

U.S. Embassy denies it asked to install telecoms equipment

By Hasan Lakkis

The Daily Star

BEIRUT: The U.S. Embassy in Beirut denied over the weekend a report that it is seeking to install telecoms equipment in Lebanon for its own use.

As-Safir reported Saturday that the U.S. Army filed a request through the embassy to Lebanon's Telecommuni-

cations Regulatory Authority for a permit to build a large telecoms station on Lebanese territory. The report cited a ministerial source who said the Telecommunications Ministry is discussing the issue and will soon refer it to Cabinet.

The U.S. Embassy responded to the allegation via Twitter later in the day, saying the "As-Safir report is entirely without merit. The U.S. Embassy has

not sought to build a telecoms network in Lebanon for U.S. use."

But a source from the Telecoms Ministry told The Daily Star that a company that works with the U.S. government filed a request with the ministry on behalf of the embassy to install a Mobile VSAT station near the southern coast.

The source said the U.S. already has its own telecoms network in Lebanon, and this satellite would strengthen it.

Other sources said the ministry passed the request on to the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, and will present the issue to Cabinet.

Parliament's Media and Telecommunications Committee, which is headed by Hezbollah MP Hasan Fadlallah, will meet to discuss the matter.

Ministerial sources did not rule out the possibility that Cabinet would ask for clarification about the report dur-

ing Wednesday's session, which will be the last of the year.

The agenda includes a proposal by Energy Minister Gebran Bassil to restart the tender process for building a power plant in Deir Ammar. The company that was previously selected for the job did not fulfill its obligations. The Cabinet will also consider a request by the Higher Relief Committee for a loan to fund aid for Syrian refugees.