

# Israel seeks immediate resumption of talks on citizens held in Gaza

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JERUSALEM/GAZA, April 7 : Israel called on Tuesday for the immediate resumption of talks on the return of four Israelis held for years in the Gaza Strip after the Palestinian territory's Hamas rulers said they might be willing to move forward on the issue.

Last week, Israel linked any future coronavirus aid to Gaza on progress in efforts to recover two soldiers who went missing in the 2014 war and two civilians who separately slipped into the enclave. Hamas holds all four. The Islamist group has never stated whether the two soldiers are dead or alive, but neither has it provided a sign of life, as it has done in a previous similar case.

It has said that returning the four would require negotiating a prisoner swap and would not be done in exchange for humanitarian aid.

In a statement on Tuesday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said his national security team "stands ready to take constructive action with the goal of returning the fallen and the missing and of ending the affair, and are calling for an immediate dialogue via mediators."

In past rounds of talks, Egypt, Qatar and the United Nations have served as intermediaries.

Yehya Al-Sinwar, Hamas chief in Gaza, has rejected the linkage to coronavirus aid but on Thursday said he saw "a possible initiative to revive this issue" of the Israelis held in the territory if Israel frees jailed Palestinians.

"A prisoner swap will exact a big price" from Israel, he told Hamas's Al-Aqsa TV, saying that were it to start by releasing sick, old and female prisoners "we may offer something partial in return."

Hamas, hoping to head off a contagion it says has so far caused 13 cases in blockaded Gaza, wants Israel to ease economic conditions. Israel is also loathe to deal with a new humanitarian crisis on its border with Gaza, now sealed by both sides.

Israel in the past has freed hundreds of jailed Palestinians, including many militants, in exchange for the recovery of dead or captive Israelis.

But rightists in Netanyahu's ent coalition government, including Defense Minister Naftali Bennett, oppose any further releases of Palestinian militants.



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Gaza sewing factories try to meet growing demand for protective gear  
Israel links COVID-19 aid for Gaza to recovering soldiers

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## [‘Barrier of love’: Palestinian civilians set up coronavirus checkpoints](#)

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EIN YABROUD, Palestine: Wearing a face mask and an orange vest while brandishing a thermometer, Palestinian Moayad Samha looks similar to the

countless others manning COVID-19 checkpoints across the world.

But Samha does not work for the Palestinian Authority – he is a lawyer and one of dozens of civilians deployed along rural roads in the occupied West Bank to enforce coronavirus controls.

Some fear the civilian checkpoints will foster resentment among Palestinians, as villages with no COVID-19 cases turn away residents from places that have recorded an outbreak.

But Samha told AFP that he and others doing roadside monitoring were striving to protect the whole territory from a full-scale epidemic.

“We are trying to detect the virus as much as is possible with our limited means,” Samha said at the checkpoint in his home village of Ein Yabroud.

Following agreements with Israel in the 1990s, the Palestinian government controls major cities in the West Bank, but the Israeli army controls 60 percent of the territory.

Palestinian police cannot enter many rural villages without first coordinating with the Israelis, who can refuse permission.

Those Israeli restrictions, and chronic cash shortages faced by the Palestinian government, have hindered efforts to contain the virus.

So the Palestinian police have called on volunteers to help do the job.

The Palestinian interior ministry has approved the scheme, calling it key to containment efforts.

The West Bank, which has been under near total lockdown for weeks, has 250 confirmed COVID-19 cases.

Ein Yabroud has no confirmed cases but the village of Dayr Jarir, roughly 1.5 kilometers (one mile) to the east, has several coronavirus patients.

Drivers who approached the Ein Yabroud checkpoint on Monday were all stopped. Samha told anyone with an elevated temperature to hold their breath for 10 to 15 seconds, in an attempt to see if they cough or feel discomfort.

If someone presented possible COVID-19 symptoms, he called officials in nearby Ramallah to conduct a test.

Other volunteers checked travelers’ IDs to determine their place of origin. People from towns or cities with many confirmed cases were turned away.

Mohammed Hawih, who is in charge of the village’s checkpoints, told AFP the procedures differed depending on the person.

“Residents of some places are allowed to stop in the village to buy things, but those from other towns and villages are not,” he said.

But he pointed out the Ein Yabroud checkpoint is called the “barrier of love” and was designed for the protection of everyone.

Hawih and others said civilian checkpoints were a response to persistent new infections in small villages and refugee camps far from main Palestinian cities.

