

Mobile internet disruptions seen in Iran amid water protests

Fri, 2021-07-23 01:15

DUBAI: Mobile phone internet service in Iran is being disrupted a week into protests in the country's southwest over water shortages, a monitoring group said on Thursday, unrest that has seen at least three people killed.

Internet access advocacy group NetBlocks.org attributed part of the disruption to "state information controls or targeted internet shutdowns."

It identified the outages as beginning July 15, when the protests began in Khuzestan amid a drought affecting the region neighboring Iraq.

While landline service continues, NetBlocks warned its analysis and user reports were "consistent with a regional internet shutdown intended to control protests."

The effects represents "a near-total internet shutdown that is likely to limit the public's ability to express political discontent or communicate with each other and the outside world," NetBlocks said.

There was no acknowledgement of an internet shutdown in Iranian state media. Iran's mission to the United Nations did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

July 21 – Izeh, southwest [#Iran](#)

Reports indicate regime security forces are cracking down on locals and widespread internet disturbances reported. [#IranProtests](#)

[خوزستان](#) pic.twitter.com/b6CJ8ukiVb

– People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI/MEK)
(@Mojahedineng) [July 21, 2021](#)

Activist groups abroad have described internet disruptions in the region in recent days as well.

Since the country's 2009 disputed presidential election and Green Movement protests, Iran has tightened its control over the internet.

Tehran deployed a complete shutdown of the nation's internet in November 2019 during protests over gasoline prices. That both limits demonstrators' ability to communicate with each other, as well as the spread of videos of the protests with the wider world.

Protests took place across eight cities and towns in Khuzestan into the early hours of Thursday, according to the group Human Rights Activists in Iran.

Security forces fired tear gas, water cannons and clashed with demonstrators, the group said.

US State Department spokesman Ned Price told journalists that Washington was following closely reports that Iranian security forces fired on protesters.

"We support the rights of Iranians to peacefully assemble and express themselves ... without fear of violence, without fear of arbitrary detention by security forces," Price said.

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Ned Price, US State Department spokesman

Water worries in the past have sent angry demonstrators into the streets in Iran.

The country has faced rolling blackouts for weeks now, in part over what authorities describe as a severe drought. Precipitation had decreased by almost 50 percent in the last year, leaving dams with dwindling water supplies.

The protests in Khuzestan come as Iran struggles through repeated waves of infections in the coronavirus pandemic and as thousands of workers in its oil industry have launched strikes for better wages and conditions.

Iran's economy also has struggled under US sanctions since then-President Donald Trump's 2018 decision to unilaterally withdraw America from Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers, crashing the value of the currency, the rial.



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Iran's Rouhani says water protesters have 'right' to demonstrate
Danish military spots Iranian vessels in the Baltic Sea

Tunisia rescues 166 migrants at sea, 16 dead

Fri, 2021-07-23 01:02

TUNIS: Tunisia has rescued 166 migrants stranded at sea for nearly a week, recovering the bodies of 16 others who died attempting the dangerous Mediterranean crossing to Europe, security officials said.

The migrants, who included 65 Moroccans, 62 Bangladeshis and 15 Egyptians, and who were aged between 15 and 48, set off from Libyan coast overnight Friday to Saturday, Tunisian Defense Ministry spokesman Mohamed Zekri said. Their boat broke down off Tunisia near the southern port Zarzis.

National Guard spokesman Houcem Eddine Jebabli confirmed 16 of the group had died on board, and said investigations were underway to determine the cause of death.

The route between Libya and Europe is considered the most dangerous one across the Mediterranean.

Over 890 people are known to have died attempting to cross the Mediterranean so far this year, a rise of 130 percent on the same period of last year, the International Organization for Migration said last week.

Since the start of summer, the number of crossings have increased as migrants take advantage of the good weather and calmer seas.

Despite being plunged into chaos after the fall of Muammar Qaddafi's regime in 2011, Libya has become a favored springboard for migrants seeking what they believe will be a better life in Europe.



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NGO slams abuse of migrants in Libyan detention centers
UN migration official: 20 migrants drown off Libya's coast

UN envoy: Lebanon's salvation lies in the hands of its leaders

Thu, 2021-07-22 23:38

NEW YORK: The UN reiterated its call for the formation of a "fully empowered government" in Lebanon that can put the country on the path of recovery.

"The UN is doing what it can to mitigate the situation, but ultimately, the responsibility for salvaging Lebanon lies in the hands of Lebanon's leaders," UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon Joanna Wronecka told the security council on Thursday.

Last week, and after nearly nine months of failed negotiations with Lebanon President Michel Aoun to form a cabinet, Saad Hariri stepped down from his role as prime minister-designate, sending the country into deeper chaos as its beleaguered currency hit its lowest level.

The parliamentary consultations, aimed at designating a new Sunni figure to form a government, are set to take place on Monday. But there is little prospect of a turnaround for the country's devastated economy.

During a meeting to discuss the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701 on Lebanon, Wronecka highlighted the country's "multiple and accumulating" socio-economic, financial, and political crises.

The World Bank dubbed Lebanon's economic free fall as one of the world's worst financial crises since 1850. Lebanese lira is now 21,000 to the US dollar on the black market, having lost 95 percent of its value this year because of crippling financial mismanagement, state corruption, and a severe banking crisis.

With the inaugural commemoration of the 2020 Beirut Port explosion less than two weeks away, Wronecka repeated calls for an impartial, thorough, and transparent investigation into the blast.

"The families of the victims and thousands whose lives have been changed forever by that terrible blast are still waiting," she said to council members. "They deserve justice and dignity."

On August 4, 2020, a large amount of ammonium nitrate stored at the port of

the Lebanese capital exploded, which resulted in more than 200 deaths, 7,500 injuries, and \$15 billion in property damage. It also left more than 300,000 people homeless.

