

## STL 'witness leak' website mysteriously goes offline

By Niamh Fleming-Farrell

BEIRUT: The "Journalists for the Truth" website, which earlier this month published what it claimed was a confidential Special Tribunal for Lebanon witness list, has been taken offline.

Attempts to open the website Tuesday yielded an http 403 error message from its hosting company, [www.freewebhostingarea.com](http://www.freewebhostingarea.com).

"Your php script has an error or account was terminated for terms infringement," the message read.

While a scripting problem could be responsible for the 403 error, when an account is blocked by its host and the server refuses to deliver a Web page, an http 403 error is the standard message that appears.

It appeared Tuesday that a scripting error would not adequately explain the page's absence.

The Daily Star's efforts to access any files on the server in question repeatedly returned 403 error messages, indicating that the Web-hosting service had blocked the entire "Journalists for the Truth" account, effectively taking the website offline.

The "Journalists for the Truth" Web page first drew public attention on April 9 when hackers included a link to the site in a report they published on Al-Mustaqbal newspaper's homepage. The report also claimed to reveal a confidential STL witness list.

Al-Mustaqbal's publisher, the United Arab Company for Journalism, promptly filed a criminal complaint with the state prosecutor's office over the hacking incident.

Speaking to The Daily Star Tuesday evening, state prosecutor Hatem Madi said he had heard that the “Journalists for the Truth” website had been closed, but he could not confirm whether or not his office had any role in it being shut down.

“I’ll have to consult some technicians,” he said.

An email query to the hosting firm regarding the site’s removal had still received no response when The Daily Star went to press early Wednesday.

Madi did, however, acknowledge that his office has begun investigations into the hacking incident.

“We received a complaint from Al-Mustaqbal and based on that we began investigations,” he said.

“This is an issue that involves technology, so this investigation takes time,” he added.

The STL has also requested the assistance of the Lebanese authorities in relation to the matter, but Madi said Tuesday his office was “awaiting a complaint from the STL in order to expand our investigation.”

The Hague-based court expressed its deep concern at the publication of alleged witness details earlier this month, saying such actions both endanger those named and threaten the work of the court.

Witness details are strictly confidential, it said, while also emphasizing that the lists published do not accurately reflect its records.

The STL is investigating the 2005 assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

Four Hezbollah members indicted by the court in 2011 remain at large.

Their in-absentia trial had been scheduled for March 25, but was postponed by pretrial Judge Daniel Franssen following a request from the Defense.

No new trial start date has been set, although STL spokesperson Marten Youssef told AFP Tuesday that a late 2013 date was possible.

“The prosecution has indicated the fourth quarter of 2013 as to when they would be ready for

trial,” Youssef said.

“The defense and victims’ representatives have said it’s premature to set a date for when trial should start but they also identified fourth quarter 2013 as a potential date.” – *With AFP*

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