



DISINFORMATION, NARRATIVE FRACTURE, AND INSTITUTIONAL SILENCE IN THE AIN SAADEH STRIKE

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INTRODUCTION

The April 5, 2026 strike on Ain Saadeh is not only another account of an Israeli airstrike on a civilian building. It is a case study in what happens to a community when an act of violence meets an information vacuum, and when that vacuum is filled before state institutions provide a credible factual anchor.

The only two official statements on the incident came from the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). The first was issued 22 hours after the strike, nine hours after the Israeli army's own statement. The second followed 40 hours after the strike. During the 22-hour period before the first LAF statement, a broad national information ecosystem, made up of legacy media outlets, digital networks, social media accounts, and countless WhatsApp news groups, operated without a single official account to structure public understanding. Into that gap flowed eyewitness testimony, attributed reporting, unverified claims, fabricated content, and sectarian amplification. Much of it was aggregated through WhatsApp channels with combined audiences in the hundreds of thousands and circulated as fact across the country.

The 16-hour gap between the first and second LAF statements did little to stabilize the information environment. Reporters on the ground interviewed angry and grieving residents, repeated claims that had not been independently verified, and fed a fast-moving news cycle further amplified through WhatsApp networks reaching very large audiences. By the time the second statement was issued, it had clarified one point while leaving the central factual and accountability questions unresolved.

METHODOLOGY

This investigation is based on the systematic monitoring and logging of fourteen sources across WhatsApp, Telegram, X, and broadcast television. The primary monitoring covered a 48-hour period following the Israeli airstrike on Tilal Ain Saadeh on April 5, 2026. Three supplementary sources were added to extend the factual record through April 10, 2026, and one additional source was incorporated following significant developments on April 15, 2026.

The primary monitoring set was designed to capture a cross-section of Lebanese political affiliations, audience sizes, and media formats. It included MTV Lebanon (619,000 followers), Al Jadeed (one million followers), the Lebanese Forces (LF) official WhatsApp channel (46,000 followers), Sawt Beirut International (130,000 followers), Huna Lubnan (26,000 followers), Khabar Ajel (16,000 followers),

Bint Jbeil/bintjbeil.org on Telegram (306,000 followers), official statements issued by the Lebanese Armed Forces, and a curated set of public X accounts selected through a minimum engagement threshold of 50 likes, 10 reposts, and 10 comments. Ahmad Yassine's X account was included as a distinct source because of its central role in the circulation of high-reach disinformation within the monitored narrative ecosystem.

To extend the analysis beyond the primary window, three supplementary sources were incorporated: Al Arabiya's broadcast reporting of April 6, AFP's April 8 wire report citing a judicial source, and the April 10 episode of *Sar El Wa2et* on MTV Lebanon featuring LF Member of Parliament (MP) Melhem Riachi and members of the victims' family. An additional source was subsequently added: the April 15 AlJadeed television interview with Lisa Rahmé, conducted by presenter Ghadi Bou Moussa, broadcast and shared across the network's social media platforms. This interview is treated as primary witness testimony as it includes the on-record account of the building resident identified through prior source reporting as the woman the intended target had been visiting.

Each logged item was recorded with its original timestamp, source attribution, full translation where the content was in Arabic, a summary of its substance, visible engagement metrics where available, and an editorial tag identifying its narrative function. Items were then cross-referenced across sources to identify the first appearance of specific claims, trace narrative transfer across platforms, and document subsequent corrections and denials.

No claim was treated as confirmed fact unless it was corroborated by an official Lebanese state statement, a named judicial or official source, or independent multi-source confirmation. Attributed claims are identified as such throughout.

This investigation does not seek to resolve every contested factual question that emerged after the strike. Its purpose is to document how those questions were formed, circulated, amplified, and, in some cases, later clarified in the absence of a timely and authoritative official account.

THE NARRATIVES

THE CONFIRMED RECORD

Across thirteen sources and 180 items this research examined, the following elements are established through official statement or multi-source confirmation within the primary 48-hour monitoring window:

At approximately 21:00 on April 5, 2026, two GBU-39 precision bombs struck the Maronite Complex in Tilal Ain Saadeh. Three civilians were killed: Pierre Gebrayel Moawad, head of the LF center in Yahchouch; his wife, Flavia Joseph Mourad; and a visitor to the family identified across sources as Roula Matar. Three other individuals were wounded.

