

# Iran to send black boxes from downed Ukrainian airliner to France, enter reparation negotiations

Mon, 2020-06-22 22:18

PARIS: Iran will send the black boxes from a downed Ukrainian airliner to France for analysis, the countries said on Monday.

Iran shot down the Ukraine International Airlines flight on Jan. 8 with a ground-to-air missile, killing 176 people, in what Tehran later acknowledged as a "disastrous mistake" by forces on high alert during a confrontation with the United States.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran will send the black box of the Ukrainian airplane to France in the coming few days in order to read its information," Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said, according to the official IRNA news agency.

France's BEA air accident investigation agency is known as one of the world's leading agencies for reading flight recorders.

Zarif made the comments in a phone call with Canadian Foreign Minister Francois-Philippe Champagne. Canada had 57 citizens on board.

Champagne said in a statement that Zarif had committed to sending the flight recorders to France without further delay.

He also said Iran had "agreed to enter into negotiations for reparations" but gave no details. Champagne has consistently pressed Iran to compensate the families of victims.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said in February that Kiev was not satisfied with the size of compensation Iran had offered.

The fate of the cockpit voice and data "black box" recorders was the subject of an international standoff after the plane was shot down, with Ukraine demanding access.

Iran says the coronavirus crisis has contributed to delays in a probe by its Air Accident Investigation Board.

Tehran has been sending mixed messages about where the black boxes may be read. Last week, Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mohammad Eslami said they would be sent to Ukraine.



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## [\*\*Saudi Arabia intercepts barrage of drones launched by Yemen's Houthi militia\*\*](#)

Mon, 2020-06-22 22:04

RIYADH: Saudi Arabia intercepted on Monday a barrage of explosive drones launched by the Iran-backed Houthi militia in Yemen.

Arab coalition spokesperson, Col. Turki Al-Maliki, said that the Houthi militia "launched a number of unmanned (booby-trapped) drones at civilians and civilian objects in the Kingdom," adding that several of them were

intercepted by the coalition forces and the rest are being pursued.



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## [Turkey arrests four suspected of spying for France: report](#)

Author:

AFP

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1592851157572251900

Mon, 2020-06-22 18:24

ISTANBUL: Turkey has arrested four of its nationals on suspicion of spying for France on conservative and religious groups, a pro-government newspaper reported on Monday.

The news came as tensions between the two NATO members have increased over

their different positions on Libya and a recent incident between their naval warships in the Mediterranean.

According to the Sabah daily, Metin Ozdemir, a former employee of the French consulate's security service told police he had gathered intelligence for the French intelligence service, the DGSE.

Ozdemir told police he had delivered information on 120 people, including imams, in return for monthly payments and the promise of a place in the French Foreign Legion, the paper reported.

Passing himself off as a member of the so-called Daesh group, he says he recruited three men: an employee of an Istanbul water company, a telecommunications worker and the manager of an Istanbul hotel.

The spy cell was put to work gathering information on conservative associations, religious groups and Diyanet, the public body that supervises religious affairs, Sabah reported.

After falling out with his French handlers Ozdemir approached the Turkish authorities, it added. The four men were arrested and will face trial at an unspecified date.

There has been no independent confirmation of Sabah's story, but it has emerged at a time when relations France and Turkey are particularly strained. Turkey, which backs the UN-recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) in Tripoli in the ongoing conflict in Libya, has repeatedly accused France of favoring GNA rival, Khalifa Haftar, although Paris has denied this.

The two nations had a heated exchange last week after a naval incident in the Mediterranean in which France accused Turkish frigates of "extremely aggressive" behavior toward a French ship.

Turkey denied the accusation, saying the French vessel was at fault, and NATO has opened an investigation into the incident.



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## [Water hyacinth pest chokes Iraq's vital waterways](#)

Author:

Asaad Niyazi with Ali Allaq in Kut | AFP

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1592851378152269900

Mon, 2020-06-22 03:01

AL-BADAA: The broad leaves and delicate purple flowers floating on the Euphrates look breathtaking – but they are suffocating the waterways of Iraq, celebrated as the “land of the two rivers.”

The water hyacinth, nicknamed the “Nile flower” in Iraq, is an invasive plant native to South America’s Amazon basin that has ravaged ecosystems across the world, from Sri Lanka to Nigeria.

The fast-spreading pest poses a special risk in Iraq, one of the world’s hottest countries that is already suffering from regular droughts and shrinking water resources due to overuse, pollution and upstream river dams. The exotic flower was introduced to Iraq just two decades ago as a decorative plant, but now the mighty Tigris and Euphrates rivers are being choked by its rapid spread.

Its glossy leaves form a thick cover, absorbing up to five liters (1.3 gallons) of water per plant a day and blocking sunlight and oxygen vital to the aquatic life below.

