

New York man admits he helped air Hezbollah TV

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NEW YORK: The Pakistan-born owner of a satellite TV company has pleaded guilty to providing material aid to a terrorist organization by letting customers receive broadcasts from Hezbollah's television station.

Javed Iqbal entered the plea in federal court in Manhattan on Tuesday. He declined comment afterward. As part of the plea, Iqbal agreed to serve a prison term of up to six and a half years. Sentencing was set for March 24.

Prosecutors say Iqbal used satellite dishes on his Staten Island home to distribute broadcasts of Al Manar, the television station of the Lebanon-based organization that has been fighting Israel since the early 1980s.

Israel and the U.S. consider Hezbollah a terrorist organization and accuse it of being behind deadly attacks in Lebanon and abroad.

Iqbal, 45, was born in Pakistan but has lived in the United States for more than 20 years. He is a permanent resident with five children. A former New York Police Department officer was among those who signed his \$250,000 bail package.

Although Americans are granted freedom of speech under the First Amendment to the Constitution, the government contended in this case that Iqbal was not entitled to arrange the satellite broadcast of an organization designated as a terrorist group, regardless of the message.

Lebanon's information minister, Ghazi Aridi, had criticized Iqbal's arrest, calling it an "attack against freedoms (that) robs a large section of people from watching a specific channel."

According to WCCR's USA Director, John Hajjar responded to Aridi by saying that "he should remember how Hezbollah shut down al Mustaqbal TV and other media in Beirut during the Beirut invasion. Is Aridi a member of the March 14 coalition or of Hezbollah? Is he a supporter of the Cedars Revolution or of the Iranian regime? We call on the Lebanese Druze Leader Walid Jumblatt to fire Aridi from his Party if he wants to continue working with the Lebanese pro freedom groups around the world."

CRNews also learns that this week the US authorities also seized a building operated by the Iranian intelligence in downtown New York City.