Immediately after the strike, a man was seen fleeing the building on a motorcycle, covered in dust. This moment was captured on the building's CCTV system, witnessed by multiple residents, and later acknowledged in both LAF statements. This is the most documented single event in the investigation outside of the strike itself. In its first statement, issued 22 hours after the strike, the LAF confirmed the presence of this individual and stated that preliminary investigations had found no new tenants in the building. In its second statement, issued 40 hours after the strike, the LAF identified the motorcycle rider as a pharmaceutical delivery worker who had been making regular deliveries to a resident of the building. The identity of that building resident was not established in any official statement and was not confirmed through subsequent reporting during the period covered here.

The Israeli army later acknowledged that the strike was a failed assassination attempt targeting an individual in east Beirut. The Mayor of Ain Saadeh stated that the apartment was unoccupied in municipal records, while also acknowledging that the municipality had no effective way to prevent someone who could “come for fifteen minutes and flee.” This qualification would acquire greater significance in light of subsequent reporting. The apartment owner, Michel Tanios Ibrahim, stated on camera to live television that the apartment had not been rented and that all personal belongings remained inside. This report treats that statement as an on-record claim by the owner, not as an independently established fact, because subsequent reporting introduced specific counterclaims regarding access to the apartment that were never conclusively resolved.

MTV separately reported, citing a municipal source, that Pierre Moawad had warned the municipality three days before the strike that suspicious movement had been observed in the supposedly vacant apartment. The municipality acknowledged receiving that warning. This is confirmed through MTV's reporting and a municipal source — it is not corroborated by any official LAF statement or municipal

communicate but is treated here as attributed multi-source confirmed reporting given its consistency across independent accounts.

FILLING THE INFORMATION VACUUM

Within minutes of the strike, media outlets reported preliminary information about the location description, with multiple sources describing the site as “opposite Roumieh Prison,” suggesting reliance on a common initial source, most likely emergency services. Within 23 minutes, MTV framed the event as “an assassination operation.” That framing rapidly spread across other channels.

Figure 1. Early reporting of a strike “opposite the Roumieh prison”



Within 80 minutes of the strike, reporting attributed to the Huna Lubnan correspondent stated that person being targeted had been “living [in the apartment] under a name other than his real name.” The claim circulated quickly, remained unverified, and was never addressed in either LAF statement.

At the same time, social media users and WhatsApp aggregators began circulating that the LAF had ordered the area around the targeted building be cleared in order to remove an unexploded rocket. In some channels, the claim was interpreted as cover for the removal of the alleged target’s body.

Figure 2. Claims of unexploded device in Ain Saadeh circulating on WhatsApp



This narrative echoed speculation reported by Huna Lubnan from a resident of the complex regarding ambiguous civil defense activity at the scene. Neither the unexploded rocket nor the body removal claims appeared in any official statement or record. Both remain unverified throughout the monitoring period.

A separate but related claim came from DailyNewsLB, which reported that the Lebanese Army had asked people to clear the area for security reasons, after which Red Crescent teams allegedly entered the site and retrieved a fourth body. No official source corroborated this report. It was not mentioned in either LAF statement or was not followed up by any other outlet included in the log. The same report also stated that the apartment had been rented for approximately \$1,500 per month, a figure that contradicted the \$4,000 and \$2,500 rental figures circulating elsewhere, and was likewise never confirmed.

Figure 3. Claims on a fourth body and a rental figure circulating online



In the first minutes after the strike, neighbors were filmed saying they wanted nothing to do with the displaced. This was accompanied by eyewitness accounts of residents attempting to stop a man seen leaving the parking area on a motorcycle while covered in dust. According to MTV's detailed reconstruction of witness reports, the individual descended from the building immediately after the strike, visibly covered in blast-produced dust, left on a black Yamaha Nmax motorcycle, told residents gathered outside there were casualties upstairs to care for, and then fled. A resident pursued him on another motorcycle, colliding with him repeatedly in an effort to stop and identify him. The chase continued to the Dora bridge underpass, where a second individual on a Cross motorcycle allegedly intercepted the pursuer by ramming into him, then left the scene with the fleeing rider. MTV reported that this information had been passed to Army Intelligence, which was reviewing camera footage and attempting to establish the fleeing individual's identity. None of these details appeared in either LAF statement.

MTV also reported, citing a municipal source, that Pierre Moawad had warned the municipality three days before the strike that suspicious movement had been observed in the supposedly vacant apartment. The municipality acknowledged receiving that warning. No action was taken before the strike occurred.

As reporting accumulated, the vacancy narrative itself became contested. Al-Jadeed and MTV both reported, citing their own sources, that the apartment had been rented 48 to 72 hours before the strike and that Moawad had contacted the owner 24 hours earlier demanding that it be vacated. These claims were never confirmed in official LAF communications, but they spread rapidly across social media. Soon afterward, a voice note attributed to the deceased circulated widely, purporting to capture a conversation in which he expressed to a friend concern about a new tenant. Because it aligned with the emerging narrative, the recording was widely accepted as authentic. On April 7, Al-Jadeed debunked the voice note as fake and taken out of context.