That has made the hyacinth a formidable floral foe for Iraq’s fishermen, who sell hauls of river carp in local markets to those cooking “masgouf,” a national delicacy.

Because of the infestation, carp are dying and fishing nets get caught in the tangle of flat leaves, roots and flowers that also hampers boat travel.

“Our livelihoods are gone, all because of this Nile flower,” said Jallab Al-Sharifi, a fisherman in the southern province of Dhi Qar who makes his living on the Euphrates.

Another fisherman east of Baghdad who works the Tigris said his haul had dropped by as much as half.

The hyacinths have also impacted Iraqi farmers who already struggle with low water levels due to a series of dams built further upstream in Turkey and Iran.

The thick floating vegetation draws down water levels and clogs irrigation channels leading to agricultural fields.

“During this harvest, our vegetable sales in the local market were down by a third,” said Ahmed Yasser, a farmer in a village near Kut, east of Baghdad. The hyacinth causes another type of pressure – a 100 square meter (1,000 square feet) patch can weigh up to five tons, putting major strain on dilapidated riverside infrastructure, Iraqi officials warn.

In the village of Al-Badaa, the thick columns of a brick bridge that once spanned a wide stretch of the Euphrates are now covered by hyacinths.

A dam further upstream encloses a swamp-like patch of land also covered by the plant.

If the flowers are not removed, “the bridge and dam of Al-Badaa will collapse,” said Jalil Al-Abboudi, the village sheikh.

“And if they collapse, the whole water supply system will collapse.”

That would deprive vast regions – all the way to Iraq’s southernmost province of Basra – of the fragile water resources their ecosystems and economies rely on.

Iraq’s oil-dependent economy is already projected to shrink by nearly 10 percent this year, according to the World Bank.

And a health crisis sparked by a shortage of safe drinking water in the south hospitalized some 100,000 people in 2018.

Locals blame authorities for what they say have been years of neglect and insufficient maintenance.

“The lack of action by the ministry of water resources, and the fact that there have been no renovations of infrastructure, caused an invasion that reached potable water reserves,” said Abboudi.

But Saleh Hadi, head of research at Dhi Qar’s agriculture directorate, insisted the ministry was well aware of the dangers and working hard to mitigate them.

“The ministry of water resources is working to combat this plant mechanically by uprooting it from irrigation channels,” he told AFP.

The perennial predicament has been made even worse this year because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Under normal conditions, Iraqi villagers along the banks of the Euphrates pluck out the plants by hand instead of using a chemical agent that would destroy the delicate ecosystem.

But this year, a countrywide lockdown imposed to stem COVID-19 infections has allowed the hyacinth to spread mostly unhampered.

Some vigilantes, however, are defying the curfew to fight the parasitic flower which they see as a bigger threat to their livelihoods than the pandemic.

While villagers are sneaking out to uproot the plants by hand, Mohammed Kuwaysh, an environmental activist and member of a farming cooperative, is thinking even bigger.

His collective raised about \$800 from local farmers to equip small speedboats to clear waterways by cutting hyacinths en masse.

“The government isn’t listening, which allowed this flower to spread like wildfire,” Kuwaysh said.





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## [UAE tests over one-third of population for COVID-19: Health minister](#)

Mon, 2020-06-22 19:51

DUBAI: The UAE has carried out more than 3 million tests for the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), representing nearly a third of its 9.89 million population, Health Minister Abdul Rahman Mohammed Al-Owais said.

The country started tracking cases in early January before the World Health Organization (WHO) had even announced a serious outbreak, the minister told a webinar summit of world governments on COVID-19 response.

“Residents and citizens came together during the coronavirus pandemic,” which was one of the reasons behind the UAE’s effective response, Al-Owais added,



along with the government's cooperation with the private sector.

In April, UK-based Deep Knowledge Group ranked the UAE among the world's top 10 countries for treating COVID-19 cases. Also on the list were Germany, China, South Korea, Austria, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, Israel, and Japan.

The UAE has been reporting a decreasing number of daily cases, with the latest figures showing 392 new patients on Sunday. The country has so far recorded a total of 44,925 COVID-19 cases, with 302 deaths and 32,415 recoveries.

Meanwhile, WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, told the webinar gathering that "the coronavirus pandemic is still accelerating globally," and he called for global preparedness which was "not a one-time investment" but a continuous effort.

The Swedish, Norwegian and Emirati ministers of health stressed the necessity of learning to live with COVID-19 and developing a new normal.

The sentiment was echoed by WHO's envoy on COVID-19, David Nabarro, who said: "The coronavirus is not going away, it is up to all of us to change our behavior to live with this virus."



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UAE COVID-19 cases up by 412 after health ministry tests over 32,000 UAE's Sharjah to reopen cinemas, gyms and other public areas