Volunteers in different locations communicate via the Zello app, which works like a walkie-talkie.

Some villages have even produced uniforms for their civilian protectors, with checkpoint staff in Dura Al-Qara, adjacent to Ein Yabrud, wearing yellow outfits emblazoned with the village council’s name.

At the Ein Yabroud checkpoint, a key priority has been preventing the Israeli army from entering the village during patrols or raids.

There are more than 9,000 confirmed COVID-19 cases in Israel and Palestinians fear that troops from the Jewish state might cause further West Bank infections.

Hawih claimed to have forced soldiers to turn back by blocking their path on several occasions.

Concern has also risen about a possible surge in West Bank infections caused by the thousands of Palestinians who have returned home in recent days from jobs in Israel.

When a large truck arrived in Dura Al-Qara on Monday, the driver was told to open the rear doors. His ID and destination were checked before he was allowed to pass.

Checkpoint staff said they were on the lookout for anyone trying to sneak through the village after returning from Israel, instead of entering mandatory quarantine.

Abdul Rahman Hussein, an official at the checkpoint, said looking for returnees from Israel was a civic duty.

“Our brothers in the central government can’t reach us in this area, but if there is something urgent they come.”

So far, he said, by working with other local checkpoints, “we have caught four sick people” seeking to avoid quarantine.



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“Pride of Palestine” in fighting shape to reignite MMA career Palestinian, Syrian refugees in Lebanon camps brace for virus

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# Kuwait locks down two districts, extends public holiday over coronavirus

Author:

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DUBAI: Kuwait placed a full lockdown on two densely-populated districts and extended a public holiday by two weeks until April 26 as precautionary measures against the coronavirus, the cabinet said on Monday.

It also extended its partial curfew by two hours in the morning to run from 5 p.m. until 6 a.m. effective Monday until further notice. The interior minister urged people to stay indoors even during non-curfew hours.

The Gulf Arab country has recorded 665 cases of the new coronavirus and one death so far.

It declared a two-week public holiday from March 12 except for entities providing essential services, which has since been extended.

On Monday, the cabinet said all ministries and government institutions would now remain on holiday until April 26.

The two districts to be put under a two-week "complete isolation" are Jleeb Al-Shuyoukh and Mahboula, two heavily populated areas where poorer expatriate workers live.

"The decision to isolate (the two area areas) is in order to test everyone in there and treat them so it does not impact other areas," the state news agency KUNA reported the interior minister as saying.

Countries of the six-member Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have recorded almost 8,000 cases of infection and 60 deaths.



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Kuwait launches online database for disadvantaged families to register for aid amid coronavirus pandemic  
Kuwait's Ministry of Interior launches new online services amid coronavirus pandemic

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## [\*\*Egyptian lawyer demands China pay \\$10 trillion in coronavirus damages\*\*](#)

Author:

Tue, 2020-04-07 00:38

CAIRO: Social media users in Egypt have shared an injunction issued by an Egyptian lawyer to Chinese President Xi Jinping calling on China to pay \$10 trillion due to the damages caused by the coronavirus in Egypt.

Egyptian lawyer Mohamed Talaat based his move on US President Donald Trump's comments that the virus originated in China, with the US president several times calling it the "Chinese virus." Talaat also relied on media sources, which he did not name, that said China had produced the virus as a biological

weapon.

As of Sunday, Egypt had registered 1,173 cases of coronavirus with 78 deaths. Speaking to Arab News, Talaat said that the reason he was taking legal action against China was to safeguard Egyptian rights, especially after news agencies and Trump announced that COVID-19 was "Chinese made."

Talaat, who lives in the Gharbeya governorate south of Cairo and who is filing the lawsuit via the Chinese embassy in Cairo, was driven by allegations by an American lawyer to file a case against Beijing's government demanding that it pay \$20 trillion in compensation for damage caused by the virus.

Press reports circulated last week that US lawyer Larry Klayman slapped a lawsuit fining China \$20 trillion, accusing Beijing of developing and spreading the coronavirus to use it as a biological weapon. The reports were published on the website Freedom Watch, a human rights organization chaired by Klayman.

Talaat said that he urged Egypt's President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi on social media to take up the case and to form a committee of international law experts who would help take the issue to the highest authorities.

Talaat reportedly has not coordinated with anyone in government. He said that Egypt's government "doesn't interfere in judicial issues and maintains a neutral stance." Regarding reaction to his move, he said that there were supporters and detractors, adding there were some people dealing with the issue "too lightly and sarcastically."