By the morning of April 6, roughly 12 hours after the strike, public figures such as right-wing commentator Tony Abi Najem and controversial whistleblower Nadine Barakat stated publicly that the apartment owner and the Mayor were lying about the apartment being empty or unrented. This was amplified on X and across WhatsApp channels.

Figure 4. Example of accusations of lying about the occupancy status of the targeted apartment



Anti-Hezbollah commentator Ahmad A. Yassine pushed the narrative further in a video that reached 20,000 views within the first 48 hours on X alone, and was also downloaded and shared further through WhatsApp. He claimed that the apartment had been rented under a false name for three years and called on “Christians to act.” At the same time, reports falsely attributed to *Nida’ al-Watan* newspaper and amplified by public figures including right-wing pundit Marie-Lina Hraoui identified the intended target as Hezbollah leader Abdullah Ibrahim, allegedly having left the apartment shortly before the strike.

Figure 5. Example of false attribution to an established media outlet



Nida al-Watan issued a categorical denial, stating that it had published no such information. The name continued to circulate regardless.

Figure 6. *Nida' al-Watan's* denial of circulated attribution



At approximately 16:00 on April 6, a video circulated showing Pierre Moawad's grieving daughter rejecting the apartment owner's account and stating that the owner's sister frequently visited the apartment. She appealed to the public not to assume, without evidence, that the unit had been empty. Within the first 24 hours of monitoring, this was the first claim to introduce a specific individual – the owner's sister – with documented access to the supposedly vacant apartment. No official source followed up on it.

MTV reporter Zena Basile, explicitly presenting the information as preliminary, described the target as "a figure whose mission was to distribute funds to Hezbollah members and their families." This was the most specific functional description of the target provided by a named journalist with institutional affiliation during the period covered in this research.

Figure 7. MTV reporter describing the targeted individual's role within Hezbollah



MTV later published a [video](#) it said came from the targeted apartment, showing a pistol, water bottles, and coffee, seemingly contradicting the claim that the apartment had been vacant. This post generated 159,000 [impressions](#) on X within the first 48 hours. MTV later [reported](#) in its own summary that security forces had confirmed the pistol was in fact a plastic toy belonging to a child on the fourth floor, not an item from the targeted apartment. The correction on X reached only a [fraction](#) of the [audience](#) exposed to the original claim.

A more developed narrative was introduced on April 6 by [Al Arabiya](#), which cited a judicial source describing the target as a Hezbollah figure who had visited the building 20 to 25 times over the previous 40 days. This was also the first source in the log to introduce both the claim of a romantic relationship with a resident of the building (a characterization later contested by the woman herself) and the specific visit-frequency estimate. The source stated that the individual had not fled after the strike, but had already arrived, remained briefly, and left before the strike took place. It also offered a structural explanation for a targeting error, suggesting that both Block 1 and Block 2 of the Maronite Complex had a third floor and that the missile struck the wrong one. None of these claims was confirmed by an official source at the time. Several were later corroborated, including the romantic relationship, the fact that the intended target escaped the strike, and the repeated nature of his visits. The claim that the missile struck the wrong block remained unaddressed by subsequent official or judicial reporting.

On April 7, MTV [reported](#) that its sources had identified the targeted individual, distinct from the delivery worker mentioned by the LAF. According to the new report, this person worked in pharmaceutical sales, had disappeared since the day of the strike, and had regularly visited the building to meet a woman who also frequented it. The two were said to meet in the unrented third-floor apartment. The identity of the visitor was known to security services pending public announcement. None of this was confirmed in any official statement.

By this stage, other conspiratorial explanations had also begun to circulate. One of Ahmad Yassine's [videos](#), which reached 37,000 views on X by April 8 and between 90,000 and 140,000 views on [Instagram](#) by April 12, in addition to unquantifiable spread on WhatsApp, claimed that Hezbollah had deliberately fed Israel the location, evacuated their operative, and allowed Moawad to be killed.

Figure 8: Fake conspiracy theories circulating about the killing



WHAT THE SECOND LAF STATEMENT LEFT OPEN

The second LAF statement narrowed one point of uncertainty by identifying the motorcycle rider as a pharmaceutical delivery worker. It did not, however, resolve the broader set of questions that had already come to define the public information environment.

