

'Big Brother' move

By GEOFFREY BEW

NEW regulation that would force telecommunication companies to keep records of everyone's phone calls, e-mails and the websites they visit in Bahrain, has been attacked by human rights activists and MPs.

It has been drafted by the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA), which wants the information to be stored for up to three years.

Both the National Security Agency and the BDF Directorate of Military Intelligence would have access to the data, but only upon receipt of a court order or permission from the Public Prosecution.

It would allow authorities to eavesdrop on the content of phone calls, e-mails and any other form of electronic communication.

In addition, information such as the phone numbers of the parties involved, the date, time and duration of the call and their location at the beginning and end of the call would also be stored.

Similar data will also be logged from text messages, multi-media messages and enhanced messages.

Meanwhile, information retained from e-mails sent and received would include the authentication username, date, time of login and logout, the Internet Protocol (IP) address, date and time the mail was sent.

Telecommunication companies would have to

Illegal equipment seized

THE Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) yesterday announced it seized illegal Internet-based telephone devices during raids across Bahrain.

The gadgets, being used to support an international calling service by those not licensed to do so, were confiscated during surprise inspections, said TRA general director Alan Horne.

"As a proactive measure in protecting the interests of consumers as well as those of licensed operators, we will conduct more such activities among licensed operators, phone shops, retailers and other commercial

entities," he said.

Mr Horne said the TRA was concerned that consumers were taking advantage and paying unlicensed operators for unlicensed activities.

"We are also concerned that we protect investments made by legitimate licensed operators," he said.

Mr Horne said article 77 of the Telecommunications Law allowed TRA staff, designated as judicial officers, to enter any premises, vehicle or site that contains or is suspected of containing telecommunications equipment and facilities.

TRA information communica-

tion technology operations manager Ahmed Aldosari, who is leading the inspections, appealed people to report anyone violating the country's laws, to the organization.

"We encourage all parties to report on any suspected violations of the telecommunications law or any potential illegal operation," he said.

"In co-operation with the Interior Ministry, the TRA will implement its plan of action in order to provide continuous monitoring and inspection of the telecom industry to proactively detect and deter illegal activities."

provide access to the information within 24 hours of a request being made.

They would also be responsible for paying the costs of setting up such a system.

Companies would have two months to submit a plan for establishing a database to the TRA and another six months to put it into effect.

Firms would be able to keep an electronic copy of the data, but would have to ensure its safe storage and maintain the privacy and

confidentiality of the information.

The TRA says the law has been proposed to help maintain national security, but has been criticised for allowing Bahrain's authorities to spy on its citizens.

President of the now-dissolved Bahrain Centre for Human Rights (BCHR) Nabeel Rajab claimed it would provide a legal mandate to invade people's privacy – especially political and human rights activists.

"Although infringing privacy of activists has

always been practised by the Bahrain authorities, what is more dangerous this time is that they are legalising it under the pretext of national security," he said, as he urged the TRA to withdraw the draft law.

Parliament's foreign affairs, defence and national security committee chairman MP Shaikh Adel Al Maawada was also against the proposal.

However, his opposition could be futile since the regulation does not have to be approved by MPs.

"This is a breach of personal freedom and is unethical," he told the GDN. This will mean everyone being monitored – including me.

"It is like (the government is) entering your home without your permission to see what you are doing with your family. This is against Islam. Everyone has the right to personal freedom."

Tomorrow is the deadline for public comments on the draft law. People can submit their views directly to the TRA by e-mail or deliver their comments in person to the TRA's office, in the Diplomatic Area, by 4pm tomorrow.

The TRA will then review the feedback and publish a report on the public consultation process, before officials decide whether the draft should be amended.

Once that process is completed, the regulation



■ Mr Horne



■ Mr Al Maawada



■ Mr Keeble, left, presents the cheque to Ms Gordon as Mr Pals looks on

This includes breakfast, lunch and a presentation in the evening with a buffet dinner and drinks. Each player also gets a golf shirt, a cap and a goody bag as mementos and a number of prizes will also be on offer. For more information on sponsoring the event, contact 36638877.

BD1,000 donated to RIA Centre

A CHEQUE for BD1,000 was donated by the Royal Society of St George to the RIA Centre, Adliya, yesterday.

Society chair Steven Keeble presented the donation to centre co-ordinator Christine Gordon in the presence of committee member Tony Palys.

The donation is part of the money being raised from a charity golf tournament scheduled to take place on April 9 at the new Royal Golf Club, Riffa and hopes to raise up to BD20,000.

The tournament is open to everyone, with an entry fee of BD500 for a team of four.



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