

Outrage over Iranian flight disruption at Beirut airport

An Iranian commercial plane underwent rigorous security checks at Beirut airport on Thursday night after it was suspected of transporting money to Hezbollah resistance group, causing uproar among passengers.

Authorities at Beirut's Rafic Hariri International Airport had told the Mahan Air flight that it would need to undergo inspection or it would not be allowed to land.

The measure followed a report earlier in the day by the Saudi Al-Hadath channel, citing Western sources, claiming that Iran "intended to transfer millions of dollars to Hezbollah via a Mahan Air flight."

Lebanese caretaker Interior Minister Bassam al-Mawlawi confirmed during a talk show on Thursday night that the plane was being searched.

The airport's security requested to search the diplomats' bags to check whether they were carrying cash. The diplomats initially rejected the request, resulting in long delays in disembarking

passengers from the plane. Tensions gradually escalated as people on board grew frustrated over the wait, prompting Lebanese army forces to intervene and restore order.

The plane was eventually given the greenlight in the late hours of Thursday after the diplomats' bags were searched, finding that they did not contain anything undeclared.

"An Iranian diplomat refused to have his bags searched upon landing in Lebanon tonight. After a long dispute, Tehran sent a cable to Beirut saying two bags had documents and cash to pay operating expenses at the Iranian Embassy in the country. They were let go per Vienna Convention," Washington-based Lebanese journalist Joseph Haboush wrote on X.

Lebanon's Foreign Ministry said Friday that it received a written letter from the Iranian Embassy in Beirut clarifying that two diplomatic bags which initially had not been allowed to pass contained documents and cash for embassy opera-



tional expenses only. The incident led to small protests mainly by Hezbollah supporters outside the airport and across Beirut's southern suburbs.

The airport has seen stringent security measures in recent months in the wake of the Hezbollah-Israel war which ended in late November. Iranian planes had not been allowed to land at

Beirut airport during the war as Israel claimed they could be transporting weapons to Hezbollah. Under the US-brokered ceasefire agreement which ended

the war in late November, the Lebanese government must gradually disarm Hezbollah and all other armed factions and take full control of the country's borders.

Iran calls on Afghanistan not to impede flow of Hari River

International Desk

The Iranian Foreign Ministry called on Afghanistan on Friday not to disrupt the flow of water to the country by building dams on the border rivers, stressing that maintaining relations between the two sides requires respect for mutual interests and avoiding harmful actions.

The ministry's spokesman Esmail Baghaei emphasized the importance of bilateral agreements, principles of international rights and the rights of the people downstream of shared rivers, as well as the principle of good neighborliness in the two nations' fair exploitation of the water resources from rivers that have flowed from Afghanistan to Iran for centuries due to the natural geography of the region.

Baghaei said that Iran's Foreign Ministry has expressed its strong protest to the Afghan officials over the disproportionate curtailment of the waters entering Iran or the diversion of the natural course of rivers as the Islamic republic expects the eastern neighbor to take appropriate decisions in this regard. Afghanistan has constructed a new



A general view of Pashdan Dam on the Hari River (Harirud) in the western part of Afghanistan

dam on the Hari River (Harirud) – a move that could significantly reduce the flow of water to Iran's eastern province of Khorasan Razavi, where over two million residents depend on the river for drinking water.

On Tuesday, the spokesman for Iran's water industry Isa Bozorgzadeh said Afghanistan's construction of a dam on the Harirud would affect the supply of drinking water for several million peo-

ple and would lead to widespread damage to the downstream environment.

Bozorgzadeh said the construction of Pashdan Dam on the Harirud would lead to a decrease in the volume of water entering Iran – a move that would cause problems in supplying drinking water to Iran's northeastern city of Mashhad.

The Iranian official said Tehran has repeatedly expressed its official protest against the consequences of the construction of a dam by the Afghan side on the Hari River and has called for joint cooperation to minimize the effects of such measures and choosing "sustainable development instead of destructive development."

Iran and Afghanistan have been locked in a protracted water dispute which has been escalated after Taliban's takeover of the country in 2021.

At the heart of the dispute is the Hilmand River, which originates in the Hindu Kush Mountains near Kabul and flows 700 miles (1,126 kilometers) south before flowing into Hamoun wetlands, located in Iran's Sistan and Baluchestan Province.

The two countries signed a water-sharing accord on the Hilmand River in 1973, under which Afghanistan pledged to deliver an average of 820 million cubic meters of water per annum to Iran.

Iran has repeatedly criticized Afghanistan for failing to honor the agreement in letter and spirit.

Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Iran summons Italian envoy over 'illegal' detention of own national



Cecilia Sala



Mohammad Abedini

International Desk

Iran's Foreign Ministry summoned Italian Ambassador to Tehran Paola Amadei over "illegal" detention of Iranian national Mohammad Abedini in the European country.

Director General of the Western Europe Department at the Iran's Foreign Ministry Majid Nili Ahmadabadi called Abedini's arrest an illegal act that was made at the behest of the US government and in line with its hostile intentions to take Iranian citizens hostage all over the world.

Nili Ahmadabadi said the arrest of Abedini not only damages the long-standing relations between Iran and Italy, but also contradicts the principles of the international law.

He called on Italy to the immediately release the Iranian national to prevent harm to Tehran-Rome ties. The Foreign Ministry's move came a day after Italy's Foreign Ministry summoned the Iranian ambassador to demand the release of reporter Cecilia Sala, who was arrested in Tehran in December 19 for "violating the laws of the Islamic Republic."

The Italian ministry said in a statement it had relayed "serious concern" over Sala's detention and stressed the need for humane treatment and respect for her human rights.

The Iranian Embassy in Rome

also said Ambassador Mohammad Reza Sabouri exchanged views with Italy's Foreign Ministry Secretary-General Riccardo Guariglia about the cases of detained nationals in Iran and Italy.

The embassy said Sala was being given all the humanitarian care necessary, and linked her case to that of Iranian national Mohammad Abedini, who was arrested last month in Milan at the request of the United States.

The embassy said that while Sala was being afforded all the necessary support as well as access to Italian consular staff, it expected reciprocal treatment for Abedini.

This included a speeded-up release for him as well as "welfare assistance".

IRNA reported on Monday that Sala had been arrested for "violating the laws of the Islamic Republic."

Sala was detained three days after Abedini was arrested at Milan's Malpensa Airport on a US warrant for allegedly supplying drone parts that Washington says were used in a 2023 attack that killed three US service members in Jordan.

Iran has denied involvement in the attack, and its foreign ministry has said Abedini's arrest violated international law.

Abedini is currently being held in prison and a court is due to decide later this month whether to grant him house arrest while judges consider the US extradition request.