Most importantly, it did not clarify the identity or status of **the intended target**. It did not say whether he had been present in or near the building at the time of the strike, or whether investigators had established his identity. This remained one of the central unanswered questions, even as media reporting suggested that security services already possessed relevant information. MTV, for example, reported that the individual's identity was known to security forces.

The statement also left unexamined the **identity of the resident** to whom the delivery worker had allegedly been making regular deliveries. That resident was never publicly identified, never quoted on record, and never mentioned in any official communication. As a result, the one factual clarification offered by the LAF immediately opened another unresolved line of inquiry.

The statement also left the question of **access to the apartment** unresolved. While the LAF stated that preliminary investigations had identified no new tenants in the building, it did not address the wider

set of claims circulating about use of the apartment. More significantly, it did not respond to the specific statement by Pierre Moawad's daughter that the apartment owner's sister had frequently visited the supposedly vacant unit. That claim mattered because it introduced a possible access chain to the apartment through a known individual rather than an abstract allegation of clandestine use. When read alongside MTV's reporting that the intended target had been meeting a woman in the unrented apartment, the issue becomes more serious: if both claims are accurate, then the question of who enabled access to the unit may run through the owner's own family.

The same pattern applied to **the motorcycle escape** sequence reported by MTV. According to that account, the fleeing individual left on a motorcycle, was pursued by a resident to the Dora bridge underpass, and was then extracted by a second rider on another motorcycle who intercepted the pursuer. MTV further reported that this information had been shared with Army Intelligence, which was actively reviewing footage and pursuing the lead. None of those details – the motorcycle model, the extraction point, the role of the second rider, or the existence of an active investigation thread – appeared in either LAF statement.

The result was that, 40 hours after the strike, and after two official statements, the Lebanese public still lacked a coherent official account of the central facts under dispute. A state institution had answered one question, but left the broader architecture of uncertainty intact. In practical terms, contested reporting, unverified claims, and fabricated content continued to provide more narrative structure to the event than official communication did.

WHAT SUBSEQUENT REPORTING ESTABLISHED

Reporting published after the primary 48-hour monitoring window helped clarify several of the questions that remained unresolved during the period of highest narrative volatility. These later disclosures are treated separately here in order to preserve the temporal integrity of the core analysis. By the time more authoritative reporting began to resolve key factual questions, the peak of disinformation and speculative narrative circulation had already passed and deeply influenced popular perception of the incident.

On April 8, AFP, citing a judicial source who requested anonymity, reported that the intended target was a Hezbollah official who had been in a **romantic relationship** with a woman living in the targeted building and who visited the location briefly every day. The same source stated that he had escaped the strike. AFP further reported that the woman had given testimony to investigators and had provided the man's name and description, enabling investigators to confirm his identity. AFP did not publish his name.

The judicial source characterized the woman as the target's romantic partner. This characterization was directly contested ten days later by the woman herself in an on-record television interview, in

which she stated the relationship was medical in nature: he had been administering iron infusions for her thalassemia condition, having introduced himself to her by chance at a nearby pharmacy approximately four months before the strike. This investigation cannot adjudicate between a judicial source's characterization and the woman's own testimony. Both are on record. The contradiction stands unresolved.

This was the first reporting, based on a judicial source and issued by an international news agency, to substantiate three claims that had circulated in contested form during the first 48 hours: that the target had in fact been present in the building, that he had escaped, and that he was affiliated with Hezbollah. It confirmed that the Israeli strike had targeted a real individual connected to Hezbollah and rendered untenable the narratives that denied any Hezbollah-related presence in the building or suggested that the deaths had been caused by an internal explosion rather than by the Israeli strike.

Al Arabiya's reporting of April 6, which fell within the broader chronology of the case but preceded AFP's publication, also became more significant in light of subsequent disclosures. Citing a judicial source, Al Arabiya described the target as someone who had visited the building 20 to 25 times over the preceding 40 days, a pattern broadly consistent with AFP's later description of brief daily visits. However, Pierre Moawad's daughter stated on MTV's *Sar El Wa2et* show on April 10 that this may have been the target's first visit to the building and that he had remained there for approximately one hour. The discrepancy between Al Arabiya's high-frequency visit account and the daughter's statement remains unresolved. CCTV footage reportedly seized by Army Intelligence would likely clarify the question of visit frequency, but it has not been made public.

