

Israel 'infiltrating' phone network

Telecoms officials say technicians found devices used for phone tapping, data manipulation

BEIRUT: Telecommunications Minister Charbel Nahhas said Tuesday there was proof of Israeli infiltration into the Lebanese telecommunications network "on a large scale."

"Everybody knows that modern telecommunications technology ... is exposed to infiltration in different ways in order reach specified results," Nahhas told a news conference held in Beirut.

Nahhas said that the telecommunications sector in Lebanon should not be seen as a mere commercial sector "in a country that is confronting the aggressiveness of a state reported to be one of the most advanced countries in telecommunication techniques, decoding and the protection of systems."

Nahhas said it was the duty of the state to deal with the sector as "commercial and economic first, taxable and monopolistic second, and we should add technical and security."

Nahhas touched on the recent endorsement of Resolution 75 by the International Telecommunication Union, condemning Israeli violations of Lebanon's telecommunications infrastructure.

MP Hassan Fadlallah, a Hizbullah official, and chairman of Parliament's Telecommunications Committee, was at



Nahhas and Fadlallah speak at the Parliament Tuesday.

the conference, along with the acting head of the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), Imad Hoballah.

The move is a clear attempt to discredit an impending indictment by the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, which media reports have said would rely on telecommunications data in implicating members of Hizbullah in the killing of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

Nahhas said the information that was presented in the news conference was collected in detail by the ministry in

cooperation with Hoballah and specialized technicians from the ministry.

The group of technicians, with the help of specialized teams, also analyzed information available at companies operating Lebanese telecommunication networks, Nahhas added.

Hoballah highlighted the "chaos in distributing passwords and the absence of any criteria based upon which the prerogatives of workers in the telecommunications sector are determined."

The TRA official disclosed that

Israel had erected devices along the Lebanese-Israeli border capable of penetrating the Lebanese telecommunications network, along with other devices that could gather information about the network.

Hoballah also noted that Israel hacked into the network by implanting devices in the network that allowed it to manipulate data.

While noting that penetrating the network could take place via different means, Hoballah said Lebanese

detained on charges of collaborating with Israel played a major role in facilitating such acts.

Fadlallah explained how Adib Alam, a Lebanese who was arrested by the Lebanese authorities earlier on charges of collaborating with Israel, had provided Israeli authorities with the password of the sim cards of three members from Hizbullah.

He added that the information passed to the Israelis enabled them to implant a second line which allowed them to tap the Hizbullah fighters and listen to all their conversations, even when their cell phones were closed.

Fadlallah said that Tarek Rabaa, another Lebanese detainee charged with collaborating with Israel, had confessed that he presented detailed information about the designs and telecommunication networks of ALFA, one of two telecommunication companies in Lebanon. Rabaa was an employee of ALFA.

According to Fadlallah, Rabaa informed Israeli intelligence services of ALFA's plans to rebuild antennae destroyed by Israel during its 2006 war on Lebanon.

Fadlallah said the issue of Israeli infiltration of the telecommunications network was a national one that has to do with national security.

"This is an issue that has to do with ... the security of various political parties," he said.

While praising the collection of information as an "achievement for Lebanon," Fadlallah said the information revealed "a bitter truth that demonstrates the absence of security, safety and freedom of our telecommunications sector." — *The Daily Star*

Photo by Azzam