

Journey of hope



AFP/Suhaila Sahmarani

The relatives of some 50 people believed to be detained in Syria for about 25 years headed to Damascus Monday to try to meet President Bashar Assad, whom they believe to be the only individual with a solution to their plight.

The group was met in Damascus by Syrian Interior Minister Ali Hammoud, who promised that they would receive an answer within "two to three months," according to Wadih Asmar,

a spokesman for SOLIDE (Support for Lebanese in Detention and Exile).

Relatives held banners and waved Lebanese flags. "Until when?" said one banner. "We have the right to know if our loved ones are dead or alive," said another, and: "If you want our friendship, give us back our loved ones."

Syria released 54 Lebanese prisoners in December 2000, with Assad asserting last year

that there were no others held in his country's jails, during an official visit to Paris.

Although a Lebanese government investigative committee was subsequently formed in January 2001 to investigate parents' persistent allegations that their loved ones might still be in Syria, the committee finally ended its inquiries on July 6 without publishing any findings.