He rejected comments made by a Kuwaiti journalist who described the step as "Egyptians pursuing dollars."

## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Mohamed Talaat based his move on US President Donald Trump's comments that the virus originated in China, with the US president several times calling it the 'Chinese virus.'**
- **Speaking to Arab News, Talaat said that the reason he was taking legal action against Beijing was to safeguard Egyptian rights.**
- **Reports circulated last week that US lawyer Larry Klayman slapped a lawsuit fining China \$20 trillion.**

"I want to ask why he didn't attack the United States or the lawyer who filed a case against China in the US? Is it just because I'm an Egyptian lawyer?" Talaat asked.

"Egyptians are filing a court case against China's president calling on him to pay \$10 trillion due to the coronavirus and the suspension of Egyptian flights!" the journalist tweeted on his Twitter account. "The world is looking for a cure for the virus and there are those who are looking for dollars!" He attached the Egyptian lawsuit to his tweet.

Talaat claimed that a number of Italian citizens have phoned to coordinate with him "for the sake of the Italian government."

"If further communication takes place, I will definitely inform the Egyptian

government with regards to the details and names to prevent exploiting the case,” Talaat said.

Talaat added that the suspension of flights to and from Egypt prevented him from traveling to take more serious action. He said in his statement that “when things return to normal and flights resume, I will be able to fly anywhere in the world to promote my case, and legally pursue the Chinese government.”

“What I did was the first step in what is coming,” Talaat said, referring to why he did not address Egypt’s public prosecutor. “We as Egyptians have rights. The president of the world’s biggest country confirmed the issue. America is suffering huge fatalities which did not happen in all the wars it waged.”

For several years, many Egyptian lawyers have added their names to lawsuits in public relations stunts that stir controversy, hoping for fame and TV interviews. However, some of these cases have gone to court.



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# Lebanese expats launch job-creation initiative

Tue, 2020-04-07 00:18

DUBAI: A team of young Lebanese expatriates and locals is hoping to turn the tide on the country's unemployment crisis with the launch of an ambitious online job-creation initiative.

Lebanon's recent economic woes had already contributed to a significant rise in the number of people out of work before the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak delivered another hefty blow to its fragile employment market.

But the 28 team members behind JobsForLebanon.com aim to share the best of their expertise to build positive change and help potential jobseekers find work in Lebanon.

They are calling upon the diaspora of 16 million Lebanese to hire skilled talent on a freelance basis in the country.

The catalyst for the project was the anti-government protests that started in Lebanon in October last year.

Roy Baladi, 36, a San Francisco-based computer scientist who specializes in recruitment technology, said: "It started with a phone call from a childhood friend of mine. That was in December, when the hopes of the revolution were high, and everybody was excited.

"She (Baladi's friend) had just returned from maternity leave and had 10-12 messages and emails from highly educated people, who were looking for a job or money. That rang an alarm bell in my mind.

## **SPEEDREAD**

**The 28 team members behind JobsForLebanon.com aim to share the best of their expertise to build positive change and help potential jobseekers find work in Lebanon.**

"The (Lebanese) Ministry of Finance showed that 45 percent of the population makes less than 5 million liras a year, that's \$3,300 a year. Half the population is making less than 250 bucks a month – who can live on that? You can't pay for tuition, gasoline, and groceries. It's beyond unemployment – it's no jobs and severe levels of poverty."

Baladi began connecting with socially engaged Lebanese organizers from around the world, such as Expats United, in a bid to get a campaign going and when he returned to Lebanon for Christmas his New York-based brother, Edwin Baladi, 34, helped with others to bring JobsForLebanon to life.

The team launched its website last month and visitors can view a video of members of the Lebanese international community encouraging involvement in the jobs initiative with the message, "together, we can unleash the power of the Lebanese community. No matter where we are, together we can keep the economy alive."

Powered by SmartRecruiters – a major recruiting software platform – the

website allows employers to post job offerings and candidates to apply for them. Already the site has had visits from users in 131 countries, more than 100 jobs have been posted, and at least 1,000 candidates have registered. Five hires have been confirmed.

The team plans to grow its partnerships and collaborate with embassies to promote the initiative. Australia and the Netherlands are also among countries looking to launch similar hiring e-platforms based on the JobsForLebanon model.



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Lebanon divided over face masks in virus battle