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# Families of missing plan Baabda demo

## Committee hopes sit-ins will pressure investigators to release report

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Members of the Committee of the Families of the Kidnapped and Missing during the War plan to stage a sit-in in front of Baabda Palace for the first time on Monday.

Although the families feel they could encounter resistance from presidential guards, they want to put pressure on the government to announce the results of the investigative commission set up by Prime Minister Salim Hoss in January.

The commission, comprised of five army intelligence officers who conducted the investigations, was given three months to produce its report.

When the first deadline neared its end in April, Brigadier Salim Abu Ismail, who headed the commission, asked for an additional three months to complete the task. With the second deadline ending on Tuesday, the families are now demanding that the results be made public.

"Unless the families know exactly what the findings of the commission are, they won't believe it has done its job," said committee member Albert Abi Azar. "There's nothing worse than silence and this is what we've faced until now."

On Monday and Tuesday, the families of the missing and kidnapped will hold simultaneous sit-ins in front of Baabda Palace, Parliament and the Grand Serail.

"We have the right to know the complete details, such as how many of the kidnapped are thought to be in Israel and Syria, and we also want to know how the commission arrived at these findings," Abi Azar said on Sunday.

On Sunday, a delegation that included Halwani and Abi Azar met Hoss. After the meeting, Halwani said that Hoss would announce the results of the investigation into the missing



Families of the kidnapped staged a sit-in in front of the Cabinet office last week

once he receives the report from the commission.

"He asked us if we wanted the information to be publicly announced no matter what the conclusions are and we said that was exactly what we wanted," Halwani said.

In a telephone interview with The Daily Star, Hoss would not give a specific date for announcing the results but said it would be "some-time soon. This is their right and I will announce it soon. I can't say yet how or when this will happen until I read the report but I will make the announcement regardless of the conclusions," Hoss said.

According to committee president Wadad Halwani, 2,050 questionnaires have been submitted to the commission over the past six months. When the commission was formed, Abu

Ismail asked families of the missing and kidnapped to fill in the forms, including all the details of their missing family members and the circumstances surrounding their disappearance.

The preliminary results Halwani received from Abu Ismail revealed that 203 missing or kidnapped people were thought to be in Israel while 168 are thought to be in Syria. The families want to know where the commission believes the rest of the kidnapped or missing are.

Committee members also demand that the government finally make a decision about what to do with the findings, especially since the families themselves are not prepared to make a final decision about whether or not their loved ones remain alive.

"It's up to the government to

decide, once and for all, who is thought to be dead and who isn't," Abi Azar said.

In 1995, the government issued a law allowing families to obtain official documents confirming the death of a missing relative to clear up inheritance issues. But the law was almost universally rejected by the families of the kidnapped.

With the prospect of parliamentary elections next month, the families also fear the issue will be "buried" if it is delayed any further. Abi Azar said he was also frustrated at the failure of committee members to obtain an appointment with President Emile Lahoud.

"The president gives appointments to football teams and immigrants' delegations but not us," he said. "Not once did we get a response to our many inquiries to get an appointment. I guess one of the reasons we have not been granted an appointment is because the Syrian aspect of the issue is too embarrassing."

203 missing or kidnapped people thought to be in Israel