

## TRA: New ADSL rates below Arab average

**By Mohamad El Amin**

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BEIRUT: A Telecommunications Regulatory Authority study showed Friday that ADSL and international bandwidth prices in Lebanon are lower than Arab countries' average. But it admitted that 3G prices in the country exceed average Arab prices.

The study, presented by TRA board member Patrick Eid, stipulated that 3G mobile broadband services would develop through all three internationally recognized stages of gradual service expansion.

The first stage, which Lebanon is currently at, carries the heaviest price-tag and the lowest number of subscribers, Eid explained. He added that operators aim at this stage to increase the knowl-

edge-base and study usage patterns in addition to improving service coverage and eliminating technical problems.

In the latter two stages, Eid said, the service operators aim to increase market penetration as the pool of users grows larger with an increase in the number of smartphone users, leading to significant price decreases.

3G mobile broadband service was launched last week by both of the country's mobile network operators, Alfa and MTC.

The price of 3G services, Eid explained, is currently between 23 and 25 percent higher than the average price in the Arab countries "which leaves a comfortable margin to decrease prices as the service progresses to the 2nd and 3rd stages," Eid added.

But he revealed that ADSL pricing in Lebanon was lower than many Arab

countries. The new low-usage (2GB) ADSL prices put Lebanon below Arab countries average price by 23 percent. Meanwhile the high-usage (6GB) ADSL price positions Lebanon level with Arab countries' average of \$28.

"Only Lebanon, Morocco and Oman offer ADSL Services starting at capacities higher than 256kbps and 512Kbps," Eid said.

But significant differences are shown in prices of corporate fixed broadband, said Eid. When compared to average Arab prices, low-usage (2GB) and high-usage (6GB) in Lebanon are 75 percent and 59 percent lower respectively.

Newly reduced international bandwidth and international leased-circuit prices, Eid added, became also significantly lower than the Arab average and similar to prices in Morocco and Jordan.

TRA acting chairman Imad Hobal-

lah opened the press conference with a presentation of the authority's main duties, outlining its vision for developing the sector. Hoballah also described the mechanisms of cooperation between the TRA and the Telecommunications Ministry, especially issues relating to price and infrastructure of telecommunications services.

Head of TRA's Information and Consumer Affairs Unit Mahassen Ajam shed light on the authority's efforts to reduce the prices of telecommunications services, building its pricing studies on scientific analysis and comparisons with neighboring and developed countries.

Ajam explained that recent draft regulations issued by TRA are centered on protecting consumer rights, while at the same time ensuring increased access to a wide choice of advanced services.