

Lebanese See Smear Attempt

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Beirut: A Syrian state television broadcast showing people tied to Lebanese organisations confessing to a September Damascus bomb attack is an attempt to smear Lebanese institutions, Lebanese politicians said yesterday.

The Thursday night broadcast showed 10 men and a woman alleged to be members of the group Fatah Al Islam confessing to carrying out the September 27 car bombing that killed 17 people and wounded 14 others near a Shia shrine in southern Damascus.

Some of the confessions said the group had received funding from the Lebanese Future Movement, a Beirut-based political movement that seeks to remove Syrian influence from Lebanon, led by Saad al-Hariri.

Critics of the broadcast say the Syrian government forced the confessions and will now use them as a pretext to smear Lebanese independence groups or even launch its own terror campaign within Lebanon.

Boutros Harb, a member of parliament, told the Voice of Lebanon radio station yesterday that the Syrian broadcast was designed to tarnish the image of the pro-independence, anti-Syrian March 14 Alliance, of which the Future Movement is a member.

Additionally, March 14 members said the broadcast was designed to divert attention from the upcoming release of a report on the 2005 assassination of ex-premier Rafik al-Hariri. Many analysts believe the Syrian government played some role in the murder.

“This (Syrian) regime is trying to imply that responsibility for the killings should be shared by all,” said a statement from the March 14 coalition.

The statement, released after a meeting by the March 14 Secretariat General, also accused the Syrian regime of setting the stage for launching a “terror campaign” against the Lebanese people “under the pretext of self-defence.”

Sceptics noted that two of the alleged terrorists seemed haggard and spoke with difficulty during their confessions. Viewers also noted that none of the people confessing explained their motivation for allegedly planting the bomb.

Individuals shown in the broadcast included Wafa al-Abssi, the daughter of Fatah Al Islam leader Shaker al-Abssi. The father has been a fugitive since he escaped security forces in Lebanon after the militant group’s 15-week battle with the Lebanese army in the Palestinian refugee camp of Nahr Al Bared in 2007.

Al-Abssi named Abu Ritaj and Abu Youssef, both Saudi nationals, as their Saudi contacts. She also accused Lebanon’s Future Movement and some of its banks of involvement in financing the group.

Sources with the Future Movement denied any link with al-Abssi and “her terrorist ring.” - DPA