

Gaza man dies of coronavirus as enclave clamps down on outbreak

Thu, 2020-08-27 01:38

GAZA: A 61-year-old man has died in the Gaza Strip after contracting the coronavirus, Palestinian authorities said on Wednesday as they clamped down on an outbreak of the pandemic in the enclave.

The man had suffered previous illnesses and had been on a respirator, the Health Ministry said. It was the first death among the general population since an infected woman died at a quarantine center in March.

Health officials said nine more cases were discovered on Wednesday. Six of them were in the isolated Maghazi refugee camp where a first four cases had been confirmed on Monday, prompting Gaza's Hamas authorities to impose a full lockdown.

The three other cases were in northern Gaza Strip, indicating the virus has begun to spread into different areas of the enclave of 2 million people.

The outbreak outside Maghazi remains slow but it cemented concerns by local and international health organizations over the territory's potentially disastrous combination of poverty, densely populated refugee camps and limited hospital capacity.

With local authorities maintaining a lockdown in all cities, people were instructed to stay home at all times and to wear face masks if, in cases of extreme necessity, they had to go out.

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency UNRWA, which helps over half of Gaza's population, said it was looking into alternative plans to continue health, education and food services to beneficiaries should the lockdown be extended.

Adnan Abu Hasna, UNRWA spokesman in Gaza, said clinics remained open but physical presence was prohibited, instead staffers were providing medical consultation over the phone and some medication was delivered to patients at home.

"We are in constant consultation with the Health Ministry and we are also in discussion over the implementation of our own alternative plans in order to ensure the continuation of delivering services to refugees," Abu Hasna said.

Monday's cases were uncovered after a woman traveled to the Israeli-occupied West Bank, where she tested positive, the Gaza Health Ministry said. A ministry spokesman urged everyone who might have visited a supermarket outside a hospital in central Gaza to quarantine themselves and report to medics immediately.



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Gaza reports first COVID-19 cases outside quarantine areas, declares lockdown
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[**A free supermarket offers dignity to Lebanon's most vulnerable**](#)

Wed, 2020-08-26 23:05

DUBAI: Beit El Baraka, which means “house of blessings” in Arabic, is a nonprofit organization in Beirut that is living up to its name in a time of crisis.

It was launched by Maya Chams Ibrahimchah last year to offer a helping hand to elderly and retired people abandoned by the state. More recently, it has been providing a lifeline to cash-strapped families struggling to survive amid Lebanon's economic collapse.

Beit El Baraka chiefly operates through its free supermarket in the capital's Karm El-Zeitoun neighborhood. The store provides a friendly and accessible environment for the 1,012 people it serves each day. The August 4 explosions

in Beirut, while causing temporary disruptions, having not dimmed the spirit of altruism of the NGO's founder.

"Two factors are important to us: dignity and security," said Ibrahimchah, a graduate of the American University of Beirut. "When someone visits us, it's like entering a person's home. Usually, a home is a place where you feel safe. Your family is supposed to treat you with kindness, respect you as a citizen with rights, and support you."

A communications expert and heritage-preservation activist, Ibrahimchah said the decision to set up a charitable organization was sparked by distressing daily encounters with poverty resulting from failing, bankrupt government institutions caught in a perfect storm of crises.

She recalled the day she decided to do something. She met a woman who had worked as a French teacher for 40 years, who had lost her home and was sitting in the street surrounded by her few remaining possessions: some suitcases and boxes of books.

"How can someone so educated just end up on the streets?" asked Ibrahimchah. After finding shelter for the woman, she and the teacher spent time together and began to research Lebanese retirement laws and pension plans. They were dismayed to discover how little retirees receive as end-of-service benefits after many years of hard work.

An International Monetary Fund report published in 2016 found Lebanon to be the only country in the Middle East and North Africa region that lacks a social security system for retirees from the private sector, who lose their benefits and health coverage when their service ends.

The country also has the highest percentage of people still working past the age of 65 to pay their bills as the cost of living keeps rising.

Another incident that left its mark on Ibrahimchah was a visit to an apartment where a couple lived by candlelight in the evenings because they had been without electricity for eight years.

"These are things that you're not supposed to see in the 21st century," she said. "It's not just shameful, it shows a lack of dignity from our leaders."

"The Lebanese people are educated, cultured and known for their resilience – they fall and rise again. We have 5,000 years of history in Lebanon and we're one of the oldest countries in the world. How can a country that has endured so much and become all that it's become be reduced to this level of misery?"

