

# Lebanon

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Families of more than 17,000 people abducted during the civil war want the cabinet to investigate

## Protestors demand asylum for Red Army prisoners

More than 300 people protested outside the Cabinet's headquarters on Wednesday, demanding political asylum for five Japanese Red Army members sympathetic to the Palestinian cause.

The members have served almost three years for forging documents, illegally residing in Lebanon and using fake passports. The extreme leftist group, which was founded in 1969, is allied to anti-Israeli Palestinian factions and its members are wanted in Japan on international charges of guerrilla activities.

"No to their extradition, yes to political asylum. They are heroic fighters, not terrorists," chanted the protesters who gathered as the ministers held their weekly meeting.

The demonstration was organized by the Friends of Koza

Okamoto and His Companions. The sentences of Okamoto; Masao Adachi, 59; Kazuo Tohira, 46; Haro Wako, 50, and Mariko Yamamoto, 59, the only woman, are due to end in about three months.

Okamoto, 51, was involved in the 1972 shoot-out at Tel Aviv's Lod airport that left 26 people dead, including two members of his group. The attack was organized with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

He was sentenced to life imprisonment in Israel but was freed along with 1,150 Palestinians in a swap for Israeli soldiers in 1985.

Many demonstrators carried placards asking for "freedom for Koza Okamoto and his friends" and hailing the Japanese Red

Army for "offering sacrifices for the Arabs more than the Arabs themselves."

Japan, which does not have an extradition agreement with Lebanon, has sought to extradite the five since they were arrested in Lebanon in February 1997.

But Beirut has turned down Tokyo's request because Lebanese law stipulates they must first serve their sentences before any extradition demand can be examined.

While the Cabinet was in session, another demonstration was held nearby by the families of more than 17,000 people abducted by conflicting militias during the civil war. The few dozen people carried banners calling on the government to investigate their fate.