

In latest breach, Iran's Mahan Air hit with cyberattack

Thu, 2021-12-02 23:34

TEHRAN: A cyberattack on Sunday disrupted access to Iran's privately owned Mahan Air, state TV reported, marking the latest in a series of cyberattacks on Iranian infrastructure that has put the country on edge.

Mahan Air's website displayed an error message saying the site couldn't be reached. The carrier said in a statement that it had "thwarted" the attack and that its flight schedule was not affected, adding it has faced similar breaches in the past.

Many customers of Mahan Air across Iran received strange text messages on Sunday. A group calling itself Hoosyarane-Vatan, or Observants of Fatherland, claimed in the mass texts to have carried out the attack, citing the airline's cooperation with Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard. The self-described hacking group did not provide any evidence.

Mahan Air flies from Tehran to a few dozen destinations in Asia, Europe and the Middle East.

The US Treasury Department, which polices compliance with sanctions, blacklisted the airline in 2011 for allegedly "providing financial, material and technological support" to the Revolutionary Guard's elite Quds Force.



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Iran gives drafts on sanctions, issues to European nuclear deal parties 'No cause for optimism' on Iran nuclear deal: US

[Tel Aviv most expensive city to live in, outranking Paris in new report](#)

Thu, 2021-12-02 23:16

TEL AVIV: Residents of Israel's seaside metropolis Tel Aviv have for years complained of how expensive it is, with living costs taking a chunk out of their paychecks.

Now a new report affirms their quibbles. Tel Aviv has emerged as the most expensive city to live in, according to the Economist Intelligence Unit, a research group linked to the Economist magazine.

The city, which was previously ranked 5th most expensive, has now surpassed other pricy places like Paris and Singapore.

Economists attribute the jump to a strong appreciation of the shekel against the dollar.

In its report Wednesday, the Economist Intelligence Unit also pointed to a rise in grocery and transport costs.

The report did not include housing prices – another common complaint among young professionals and families trying to live in the bustling city.

"It's really hard to live here. You pay the rent and you pay for something small and you live, like, from paycheck to paycheck so it's really hard," said Ziv Toledano, a transplant from northern Israel. He said his expenses have nearly doubled in Tel Aviv.

Israeli news outlets constantly compare the prices of basic goods in Israel to other Western nations, hammering into audiences what has been clear to their wallets for years: That the country is far more expensive than others.

Tel Aviv is Israel's financial and cultural epicenter. It boasts a thriving high-tech scene, world-class restaurants and a stretch of Mediterranean beach lined by gleaming new hotels and condominiums.

The shekel is one of the world's strongest currencies, with its value buoyed in large part by heavy foreign investment in the local high-tech scene.

Dan Ben-David, head of the Shores Institute for Socioeconomic Research and an economist at Tel Aviv University, said goods and services in Israel in general are more expensive than in other countries. Tel Aviv is more expensive because it is the country's economic hub, with high-paying tech jobs drawing talent from across the country who are driving up prices of food and rent.

"Israel is expensive, and in that regard, Tel Aviv is more expensive than other places in Israel's because that's where the good jobs are," he said.

The city draws even more Israelis wishing to live close to its vibrant cultural and social scene.

Compounding the issue, Ben-David said, is major congestion leading into the city and inadequate transit to its suburbs and surrounding cities, sending even more people wanting to reside in the city.

That, along with foreign buyers, has sent real estate prices skyrocketing, making purchasing an apartment in Tel Aviv almost unattainable for the average Israeli.

Even modest apartments in desirable areas can cost 4 million shekels, or over \$1.2 million.

A decade ago, hundreds of thousands of Israelis took to the streets to demand a solution to the rising cost of living.

Successive Israeli governments have struggled to create better job opportunities in other parts of the country and attempts to extend public transit are ongoing, but slow.



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Israeli PM slammed for family trip amid travel restrictions
Israel, Turkey should restore ambassadorial links: Foreign policy expert

[Lebanese info min Kordahi to resign on Friday: Reuters](#)

Thu, 2021-12-02 22:40

LONDON: Unconfirmed media reports suggested that Lebanese Information Minister George Kordahi is set to resign on Friday, Reuters reported on Thursday.

Kordahi's resignation announcement was made following his meeting with Prime Minister Najib Mikati on Wednesday.

Kordahi's party, Al-Marada, is looking into who will replace him, and has appointed Minister of Education Abbas Al-Halabi as the acting information minister until then, Lebanese Al-Jadeed TV reported.

