

'Some days, you wish you were dead'

ILLEGALLY TAKEN:

Book a bid to humanise suffering of Palestinians in Israeli jails

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FROM his demeanour, you can't tell that Palestinian Magdi Anro has been held in Israeli prisons since age 16. There is certain calmness in him although when he talks about his family, you can sense his longing for a home that he can no longer set foot in.

His story is not that much different from other long-serving Palestinians freed from Israeli jails in exchange for soldiers. Hundreds of men, women and children were captured illegally, sometimes over

made-up offences. But his is a story that needs to be told.

In an interview with the *New Sunday Times* recently, Anro, 36, said he had been jailed four times — the first when he was 16 years old in 1995 for throwing stones at an Israeli tank, something which he denied.

"The soldiers came to my house and arrested me in front of my mum, I was in prison for nine months and I missed school. I did not understand what I did that made it alright for them to take me from my family."

Anro said the last time he was detained was in 2003, when he was accused of spying and murdering an Israeli soldier. He was put behind bars for eight years before being released in 2011 under a prisoner exchange programme that was part of the peace talks with Hamas.

"I stayed in a small cell with 10 people, which had a toilet and eating area. A few times each week, a soldier will come in and 'discipline' you by hitting you with iron rods, a piece of wood or their bare hands. At first, it hurts but after a while, you

become numb and get accustomed to the pain. They can hit me as many times as possible but my soul is intact. Survival is important. I survived by thinking of my mother."

The torture was not only physical but also psychological. Anro can't remember most of it as he did not want to remember certain memories as it was too painful for him.

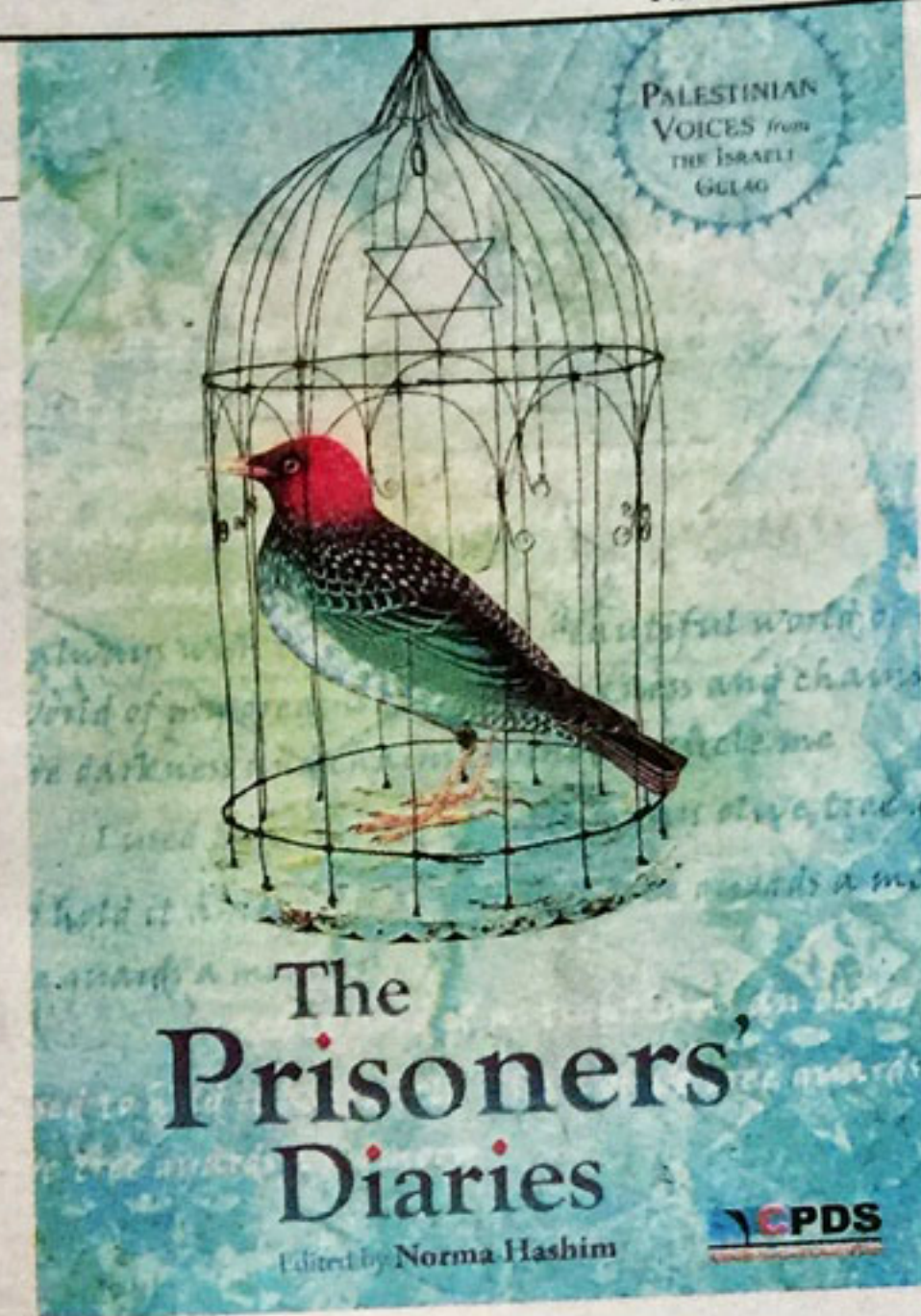
He remembered that some days, there would be no electricity and water, and the soldiers would put sugar and salt in his clothes and underwear, or soak them in water.

"We would then have to wear wet clothes all day."

He paused and sometimes struggled to relate his experiences.

"If I tell you certain things, many will not be able to relate how it feels to spend a night in prison, let alone years or decades. It gets lonely. And some days, you wish that you can just die to ease the pain."

Through the exchange programme, Anro was promised his freedom but it did not come without a price as he was exiled and told not



'The Prisoners' Diaries', compiled by social activist **Norma Hashim**, contains the accounts of 22 Palestinian prisoners freed from Israeli jails.

to return to his homeland.

He went to Qatar for a while to work and, eventually, came to Malaysia to continue his studies in International and Strategic Studies at Universiti Malaya.

His story was just one of the harrowing accounts of pain among 22 former Palestinian prisoners highlighted in a book entitled *The Prisoners Diaries*, compiled by social activist Norma Hashim in early 2013.

"I wanted people to know what

these prisoners have gone through. "Therefore, I resolved to get these accounts translated and published to raise awareness of the plight of the Palestinian prisoners," Norma said at the launch of the Bahasa Malaysia version of the book in the KL International Book Fair here recently.

She said when a friend sent her the interviews, she felt that these stories were important as they humanised the prisoners instead of just being statistics.