The most detailed public account of the investigation came on April 10 during the same *Sar El Wa2et* show, when LF MP Melhem Riachi stated on air that he had met President Joseph Aoun, who personally briefed him on the investigation results. Riachi disclosed that Army Intelligence had seized the building's CCTV cameras and had used that material to establish the identity of the target. He stated on record that the target's family name was Al-Khatib. According to Pierre Moawad's daughter, the woman the target had been visiting was from the Rahmé family. Riachi further described this woman as a nurse at Dahr El Bachek government hospital, the same hospital to which the victims were taken on the night of April 5. During the same broadcast, however, the hospital clarified that she had left her post there four years earlier and had worked only briefly with the World Health Organization (WHO) during the COVID period. Both characterizations were subsequently denied by the woman's own testimony on April 15: Lisa Rahmé, identified by family name through the deceased's child's testimony, is an aesthetician who owns a beauty salon with her daughter in Ashrafieh. She said she had no connection to Daher El Bachek hospital and never worked there. The misidentification originated in Riachi's sourcing and was never corrected by any official body. Riachi also described the target as "a pharmaceutical provider by day and Hezbollah by night," the clearest public characterization in the record of an apparent dual civilian and Hezbollah-linked profile. That characterization is a public statement made by a sitting MP recounting a presidential briefing on Army Intelligence findings.

Even after these later disclosures, several questions remained unresolved. Riachi did not reveal the target's full name beyond the Al-Khatib family name, his specific rank or function within Hezbollah, the precise timing of his departure relative to the strike, or whether any charges or arrest warrants had been issued. As of April 10, the investigation remained officially open.

FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

Ten days after the strike, Lisa Rahmé, the woman from the Rahmé family identified through the deceased's child's testimony on *Sar El Wa2et*, gave a 20-minute interview on Al Jadeed, broadcast on April 15 and shared across the network's social media. She came forward not voluntarily but under direct social media pressure: posts had been circulating identifying her beauty salon in Ashrafieh as an active location where the fleeing Hezbollah operative was still visiting daily, including public calls to security services to monitor the premises. Her account is presented here as on-record testimony from a witness with direct knowledge of the events and direct interest in her own exculpation. No element of her account has been independently corroborated beyond Army Intelligence's confirmation that they investigated her.

The interview generated immediate controversy, with both the anti-Hezbollah and pro-Hezbollah ecosystems using it selectively to reinforce their respective narratives.

Who she is and how she met the target: Lisa Rahmé is an aesthetician who owns a beauty salon with her daughter in Ashrafieh. She has thalassemia and requires regular iron IV infusions. Approximately four months before the strike, she encountered a young man at a pharmacy near her home in Tilal Ain Saadeh. He introduced himself as a pharmacist named "Yasir", a name she subsequently learned was not his real name, consistent with Army Intelligence's finding that the target operated under a false identity. He offered to come to her home to administer her iron infusions. Over the following four months, he visited her apartment periodically to administer treatment. Her 13-year-old son was present during these visits. She categorically denies any romantic relationship with him.

Lisa's testimony introduces for the first time across all logged sources a confirmed alias used by the target: "Yasir." This supersedes every named claim that circulated in the first 48 hours, Abdullah Ibrahim, denied by *Nida' al-Watan*, and every other name attributed without sourcing across the monitoring window.

The night of the strike: He arrived at Lisa's apartment on a motorcycle on the evening of April 5. He was with her for 15 to 20 minutes. They were unable to complete the iron infusion due to what she described as "a special situation." She did not elaborate. He left her apartment. Forty-five minutes later, the strike occurred. She was alone when the bombs hit. She could not move for approximately 15 minutes due to heavy black smoke filling the apartment. Six minutes after the strike, the person captured on CCTV fled the building on a motorcycle covered in dust. Lisa states she cannot confirm

from the footage that it was him, she could not recognize his face through the dust, but adds: “who else would it be?”

The 40-minute gap, the central unresolved question: Lisa’s testimony sharpens rather than resolves the unresolved factual question. He left her apartment 45 minutes before the strike. He was seen fleeing 6 minutes after the strike. That places him in the building for approximately 39 minutes after leaving her apartment, with no established explanation for his whereabouts. The Al Jadeed presenter pressed her on this directly: why would a person leave a woman’s apartment and then remain in the building for 40 minutes? Lisa said she did not know. She speculated he may have hidden somewhere, on a staircase or in an electrical room. The CCTV footage, now in Army Intelligence custody, would establish his movements in the building during those 39 minutes. It has not been publicly released.

The apartment confusion: The narrative that dominated the first 48 hours focused on the vacant fourth-floor apartment owned by Michel Tanios Ibrahim, who appeared on camera the night of the strike and categorically denied renting it to anyone. That apartment became the center of the rental dispute. Lisa’s testimony shifts the frame entirely. She confirms that Yasir was at her apartment – also on the fourth floor, directly facing the owner’s vacant unit, on the night of the strike. Whether he had access to the facing vacant apartment owned by Michel Tanios Ibrahim and whether that apartment played any role in the events of that night, are elements that were never addressed by any official source and remain one of the most significant unresolved questions in the entire investigation.

