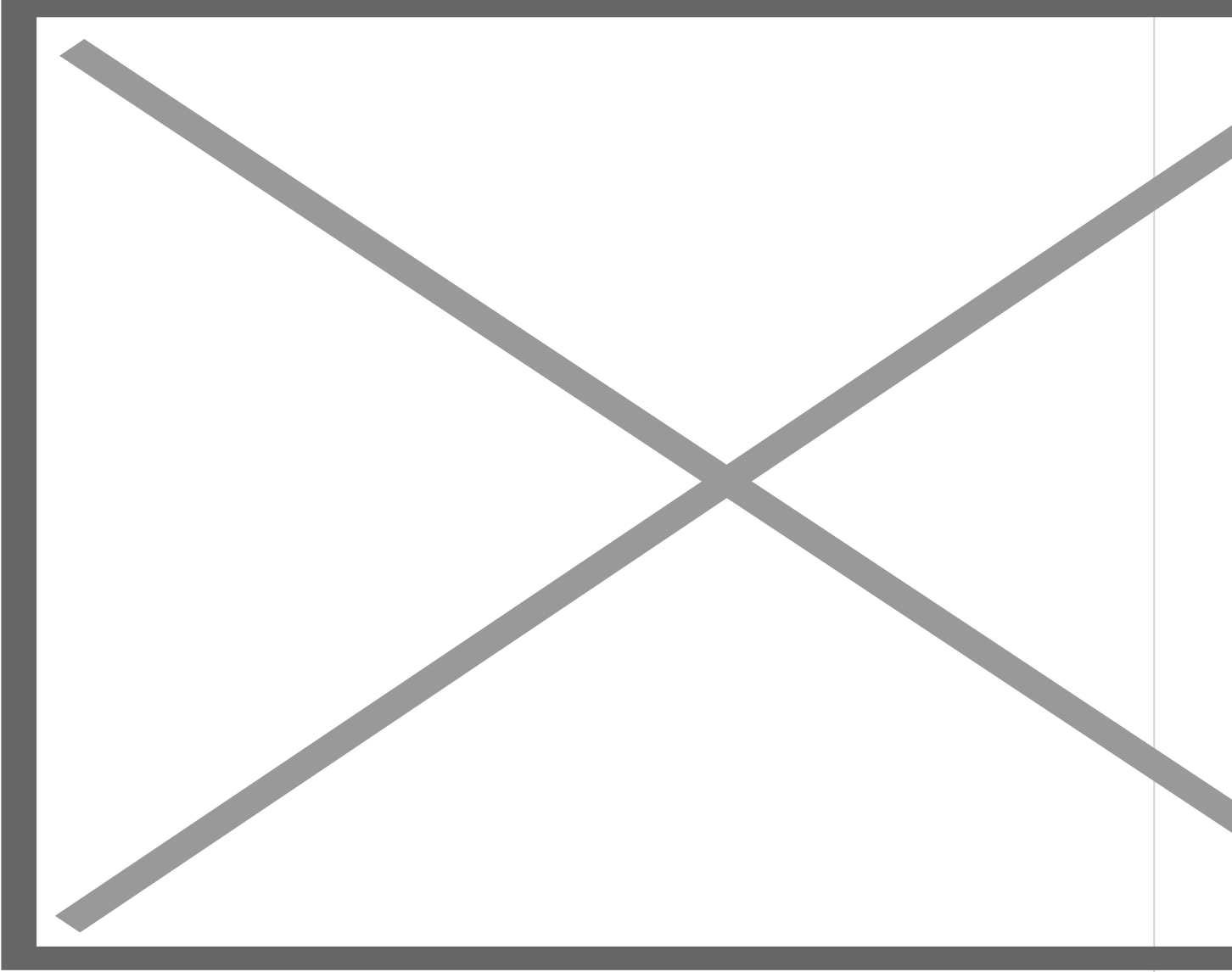


Israel postpones roll-out of COVID vaccine to Palestinian workers

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Palestinian labourers, who were not able to cross into Israel for work, gather near an Israeli checkpoint [Photo: Mussa Qawasma/Reuters]

Tel Aviv, March 6 (RHC)-- Israel says it is postponing until further notice plans to administer COVID vaccinations to Palestinians who work inside the country and in its settlements in the occupied West Bank.

COGAT, the Israeli military branch responsible for civil affairs in the Palestinian territories, had last week confirmed that the COVID vaccination drive had “been approved by the political echelon”.

The announcement was confirmed by the Palestinian Authority who said it had reached an agreement with Israel that would see the country vaccinate 100,000 Palestinian workers. But COGAT on Friday announced a postponement which it attributed to “administrative delays,” saying that a new start for the campaign would be determined at a later time.

The inoculation drive was supposed to begin on Sunday at West Bank crossings into Israel and at Israeli industrial zones. Such inoculations could have assuaged criticism of Israel for not sharing significant amounts of its COVID vaccine stockpiles with Palestinians living under Israeli control in the West Bank and those in the Gaza Strip – even as Israel succeeded in launching one of the fastest vaccine roll-outs in the world.

Israel had also announced plans to share surplus vaccines with far-flung allies in Africa, Europe and Latin America, but the decision was frozen by legal questions.

On Thursday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu with leaders of Denmark and Austria said the three nations would join forces in the fight against COVID-19 with an investment in research and the roll-out of vaccines.

Some 100,000 Palestinian labourers from the West Bank work in Israel. The PA had acquired enough doses for only 6,000 of its people – meaning the vast majority of the estimated five million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip will remain unvaccinated.

The West Bank was placed under new restrictive measures last week to curb the surge in infections.

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