A woman on a mission, Ibrahimchah opened Beit El Baraka's free supermarket in February 2019. It works on a system based on points rather than money: younger retirees are encouraged to work with Beit El Baraka, interacting with others and gaining points by cooking, delivering food to the older beneficiaries, and offering assistance in their homes.

THE NUMBERS

Lebanon's economic crisis

- 190% rise in food costs in May compared with a year earlier.**
- 172% increase in clothing costs during the same period.**
- 80% loss in value of the Lebanese pound in recent weeks.**

"In this way we are building a community where people work," Ibrahimchah said. "We're trying to change the perception of poverty. The people that come to our shop look like you and me. They are not poor, they have been impoverished, which are two very different concepts."

Many elderly people in Lebanon have been neglected, leading some to attempt suicide, a problem that Ibrahimchah said is as "taboo" in Lebanese society.

"We were able to find a lot of them and we resolved their issues," she said. "It was very simple; they just needed to feel that their lives mattered. So, we make them work, no matter how old they are. They wake up in the morning with so much happiness because they have a task to do and other people to help."

Thanks to contracts with some of Lebanon's biggest corporations, the shelves of Beit El Baraka's supermarket remain stocked with a wide range of food and products.

"What was important for me was that people have freedom of choice," said Ibrahimchah, explaining the idea behind the store. "When you tell someone to choose what they want, you're giving them freedom, which means you're giving them dignity."

The environmentally friendly store does not use plastic bags; instead shoppers are given a large, reusable jute bag. They can choose from bread, eggs, rice, dairy products, canned food, cooking oil, locally grown fruit and vegetables, meat, poultry and household products, including sanitary items for women. Select chocolates and gluten-free foods are also available.

Although the supermarket was forced to close during the coronavirus lockdown, Beit El Baraka's volunteers ensured its beneficiaries did not go without. In partnership with the Lebanese Food Bank, they delivered boxes and bags packed with food and other items to the homes of clients. Face masks and hand sanitizers were also supplied.

As the economic crisis wreaks havoc on the lives of many in Lebanon, Ibrahimchah is focusing on helping the families in greatest need. In addition to operating the supermarket, Beit El Baraka's team also refurbishes homes and provides replacement furniture, and arranges medical treatment for people suffering from cancer, diabetes, osteoporosis and other conditions.

Beit El Baraka has expanded its operations in response to the sharp increase in demand for emergency assistance in the wake of the Beirut blast. Volunteers have set up a relief center in the capital and fanned out to different neighborhoods. Among its targets are raising \$3 million in donations and rehabilitation of more than 3,000 destroyed homes and shops.



Beit El Baraka chiefly operates through its free supermarket in Beirut's Karm El-Zeitoun neighborhood. (Supplied)

For a relatively young organization, Beit El Baraka's achievements are impressive: 55 homes refurbished, 356 patients treated, 93 rents paid, 128 water and electricity bills paid. This has been done with the help of 25,712 donors and 212 young volunteers. The charity has also been endorsed by Google, Benevity and the Bill & Melissa Gates Foundation.

Agriculture is at the heart of Beit El Baraka's undertakings. Ibrahimchah

said that local crop cultivation falls far below its full potential in Lebanon. The country's soil is fertile and 64 percent of land is arable, yet studies show that agriculture contributes only 5 percent of the country's GDP, and more than 80 percent of food and beverages are imported.

Ibrahimchah said that a "miracle" happened when a woman donated more than 250,000 square meters of land to Beit El Baraka. It is now being used as a sheep and chicken farm, producing dairy products, poultry meat and eggs that are stocked by the supermarket. Thanks to additional generous donations, the organization has been gifted more land on which to grow a wide variety of fruits and vegetables.



Beit El Baraka was launched by Maya Chams Ibrahimchah last year to offer a helping hand to elderly and retired people abandoned by the state. (Supplied)

All of Beit El Baraka's activities are funded by donations from businesses

and individuals around the world. As the organization grows and helps more people, it encounters a “vicious circle” of funding, said Ibrahimchah

“The more demand you have, the more you need funds,” she said. “The more funds you get, the greater the demand becomes. It’s important to highlight the fact that NGOs that are growing are not just growing financially; they’re growing in terms of need too.”

The work of Beit El Baraka has touched the lives of 180,000 people in 62 parts of Lebanon so far. Despite the crippling economic crisis in the country, Ibrahimchah remains hopeful for the future of her people and, most of all, grateful for the meaningful friendships she has formed in the past two years.

“The retirees that we help are our blessing,” she said. “They have changed our lives and give us so much happiness. Today, I have 100,000 new friends and they have wonderful stories. You listen to them and they take you back to a time when Lebanon was the Lebanon that I wish I knew.”