The pharmacy as operational cover: Lisa’s account introduces an operational detail of analytical significance. He did not use his personal phone to contact her. He called her on the pharmacy’s number to announce his arrival and ask her to open the building gate. He left his personal phone at the pharmacy when visiting her. The Al Jadeed presenter noted explicitly that Hezbollah operatives do not use personal phones during wartime, and that leaving a phone at a pharmacy before entering a residential building is consistent with operational security protocols. Lisa acknowledged she found this unusual only in retrospect. This detail is consistent with Riachi’s characterization of the target as “pharmaceutical provider by day, Hezbollah operative by night,” and with the LAF’s identification of the motorcycle rider as a delivery worker making regular visits to a building resident.

What her testimony does not resolve: The contradiction between AFP’s judicial source characterization of the relationship as romantic and Lisa’s on-record denial remains unresolved. The 40-minute gap between the target’s departure from her apartment and his appearance on CCTV fleeing the building remains unexplained.

THE DISINFORMATION CHAIN

This research identified six high-reach claims that were confirmed false and misleading, or consequential in ways that materially shaped public understanding of the strike. Together, they trace the structure of the information disorder that developed in the first 48 hours: fabricated material, unresolved claims treated as fact, false attribution through credible institutional branding, misleading visual “evidence,” and attempts to reframe the victims themselves as possible agents of harm.

One of the earliest and most striking examples was the **fabricated voice note** circulated at 05:40 on April 6. Shared with Pierre Moawad’s photograph superimposed on it, the recording framed the deceased as having warned the apartment owner in advance and implicitly assigned him responsibility for what followed. On Ahmad Yassine’s account alone, the post reached 40,000 views on X, in addition to circulation through private WhatsApp groups. Al-Jadeed later reported on April 7 that the audio was fake. The correction did not reach the same audiences, nor did it travel with comparable intensity across the echo chambers the original video reached.

Two other claims remained unresolved throughout the monitored period but nonetheless contributed to the atmosphere of narrative escalation: the claim that the LAF had cleared the area to remove an **unexploded rocket**, and the related DailyNewsLB report that Red Crescent teams had retrieved a fourth body from the site. Neither claim was corroborated by any official source, mentioned in either LAF statement, or pursued by any other outlet in the log. Their significance lies less in what they established than in what they enabled: both claims expanded the perceived scale and secrecy of the event and gave audiences further reason to believe that key facts were being deliberately concealed.

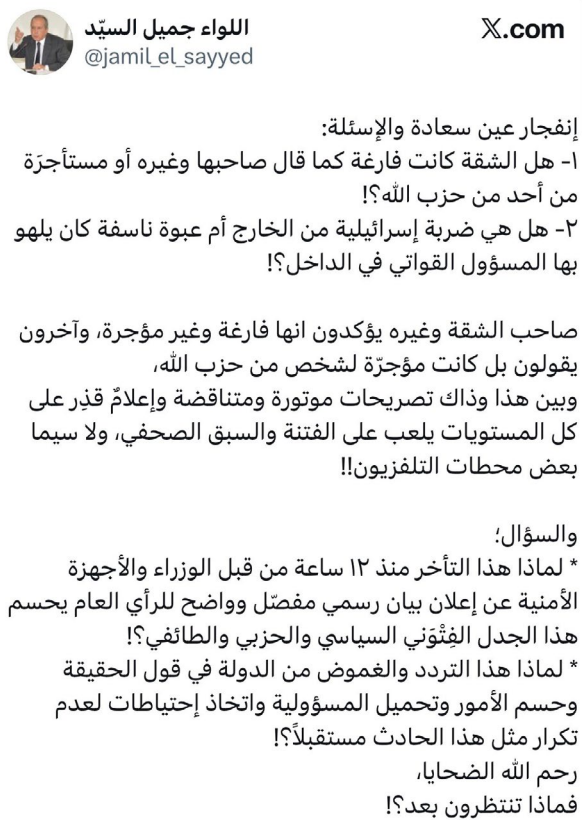
The naming of the intended target as **Abdullah Ibrahim** was the clearest case in the dataset of institutional brand misuse. The name circulated under the apparent authority of Nid’a al-Watan, amplified by WhatsApp aggregators and public figures including Marie-Lina Hraoui. The newspaper issued a categorical denial, stating that it had published no such report. The name nevertheless continued to circulate. Later reporting by AFP on April 8 and Melhem Riachi’s televised remarks on April 10 made clear that the target’s identity was different. The most widely circulated name in the first 48 hours was not the correct one.