Lebanese authorities have failed so far to deliver any justice following the catastrophic explosion as a lack of accountability has continuously hampered the investigation from moving forward.

“The stalled domestic investigation, riddled with serious due process violations, as well as political leaders’ attempts to stop the investigation reinforce the need for an independent, international inquiry,” Human Rights Watch said.

Discussions at the security council also highlighted the importance of holding free and fair elections in 2022 within the constitutional timelines, “as a key marker of democratic accountability and an opportunity for the people to articulate their grievances and aspirations.”

Recalling the goal of Resolution 1701 to enhance Lebanon’s security, state authority, and sovereignty, the special coordinator hoped for a real commitment for the implementation of that resolution in its entirety.

Unanimously adopted in the wake of the month-long war in 2006 between Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah, the resolution called for a full cessation of hostilities and a phased withdrawal of the Israel Defence Forces from southern Lebanon. It also allowed up to 15,000 UN peacekeepers to help Lebanese troops take control of the area.

Wronecka praised the role played by the Lebanese Armed Forces in safeguarding the country’s security and stability, including its close cooperation with the UN Interim Force In Lebanon. She called for continued support for this key institution and also welcomed the international community’s continued readiness to help Lebanon.



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Report: Lebanon could turn into 'Venezuela of the Mediterranean' Hezbollah's Iranian weapons undermine Lebanon, US national security: Joe Biden

[Syria shot 7 of 8 Israeli missiles, Russian military says](#)

Thu, 2021-07-22 00:54

MOSCOW: Syria's air defense forces shot down seven out of eight missiles launched by Israeli warplanes during a raid that targeted the Syrian province of Aleppo, the Russian military said.

Rear Adm. Vadim Kulit, the head of the Russian military's Reconciliation Center in Syria, said that four Israeli F-16 fighter jets targeted facilities southeast of Aleppo in Monday's strike.

Kulit said seven of eight missiles launched by the Israeli fighter jets were downed by Syrian air defense units that used Russia-supplied air defense systems Pantsyr-S and Buk-M2.

One missile damaged the building of a scientific research center in Safira,

he said. A Syrian military official previously said in remarks carried by the state news agency SANA that Israel carried out an aerial attack in the Aleppo province late on Monday.

He said that Syrian air defenses shot down most of the missiles in the attack that occurred just before midnight.

FASTFACT

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a war monitor that has activists on the ground in Syria, said the Israeli airstrikes targeted weapons depots that belong to Iranian-backed militia operating in Aleppo's Safira region.

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The group said the strikes were followed by loud explosions. The weapons depots were located inside Syrian military posts, the group said.

Israel has launched hundreds of strikes against Iran-linked military targets in Syria over the years but rarely acknowledges or discusses such operations. Israel fears Iranian entrenchment on its northern frontier, and it has repeatedly struck Iran-linked facilities and weapons convoys destined for Hezbollah.

Russia has waged a military campaign in Syria since 2015, helping President Bashar Assad's regime reclaim control over most of the country after a devastating civil war.

Moscow also has helped modernize Syria's military arsenals and train its personnel.



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[Three shot dead in riots as Iran regime runs out of water](#)

Thu, 2021-07-22 00:26

JEDDAH: At least three people have been shot dead, one of them a police officer, in a week of rioting and protests over water shortages in the southwestern Iranian province of Khuzestan.

The police officer was killed in the port city of Mahshahr during what county governor Fereydoun Bandari described as “riots.”

In Izeh, local governor Hassan Nobovati said a “young person” was shot dead by “rioters” and 14 police officers were injured. Authorities in the town of Shadegan said a protester had been shot dead by “opportunists and rioters.”

“The people of Khuzestan are staging nightly protests, protests that have been festering for years,” the reformist newspaper Arman-e Melli said

Videos posted online have shown protests in Ahvaz, Hamidiyeh, Izeh, Mahshahr, Shadegan and Susangerd, with security forces violently dispersing protesters. The videos show hundreds of people marching, chanting anti-regime slogans, while surrounded by riot police. In some, there is the sound of gunfire. The reformist Etemad newspaper said the hashtag “I am thirsty” in Arabic was trending on social media to draw attention to Khuzestan’s plight. Khuzestan is home to a large Sunni Arab minority, which has frequently complained of marginalisation.

In 2019, the province was a hotspot of anti-government protests that also shook other areas of Iran.

“There were signs of protests and unrest in the province a long time ago, but the officials, like always, waited until the last minute to address them,” Etemad said.

The regime in Tehran sent a delegation of deputy ministers to Khuzestan last week address the water shortage. On Wednesday, state TV showed a long line of water trucks it said were from the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, a day after army trucks did the same.

Over the years, blistering summer heatwaves and seasonal sandstorms have dried up Khuzestan’s once fertile plains. Scientists say climate change amplifies droughts.

President Hassan Rouhani said this month that Iran was going through an “unprecedented” drought, with average rainfall down 52 percent compared to the previous year.

This month, rolling blackouts began in the Tehran and several other large cities, in part over what authorities describe as a severe drought and surging demand for power. Rainfall has decreased by almost 50 percent in the past year, leaving hydroelectric power generation dams with dwindling water supplies.

Water worries in the past have sent angry demonstrators on to the streets in Iran. “As nearly 5 million Iranians in Khuzestan are lacking access to clean drinking water, Iran is failing to respect, protect, and fulfill the right to water, which is inextricably linked to the right to the highest attainable standard of health,” the group Human Rights Activists in Iran said.



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Iran says police officer killed in unrest amid water protestIran orders week-long shutdown in Tehran amid fifth COVID wave