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UNIFIL urges Israeli, Lebanese 'restraint'

Wed, 2020-08-26 23:01

BEIRUT: Maj. Gen. Stefano Del Col, head of mission and commander of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), on Wednesday urged Israeli and Lebanese parties "to exercise restraint and avoid any provocative act that would further escalate tensions and endanger the cessation of hostilities."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu threatened Lebanon hours after Israeli forces fired dozens of fluorescent and phosphorous bombs at Lebanese border towns, causing fires but no human casualties.

Netanyahu warned Hezbollah "not to test the striking force of Israel." He added: "Hezbollah exposes the Lebanese state to danger because of its aggression."

Lebanon decided to submit a complaint to the UN Security Council (UNSC) regarding Israel's attack.

It took place 48 hours before the UNSC approved the renewal of UNIFIL's mandate, which expires on Aug. 31, for one year.

In 2017, Israel sent a complaint to the UNSC, accusing Hezbollah of "establishing observation posts along the southern Lebanese border under the guise of an environmental organization."

The Lebanese Supreme Defense Council, headed by President Michel Aoun, met hours after the attack. The council was briefed on the details of what happened on the border.

UNIFIL spokesman Andrea Tenenti said it "detected the launch of many flare bombs from Israeli army positions along the Blue Line in front of the towns of Aitaroun, Aita Al-Shaab, □□Mays Al-Jabal, Hula, Kafr Kila and Kafr Shuba in southern Lebanon. UNIFIL's radars also detected mortar and artillery shells, most of which were smoke shells, in addition to intense drone activities over these areas."

He added that UNIFIL "immediately ... reinforced its forces along the Blue Line," the UN border demarcation between the two countries.

Tenenti said Del Col stressed the importance of "investigating all the facts and circumstances surrounding the dangerous developments that took place ... along the Blue Line." Both sides were urged "to fully cooperate with UNIFIL in determining the facts."

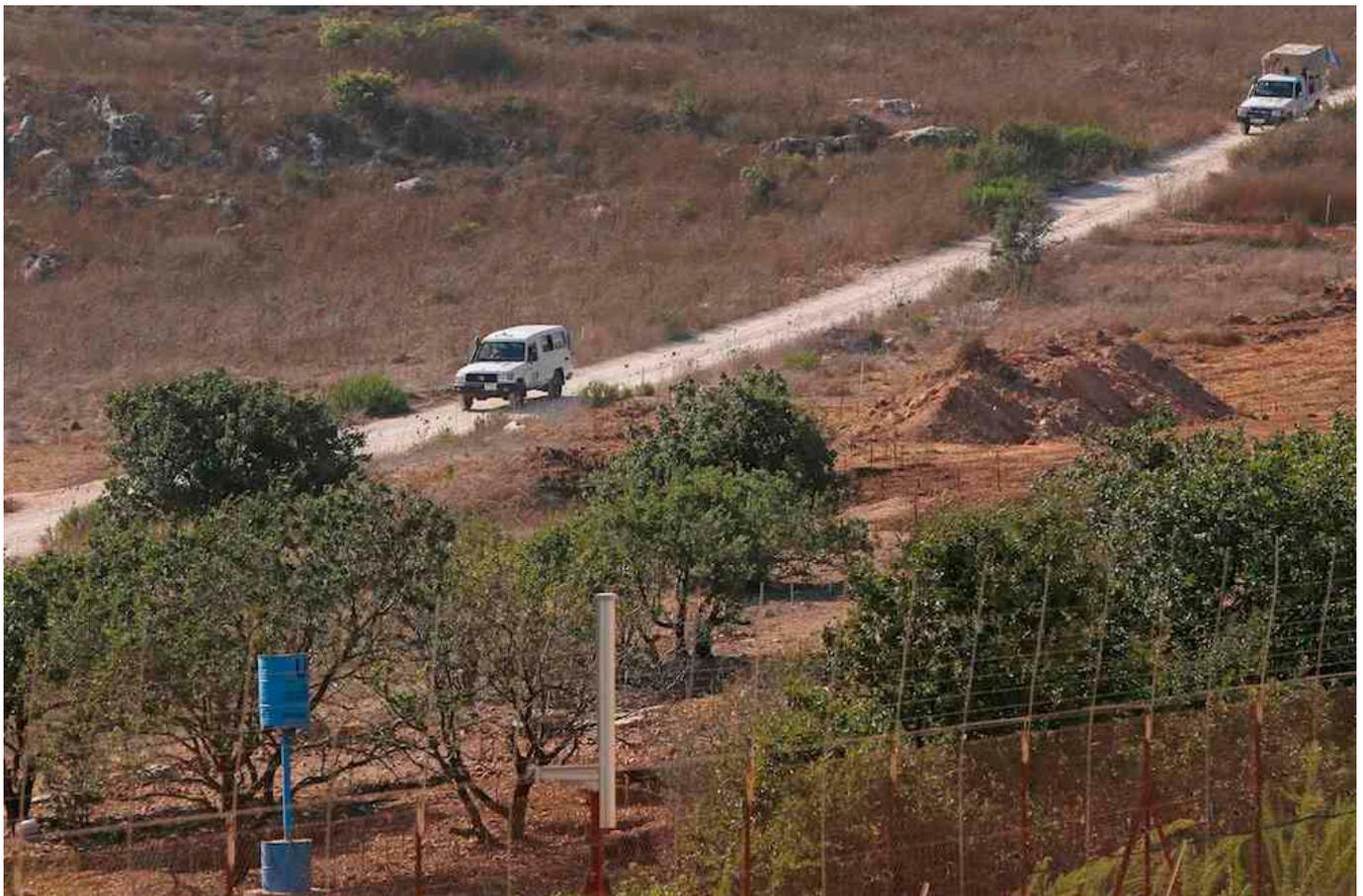
Netanyahu tweeted that "Israel views with great gravity Hezbollah's firing at our forces," adding: "We will respond mightily to any attack on us."