The other widely shared **video of a pistol** allegedly found in the targeted apartment followed a different pattern. Here, the issue was not fabricated attribution of a source, but the asymmetry between reach and correction. MTV presented the footage as originating from the targeted apartment, and the post generated 159,000 impressions on X within the first 48 hours. MTV later reported that security forces

had concluded the object was a plastic toy but the correction reached only a fraction of the audience exposed to the initial post.

A separate but equally consequential case came from **MP Jamil Al-Sayyed**, whose now-deleted tweet asked whether the deceased had been “playing with an explosive device.” This was a suspicious attempt to reframe the causal logic of the event by introducing the possibility that the victims themselves were responsible for the explosion.

Figure 9. Allusions to the deceased’s responsibility for their own death

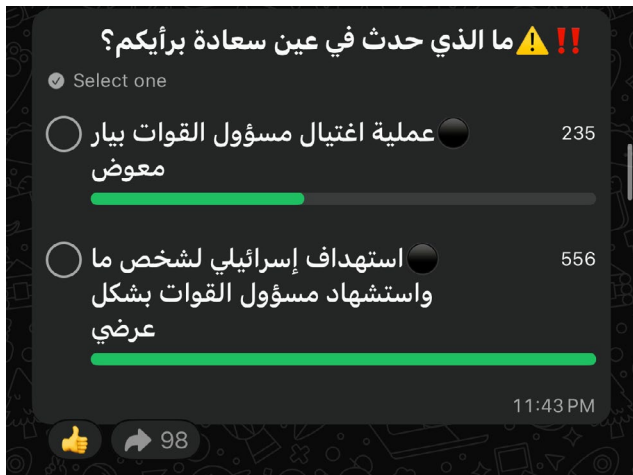


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إنفجار عين سعادة والإسئلة:
 ١- هل الشقة كانت فارغة كما قال صاحبها وغيره أو مستأجرة
 من أحد من حزب الله؟!
 ٢- هل هي ضربة إسرائيلية من الخارج أم عبوة ناسفة كان يلهو
 بها المسؤول القواني في الداخل؟!
 صاحب الشقة وغيره يؤكدون انها فارغة وغير مؤجرة، وآخرون
 يقولون بل كانت مؤجرة لشخص من حزب الله،
 وبين هذا وذاك تصريحات متوترة ومتناقضة وإعلامٌ قذر على
 كل المستويات يلعب على الفتنة والسبق الصحفي، ولا سيما
 بعض محطات التلفزيون!!
 والسؤال:
 * لماذا هذا التأخر منذ ١٢ ساعة من قبل الوزراء والأجهزة
 الأمنية عن إعلان بيان رسمي مفصّل وواضح للرأي العام يحسم
 هذا الجدل الفئوي السياسي والحزبي والطائفي؟!
 * لماذا هذا التردد والغموض من الدولة في قول الحقيقة
 وحسم الأمور وتحميل المسؤولية واتخاذ إحتياطات لعدم
 تكرار مثل هذا الحادث مستقبلاً؟!
 رحم الله الضحايا،
 فماذا تنتظرون بعد؟!

In doing so, Al-Sayyed, a former security official aligned with Hezbollah, opened space for speculation within three hours of the tragedy, that the deaths were internally caused rather than the result of an Israeli strike.

Figure 10. Circulating speculations

Later reporting, including the Israeli acknowledgment of a failed assassination attempt and AFP's subsequent confirmation that a Hezbollah-affiliated target had been present and escaped, rendered that reframing false. But by the time those clarifications appeared, the insinuation had already circulated.

Another important example of narrative escalation came from US-based anti-Hezbollah commentator Hussain Abdul-Hussain, whose English-language post introduced what appeared to be documentary evidence into an already saturated information environment. Abdul-Hussain claimed that municipal records showed the apartment had been rented to two Shia men described as "**telecom engineers**" for \$2,500 per month, and concluded that the owner had been induced by money to rent to Hezbollah-affiliated tenants. As apparent supporting evidence, he attached a screenshot that, on inspection, was a vehicle registration record for a Nissan Versa linked to an address in Tyre/Bazouriyeh, with no explained connection to the apartment, the building, or the rental claim itself. The post reached 18,400 impressions and the same narrative was mirrored and recirculated in Arabic on private WhatsApp groups. The evidentiary leap was substantial and was not questioned by the accounts that amplified it: a vehicle registration from South Lebanon was presented as supporting proof of Hezbollah-linked tenancy in a Christian suburb in Metn, north of Beirut. The rental figure he cited also contradicted the \$4,000 figure circulating simultaneously in Arabic-language reporting, a discrepancy no source addressed.

