

Gaza rescuers say **46 killed** as UN slams US-backed aid system

● 21 people were killed and around 150 wounded by Israeli fire

● The territory of more than two million people is suffering from famine-like conditions

AFP | Gaza City, Palestinian Territories

Gaza's civil defence agency said Israeli forces killed another 46 people waiting for aid in the Palestinian territory yesterday as rights groups and UN agencies slammed the US-backed food distribution system.

Civil defence spokesman Mahmud Bassal told AFP that 21 people were killed and around 150 wounded by Israeli fire near an aid point in central Gaza early Tuesday, and that another 25 were killed in a separate incident in south Gaza.

"Every day we face this scenario: martyrs, injuries, in unbearable numbers," paramedic Ziad Farhat told AFP at Nasser Hospital in southern Gaza.

"Hospitals cannot accommodate the number of casualties arriving," he said.

The latest deaths came as Israel's opposition leader and the families of Israeli hostages being held in Gaza called on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to widen a ceasefire with Iran to include the Palestinian territory.

Pressure also grew on the US and Israeli-backed privately run aid group Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF), which was brought into the Palestinian territory at the end of May to replace United Nations agencies.

The head of the UN agency for Palestinian refugees (UNRWA) called the system an "abomination" while a spokesman for the UN human rights office,



An Israeli military bulldozer demolishes a home at the Nur Shams Palestinian refugee camp, east of Tulkarem, in the Israeli occupied West Bank

'Tank shells'

Thameen Al-Kheetan, condemned the "weaponisation of food" in Gaza.

According to figures issued on Tuesday by the health ministry in the Hamas-run Gaza Strip, at least 516 people have been killed and nearly 3,800 wounded by Israeli fire while seeking rations since late May.

The territory of more than two million people is suffering from famine-like conditions after Israel blocked all supplies from early March to the end of May and continues to impose restrictions, according to human rights groups.

The Israeli military said the reports of deaths near the Netzarim corridor were "under review."

Gaza civil defence spokesman Bassal reported a first deadly shooting "with bullets and tank shells" near the Netzarim corridor in central Gaza where thousands of Palestinians gather each night for rations from a nearby GHF distribution point.

The Israeli military later said that a crowd had been identified in an area "adjacent" to its troops.

France condemned what it called deadly "Israeli fire" against civilians in a statement from the foreign ministry apparently referring to the Netzarim corridor incident.

Witness Ribhi Al-Qassas told AFP that troops had "opened fire randomly" at a crowd he esti-

mated at 50,000 people.

The second incident took place in south Gaza about two kilometres from another GHF centre in Rafah governorate, Bassal said.

"Israeli forces targeted civilian gatherings near Al-Alam and Al-Shakoush areas with bullets and tank shells", he told AFP.

Israeli restrictions on media in the Gaza Strip and difficulties in accessing some areas mean AFP is unable to independently verify the tolls and details provided by rescuers and witnesses in the Palestinian territory.

"The weaponisation of food for civilians, in addition to restricting or preventing their access to life-sustaining services, constitutes a war crime,"



Relatives mourn over the body of a man killed a day earlier while attempting to get aid at a distribution point near the Israeli-controlled Zikim border crossing, during a funeral service at Al-Shifa hospital in Gaza City

Al-Kheetan said in Geneva.

UN agencies and major aid groups have refused to cooperate with GHF over concerns it was designed to cater to Israeli military objectives.

In a statement on Saturday, GHF said it was "delivering aid at scale, securely and effectively", but it acknowledged it "cannot meet the full scale of need while large parts of Gaza remain closed".

GHF has denied responsibility for deaths near its aid points.

On Monday, more than a dozen human rights organisations called on the organisation to cease its operations, warning of possible complicity in war crimes.



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E.coli can turn plastic into painkillers, chemists discover

AFP | Paris, France

Scientists have found a way to use the bacteria *E.Coli* to convert plastic waste into a popular painkiller, a study said Monday, though outside experts doubted the technique would make a dent in the fight against plastic pollution.

Paracetamol, which is one of the most commonly used drugs worldwide, is made from the derivatives of fossil fuels, often by Asia-based subcontractors using cheap, polluting methods that contribute to climate change.

The world is also facing an escalating crisis of plastic pollution, with countries set for another bruising round of negotiations in August in the hope of sealing an international treaty to reduce plastic waste.

The British team of research-



Picture for representation only

ers behind the new study sought to find a solution to the two problems by roping in a third -- *E.coli*, which is normally known for making people sick when they eat contaminated food.

First the chemists used a mol-

ecule derived from PET plastic, which is used in bottles and many other plastic products the world over, to spark a chemical reaction in a strain of *E.coli*.

This created a molecule they called PABA, according to the

Nature Chemistry study, which was partly funded by drug firm AstraZeneca.

By genetically modifying the bacteria, the chemists were able to transform their molecule into acetaminophen, also known as paracetamol.

"This work demonstrates that PET plastic isn't just waste or a material destined to become more plastic -- it can be transformed by microorganisms into valuable new products, including those with potential for treating disease," lead study Stephen Wallace said in a statement. Singaporean researchers not involved in the study praised how it combined synthetic and biological chemistry.

But "several practical considerations remain" to take this idea beyond the proof-of-concept stage, they wrote in a linked commentary in the journal Na-

ture Chemistry.

The chemical reaction produces only a limited amount of PABA molecules, which "may be insufficient for industrial applications", they wrote.

Melissa Valliant, communications director of the Beyond Plastics project of Bennington College in the United States, expressed scepticism.

"A new 'plastic-eating bacteria' pops up in the news every few months and has been doing so for years," she told AFP.

"These discoveries never scale up to anything significant enough to tackle the massive plastic pollution problem."

This "crisis needs to be stopped at the source," she added, which means "companies and policymakers must reduce the amount of plastic being produced and used in the first place".



E. coli is one of the most studied organisms in biology and was the first organism to have its entire genome sequenced.

Despite its reputation for causing foodborne illness, most strains of *E. coli* are harmless and actually live in your intestines, helping with digestion and vitamin K production.

In fact, *E. coli* is a cornerstone of genetic engineering--scientists use it like a microscopic factory to produce insulin, growth hormones, and even vaccines by inserting human genes into it.