Israeli military spokesman Avichay Adraee said: "Military helicopters and

another aircraft attacked targets belonging to Hezbollah ... in the border area." He added: "The Lebanese government is responsible for what is happening from its territory."

Hours after the attack, Walid Sukkarieh, an MP with Hezbollah's parliamentary bloc and a former officer in the Lebanese Army, said: "The resistance will not slide into war, because Israel will not slide into war, nor will the resistance seek war."

Meanwhile, Lebanon's General Directorate of the Internal Security Forces announced "the arrest of a Syrian youth belonging to Daesh who was planning to carry out terrorist operations in Lebanon."



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Israel strikes Hezbollah after gunfire on Lebanon border
UK envoy blames Hezbollah behavior for undermining peace in Lebanon

UK envoy blames Hezbollah behavior for undermining peace in Lebanon

Wed, 2020-08-26 22:41

CAIRO: The British ambassador to Lebanon said Wednesday that the behavior of some parties, including that of Hezbollah, undermines peace in Lebanon. The remarks by Chris Rampling came during his meeting with Mar Bishara Boutros Al-Rai, the Lebanese patriarch of the Maronite Catholic church. Rampling said he discussed the political solution proposed by Al-Rai for Lebanon, which aims to maintain the country's characteristics of pluralism, openness, and democracy.

"I discussed with his eminence the neutrality initiative that he launched and its content, which it is clear that some parties, including Hezbollah, did not support, and this undermines the stability of Lebanon."

The ambassador also described his meeting with the Al-Rai as "very important."

"We talked about the Beirut bombing, and I expressed my condolences to his eminence and the Lebanese people," he was quoted by Lebanon's state news agency as saying.

"We talked about the difficult economic situation, the difficulties that Lebanon and the Lebanese are facing, the necessity for reforms at this delicate stage."



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Lebanon defense council denounces 'Israeli assault' at border
Israel strikes Hezbollah after gunfire on Lebanon border

[Campaign launched to fight dengue fever in Aden](#)

Author:

Thu, 2020-08-27 02:28

ADEN: A campaign to fight dengue fever in Aden has been launched by the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center (KSRelief) in cooperation with the Al-Awn Foundation. The spraying campaign is being carried out in the city's Buraiga district. It will last five months and benefit more than 860,000 people.

Fahd Al-Alawi, director of the Ministry of Health's office in Buraiga, praised the center's efforts and its fast response in going to targeted areas after dengue fever cases emerged in Ras Imran.

KSRelief launched an emergency response project in July to combat dengue fever. Spraying campaigns, as well as the removal of stagnant water and wetlands, are to be carried out in all of Aden's directorates to get rid of mosquitoes.

The center has also distributed 4,500 cartons of dates to displaced and affected people from Al-Jawf to Marib governorates, benefiting 4,500 families, and distributed 920 cartons of dates in Al-Dhale governorate, benefiting 920 families.

In Hodeidah governorate, KSRelief distributed 1,494 cartons of dates to displaced and affected people, benefiting 1,494 families.

The center also continues to provide medical assistance to Syrian refugees in the Zaatari camp in Jordan.



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