Several Gulf countries severed diplomatic ties with Lebanon in protest made by Kordahi that were critical to the war in Yemen.



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Opposition factions disagree on alliances needed for change in Lebanon
Lebanon relaunches support programs for the vulnerable

[UN warned its credibility is at stake over the Palestinian question](#)

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Thu, 2021-12-02 00:09

NEW YORK: There is more at stake in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict than peace and security in the Middle East, according to Abdulla Shahid, the president of the UN General Assembly.

The reputation of the global community and its ability to work together to

resolve international disputes, in keeping with the founding vision of the UN, is also on the line, he warned.

“That is why we cannot give up hope,” said Shahid as he called on member states to make every effort to join forces to resolve the conflict in line with international human rights and humanitarian laws, and the UN charter.

“We must maintain the credibility of this great institution and push for positive dialogue and engagement between the parties involved.”

Speaking on Wednesday during a plenary meeting of the General Assembly to discuss the Palestinian question and the situation in the wider Middle East, Shahid described as “disheartening” the lack of progress on an issue that has been on the UN agenda since the organization’s earliest years.

The situations in Palestine and the wider region are “deeply intertwined,” he said.

“We have seen time and time again how the spillover effects of the Palestinian-Israeli dispute undermine the stability of the broader region,” he added.

“As long as the Palestinian people are deprived of statehood, as long as illegal settlements continue to be built on land that Palestinians are justly entitled to, as long as Palestinian families are forced to flee the violence and injustices against them and they cannot return home, anger and bitterness will fester.

“This will contribute to a cycle of violence that has gone on for far, far too long.”

The plenary session came days after the 74th anniversary of resolution 181, which was passed by the General Assembly on Nov. 29, 1947. It called for the partition of Palestine into Arab and Jewish states, with the city of Jerusalem a separate entity to be governed by an international regime.

Facilitating a two-state solution based on pre-1967 borders is the “most important thing” the world can do to help resolve the conflict, said Shahid, who called for an acceleration of the multilateral political process to find a just and peaceful settlement.

Turning to key issues affecting Palestinians, he said it is time for the international community to back its words with actions in terms of humanitarian assistance, support for efforts to resolve the conflict, and upholding the dignity of Palestinians.

“Year after year we speak of the appalling humanitarian crisis in Palestine, especially the Gaza strip,” Shahid said. “But words are insufficient. Words cannot substitute for the lack of running water, electricity, proper sanitation, and decent living conditions that millions of Palestinians endure.

“Words can express how COVID-19 has exacerbated these challenges but they

cannot resolve them. Words cannot save Palestinian people suffering from decades of occupation, arbitrary arrests and the use of excessive force against them. Words cannot restore their demolished homes or halt the proliferation of illegal settlements on their land.”

More than half of the five million Palestinians in the Occupied Territories are dependent on humanitarian assistance to survive. That number rises to 80 percent in Gaza, where residents “cry out for access to even basic amenities and services,” Shahid said.

The many Palestinian refugees across the Middle East are also in jeopardy, he added, highlighting the large shortfall in funding for the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. He called on the international community to ensure it provides enough financial support to maintain the life-saving work of the agency.

“Let us all come together as an international community and reiterate our commitment to protect the rights of the Palestinian people,” said Shahid.

“Let us grant them what they have been justly demanding for so long: dignity, statehood and respect.”



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Japan and Palestine confirm grant deal worth more than \$9mUK funding cuts push UN Palestine aid agency ‘close to collapse’

The photographer who chronicled the UAE's history with a camera

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Thu, 2021-12-02 00:04

DUBAI: Veteran photographer Ramesh Shukla has lived in the UAE for the best part of five decades. He arrived from his native India just as the former Trucial States were approaching independence from Britain and embarking on a remarkable journey of nation building.

Now 84 years old, he witnessed firsthand the UAE's evolution from a collection of disparate desert sheikhdoms and fishing villages into a global business hub synonymous with entrepreneurial dynamism, cosmopolitan cities and incredible skylines.

It is a transformation whose story he has diligently documented with his camera through the decades.



Sheikh Zayed signing his name on a photo for a young Shukla

His attachment to the country began by accident following a rather uncomfortable boat journey from Mumbai in 1965. At the time, Shukla was working for the Times of India newspaper, but the lure of exploration proved too great to resist.

Packing his most cherished possession, a Rolleicord camera, and as many rolls of film as he could carry, the young man, then in his twenties, set off on what would be a life-changing adventure.

“This is my camera,” Shukla told Arab News at Dubai’s Etihad Museum more than half a century later, carefully cradling his now-vintage Rolleicord.

