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Berri files libel and slander lawsuit against Al-Jadeed



Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri speaks during a press conference at his residence in Ain al-Tineh, Beirut, Monday, April 25, 2016. (The Daily Star/Mohammad Azakir)

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Dala Osseiran | The Daily Star

BEIRUT: Speaker Nabih Berri filed a complaint Wednesday against TV station Al-Jadeed for libel and slander, after the network broadcast claims that officials from his party conspired with generator owners to prevent a power barge from docking in southern Lebanon.

According to the state-run National News Agency, the lawsuit – filed against Al-Jadeed and two of its employees, deputy news editor Karma Khayat and journalist Mariam Bassam – claims the channel slandered Amal ministers and Berri's adviser Ahmad Baalbaki.

The Daily Star was unable to confirm what comments formed the basis of Berri's lawsuit.

When contacted, General Manager of Al-Jadeed Dimitri Khodr said the news outlet had just received notice of the suit and could not yet provide further comment.

Al-Jadeed's nightly news coverage on Aug. 5 described Amal's move to prevent a new Turkish power barge from docking in the southern city of Zahrani as "theft."

The Amal Movement – the dominant political force in the district – has justified the move by claiming the barge's installation there would have delayed construction of a fixed power plant and contributed to polluting the environment.

The newscast seemed to allege that the real reason behind Amal's decision was to benefit the owners of private generators that provide electricity to residents during daily power cuts. Generator owners were "conspiring with the mafia government and splitting the profit of darkness," news anchor Ramez al-Qadi said.

The report criticized Amal caretaker Finance Minister Ali Hasan Khalil, saying that if he cared about the people, he wouldn't have deprived the south of additional hours of daily electricity by stopping the barge from docking in Zahrani.

The newscast said that Hezbollah, Amal's ally, had welcomed the barge and met with

caretaker Energy Minister Cesar Abi Khalil to discuss it further. However, "they were stonewalled. And sources told Al-Jadeed that Hezbollah arrived at that wall because of Speaker Nabih Berri's adviser Ahmad Baalbaki."

Qadi was not mentioned in the NNA's report of the lawsuit.

Berri filed the lawsuit to the Public Prosecutor, and the case was referred to Judge Ghassan Tanious al-Khoury, who summoned the defendants to a hearing on Aug. 13.

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