By the time more authoritative reporting began to clarify the underlying facts, the disinformation cycle had already peaked.

THE IMPACT

REAL-WORLD EFFECTS

The most direct documented consequence of the information disorder that followed the strike was not confined to the circulation of false or misleading claims. It also produced apparent real-world communal reactions.

Less than two hours after the strike, a video began circulating on both [WhatsApp](#) and X bearing the embedded caption: “Start of the expulsion of all tenants from the town of Ain Saadeh.”

Figure 11. Claims of tenant expulsion in Ain Saadeh



[Lebanon Files](#), a verified Lebanese news outlet, published the video at 22:37 as breaking news, where it reached 34,100 views by the following morning.

Figure 12. Lebanon Files reporting on tenant expulsion



The same footage was later shared by multiple accounts with divergent framings, including one that celebrated the act and another that described it in explicitly sectarian terms: “The residents of the Ain Saadeh area expelled displaced Shiites from a Hezbollah environment after the area was targeted by Israel. They have become isolated and no one wants them.”

Figure 13. Spread of the tenant expulsion video



Whether the expulsions shown in the video took place exactly as described, and whether any displaced tenants were in fact residing in the complex, was never confirmed by an official source. What is clear, however, is that the video circulated and was consumed as evidence of a sectarian response before any authoritative account of the strike had been established. In that sense, the video illustrates how communal reactions and their public celebration can take shape while the factual basis of the event remains unstable.

INSTITUTIONAL FAILURE

The Ain Saadeh case also documents a broader failure of public institutions to provide timely, credible, and sufficiently informative communication in the aftermath of a high-risk event.

By the time of the strike, Lebanon had been at war for 36 days. Yet the municipality had neither an updated registry nor a rapid verification mechanism capable of clarifying who was accessing a supposedly vacant apartment. The Mayor himself gave progressively more qualified versions of the apartment's status to different outlets on the same evening, moving from categorical vacancy to uncertainty about intermittent access, to the practical acknowledgment that the municipality could not stop "someone who came for fifteen minutes and fled." That progression matters because MTV later reported, citing a municipal source, that Pierre Moawad had warned the municipality three days earlier that suspicious movement had been observed in the apartment. The municipality received the warning but did not act before the strike.

At the national level, the only official response in the first 40 hours consisted of two LAF statements, the first issued 22 hours after the strike and the second 40 hours after it. In the same period, at least six competing narratives took shape. This report's source sample is indicative rather than exhaustive, and the monitored material leans toward Christian-affiliated and anti-Hezbollah channels. But the parallel pro-Hezbollah information environment also exploited the same vacuum, advancing a different selective account of events. It amplified the apartment owner's denial, the Mayor's early vacancy statements, and above all the LAF's second statement identifying the motorcycle rider as a delivery worker, using those elements to reinforce the claim that no Hezbollah-linked presence had existed in the building and that accusations emerging from Christian media and residents were fabricated. The information gap therefore enabled competing ecosystems to construct rival versions of the same event out of selected fragments, omissions, and premature certainties.

The key problem with the slow and partial official communication is its failure to displace partisan narrative production as the primary framework through which the public understood the event. The LAF's second statement asked the public not to speculate without providing enough verified information to reduce the incentives or opportunities for speculation. Notably, the Israeli army had already published its own account of the strike, nine hours before the LAF issued its first statement about an attack on Lebanese soil.

THE BROADER INFORMATION GAP

The Ain Saadeh investigation confirms a pattern that InflueAnswers and the Samir Kassir Foundation have been monitoring for years. The interval between an event and the first high-impact false or misleading claim is shrinking; the reach of unverified narratives before correction is increasing; and the capacity of official institutions to provide prompt, credible, orienting accounts is weakening.

In the absence of a trustworthy official narrative anchor, multiple organized or semi-organized actors structured public understanding before the factual record had stabilized. Some circulated fabricated material. Others selectively amplified partial truths. Others assigned unwarranted precision to fragments of reality that had yet to be publicly verified.

The information ecosystem is a field shaped by those most prepared to exploit uncertainty. Information gaps are political spaces. They are used by actors who benefit from narrative chaos, by armed groups whose operational security depends on civilian confusion, and by others who understand very well how communities under stress absorb information, assign blame, and act on partial or distorted accounts. The issue, ultimately, is institutional as much as informational. A state that speaks clearly and is believed, and institutions that know what is happening on their own territory and can say so, remain essential to preventing the next crisis from being defined first by manipulation, fear, and partisan narrative control.

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