“When I was 15, my father asked me: ‘What birthday gift do you want?’ And I said: ‘Papa, please give me a camera.’”



(Photo by Ramesh Shukla)

Despite his desire to see the world, Shukla, it transpired, was not well suited to sea travel. Shortly after his ship, the Dwarka, set sail from Mumbai he began to feel horribly seasick.

Desperate to escape the incessant rocking of the waves, he disembarked at Sharjah, one of the Trucial States that at the time collectively were an informal protectorate of the British Empire.

Here he found lodgings with a local, who urged the young visitor to go to the Sharjah camel racetrack where a big event was taking place at the time. Eager to witness the authentic sights and sounds of Arabia, Shukla duly went along, camera in hand.

There, squatting on the ground alongside the racetrack, he spotted a group of men who would go on to found the UAE. Among them was Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, who would soon become the new country's first president, a position he held until his death on Nov. 2, 2004.



Ramesh Shukla cradling his vintage Rolleicord camera. (AN photo/Mohamed Fawzy)

Shukla took 12 photographs of Sheikh Zayed watching the races, and returned the following day to present him with one of his portraits. The ruler of Abu Dhabi, now commonly referred to as the “Father of the Nation,” was so impressed, he signed the print and gave Shukla his pen as a gift.

“That’s when the first connection took place,” Shukla’s son Neel, an art director, told Arab News. “That was the first time he met his highness. From that point on, Sheikh Zayed said: ‘Don’t leave this region. Stay.’”

Determined to remain, Shukla brought his wife and their son to live with him in his adopted country, during its formative years.

“I was with him all the time,” said Neel. “Before taking a picture, he would take my picture to make sure the lighting was accurate and then he would take the shot.”



(Photo by Ramesh Shukla)

Entirely self-taught, Shukla developed a signature style of photography, capturing scenes of everyday life on black-and-white film, highlighting the simplicity of nomadic life in the country prior to unification and the oil boom.

Recurring subjects of his early work included hardworking Bedouin, herds of camels, traditional abra boats on Dubai Creek and Deira's clock tower, photographed from above. He also documented the early days of Dubai's first commercial airport and the city's first museum.

"This was life in the UAE; there was nothing. There was no light and no water in my house," Shukla said, highlighting the contrast between the limited amenities available then and the advanced infrastructure in the country now. Even the water he needed to develop his photos had to be drawn from a nearby well.

Though his lifestyle was modest, Shukla built a strong rapport with the UAE's leaders, earning the informal title of "royal photographer." His prized access to the royal courts meant that his photographs were much sought after, especially by the Indian news media.



Ramesh Shukla with his iconic image of the UAE's founding fathers. (AN photo/Mohamed Fawzy)

Much of Shukla's collection has been preserved for posterity thanks to his wife, Tarulatta, who carefully archived her husband's negatives, protecting them from the humidity and dust, at their modest home in Deira, which

consisted of a dark room, a kitchen and a bedroom. The archive offers a compelling account of the UAE's 50-year journey as a nation.

"He kept documenting history," said Neel. "We are very careful about the collection. We don't commercialize it – this is history. This is why he is loved more than anything else, because he's keeping history sacred and close to him."



(Photo by Ramesh Shukla)

Shukla's business card features a miniature print of a photograph of which he is especially proud. On Dec. 2, 1971, he attended the historic ceremony during which the rulers of Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Ajman, Fujairah and Umm Al-Quwain came together to mark their independence from Britain and the establishment of their own unified country. Ras Al-Khaimah would join the union the following month.

It was here that Shukla captured on film what would become an iconic image of the sheikhs standing under the national flag of their new country. The flagpole stands to this day in Dubai's Jumeirah district.

"There was great happiness," said Shukla, recalling the day, half a century ago, he took the photograph under the same flagpole. "With one family, the UAE started."

Union House, where the agreement that created the UAE was signed, is nearby. Shukla was there, of course, to capture on camera the historic moment when Sheikh Zayed added his signature to the document. His photo of the assembled sheikhs became the "Spirit of the Union" logo, which was widely used on the 45th UAE National Day five years ago.

Many of Shukla's photos are displayed at stations along the Dubai Metro line. More recently, his image of Sheikh Zayed signing the union agreement has featured in the Expo 2020 Dubai passports.



Ramesh Shukla with his son art director Neel Shukla. (AN photo/Mohamed Fawzy)

In recognition of his remarkable contribution to the UAE's national story, the photographer was among the first of Dubai's creative community to receive a coveted Golden Visa, which grants holders long-term residency rights without the need for a national sponsor, and 100 percent ownership of their own businesses.

