a blatant violation." Machnouk has also denied any responsibility.



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[Major General Abbas Ibrahim](#)

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Lebanese judge takes aim at top politicians, officials over Beirut port blast 'Huge explosion' targets top lawyer's office in Beirut