

Saqr reiterates call for Nahhas to resign after Telecoms Ministry 'scandal'

MP SAYS REPORTS RECEIVED BY BERRI WERE 'A BOOBY-TRAPPED FIRE BALL'

BEIRUT: MP Oqab Saqr once again called on Telecommunications Minister Charbel Nahhas on Tuesday to submit his resignation after the controversy over a report the ministry presented to the Parliament.

His words came during a telephone intervention he made on the Lebanese television station LBC in which he said "the mask has been lifted and the scandals of the Telecoms Ministry have been revealed."

Saqr was referring to an article, published by the *Ash-Sharq* daily on Friday, which said Nahhas allegedly withheld a report from the Telecommunications

Parliamentary Committee. The report was prepared by a committee within the ministry and upon the recommendation of the Parliament's Telecommunications and Media committee. It aimed at studying information related to the Lebanese mobile-phone network, information the US Embassy had requested from the Internal Security Forces in April 2007.

According to Saqr, the affair was ambiguous and he suspected it had to do with smuggling.

"It's not possible that one committee formed a draft, another committee wrote another text and then a text

was issued," he said.

Other media outlets reported that the ministry formed two committees to study the requested information. The second one was created when the parliamentary Telecommunications and Media committee asked the ministry to limit its work to technical issues and to avoid security-related matters.

However, Nahhas argued in a statement that "only one report was given to the parliamentary committee and everything else was just a draft. The parliamentary committee also followed up on all the stages of the ministry's work."

The information the US Embassy requested was said to be very sensitive and confidential but, according to *Ash-Sharq*, Nahhas said the information didn't threaten Lebanon's security.

Nonetheless, Saqr insisted the affair was scandalous or that the minister was being pressured. He declared that he prepared a memorandum in which documents related to the report were attached. He said he would present the memorandum to Speaker Nabih Berri Wednesday. He added that the reports Berri had received were "a booby-trapped fire ball from the Telecommunications Min-

istry which passed through the Telecommunications and Media Committee."

He then called on Nahhas "with love and honesty" to resign and solve the problem before he is forced to reveal some secrets and to remedy the problem with accountability and supervision.

"I suggest the minister present his resignation to Prime Minister [Saad Hariri] and to President [Michel Sleiman] until probes can reveal the truth behind this big scandal," he said.

The affair became more controversial when the chairman of the Telecommunications

Regulatory Authority (TRA) Kamal Shehadi submitted his resignation the same day *Ash-Sharq* issued its article.

The TRA was allegedly in disagreement with Nahhas but two of its members, Imad Hoballah and Patrick Eid, were part of the ministerial committee formed to issue the report.

Nonetheless, sources said Shehadi resigned because he was offered a job in the Arab Gulf. It is however to note that Shehadi's mandate as the head of the TRA was due to end in two years and his position as chairman couldn't be renewed.

— *The Daily Star*