Shukla has certainly led an eventful life, documenting the history of a nation from its very inception, including its natural and cultural heritage, its most pivotal and proudest moments, and even the lives of its heads of

state.

Yet, he does not believe in retirement despite working so hard for so many years.

“After the age of 100, life starts,” he said.





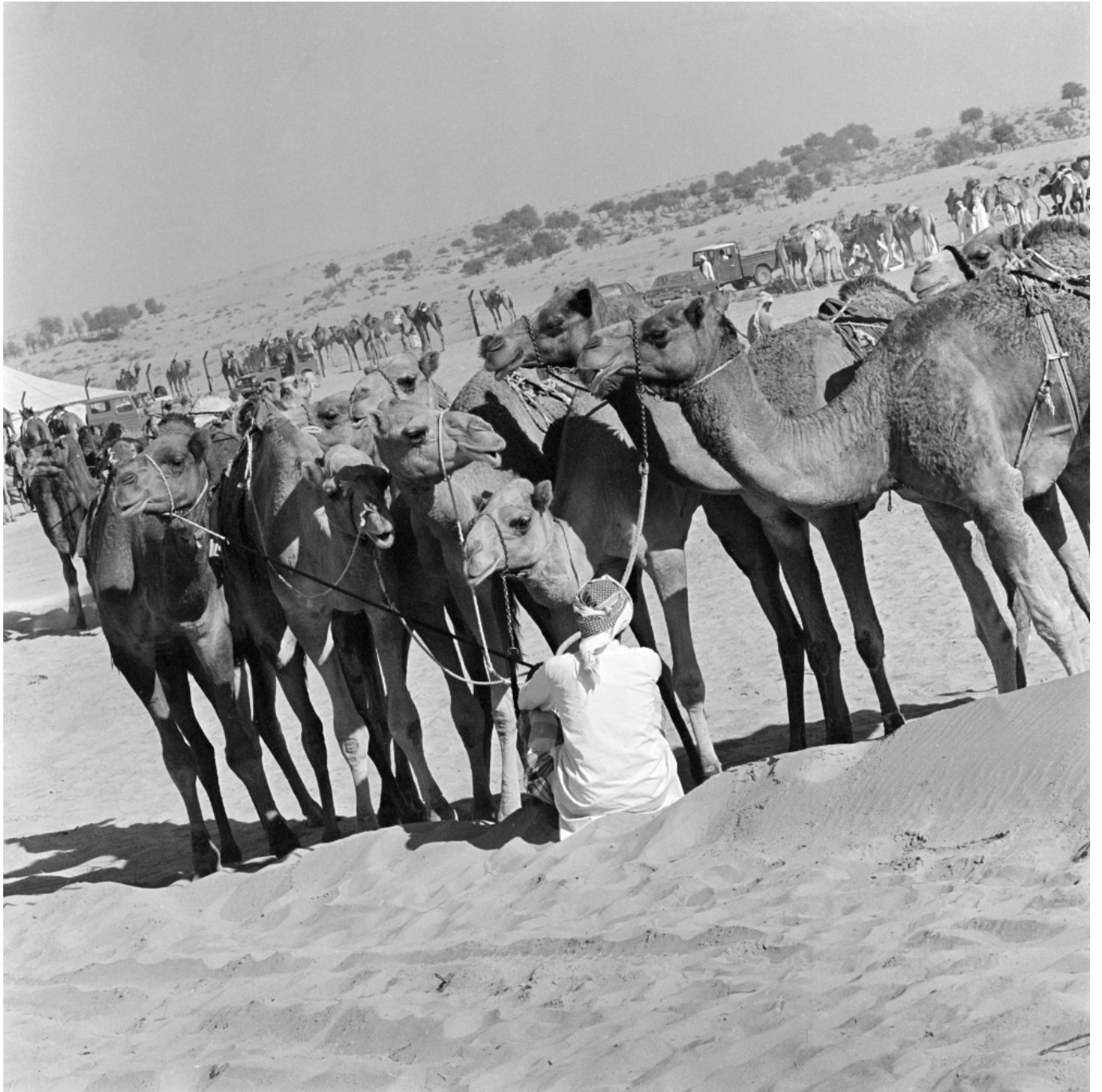






















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How an Arab took Makkah's first photos
Saudi aerial photographer reveals secrets of AlUla Old Town to global audience
British-Nigerian photographer gaining popularity in the Saudi art scene for her black and white photographs of KSA