

Lebanon to get additional internet bandwidth from India

GOVERNMENT TO BUY 45 GIGABYTES FOR \$45 MILLION IN COMING MONTHS

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BEIRUT: The Lebanese government is planning on buying an additional 45 gigabytes of international internet bandwidth for \$45 million in the coming few months said an IT expert on Sunday.

“The Ministry of Telecommunications announced that the additional bandwidth is expected to reach Lebanon in the month of May but I think that this will not happen on time because of the difficulties encountered by the Lebanese government with the Egyptian intelligence service,” Riad Bahsoun told *The Daily Star*.

Bahsoun, who is the general manager of the Telecommunication Information Technology in Lebanon, explained that the new bandwidth will come from India via Egypt, through a sub-

marine cable that will reach Tripoli. “There is no problem whatsoever with the cable but the only problem is with the whole system which is supposed to pass by Egypt before reaching Lebanon,” he said. “The Lebanese government did not solve the security issues with the Egyptian Intelligence; however Saudi Telecom is helping out with this issue.”

On the other hand, Danial Hamadeh, who is a senior spectrum expert at the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), commented on Bahsoun’s remarks, saying that he does not believe a problem actually exists with the Egyptian intelligence service because a lot of Arab countries already receive bandwidth via Egypt gateway using IMEWE (India-Middle East-Western Europe).

Hamadeh explained that IMEWE submarine cable is an

ultra high capacity fiber optic submarine cable system which links India and Europe via Middle East. He said that IMEWE is the international gateway and these cables serve as the principal internet connections between the Middle East and westward on to Europe and North America.

Lebanon has long suffered from a low speed broadband connectivity and this is negatively affecting the flow of investments to the country. Many foreign investors are reluctant to establish businesses in Lebanon due to the lack of proper internet connections and to the high-priced internet services which affect their production capacity.

One of the best examples in this area, according to Amer Tabsh, a professional technical adviser, is the lack of support offered by the government to

Google Inc. in delivering their services from Lebanon.

“Google has offices all over the world, but if you dial their office numbers in Lebanon nobody answers since they were unable to place their servers in our country,” Tabsh told *The Daily Star* in a previous interview. Tabsh explained that their main servers are not available in Lebanon and the website address ‘www.google.com.lb’ operates from Jordan because of their low cost of internet services.

Bahsoun said that this step would be an extremely important milestone for Lebanon in terms of society transformation. “The entire society will migrate to an information society. You can have the best policy in the world but if you don’t have enough bandwidth then you have nothing,” he commented. “It will absolutely decrease internet services prices.”

Bahsoun said that this step will only be successful if the administration makes use of it in a good way. “They must establish a new system of bandwidth distribution to ISPs in addition to imposing on them new prices policies that are suitable with the demand of consumers,” he said.

Bahsoun said that Today 1 megabit of internet bandwidth is consumed by 40 users. “If the government receives this additional bandwidth then in 2012, we will be 12 users using 20 megabits of bandwidth and the fee per month will go down from \$90 to \$30,” he said.

Bahsoun explained that when a user subscribes to a 512kb connection, he is only using a fraction of it. “You only use a fraction which is 1 out of 40 because they sell the same fraction to 39 others since they don’t have enough bandwidth,” he said.