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Saturday, 19, August, 2006 (25, Rajab, 1427)

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Hezbollah Pays War Victims

Agencies

BEIRUT, 19 August 2006 — Hezbollah handed out bundles of cash yesterday to people whose homes were wrecked by Israeli bombing, consolidating the group's support among the masses.



A man counts a wad of cash he received as compensation for his destroyed house from a Hezbollah activist in Beirut. (Reuters)

"People already had faith in Hezbollah, this will strengthen their faith," said Ayman Jaber, 27, with a wad of \$12,000 in banknotes Hezbollah had given him.

Israeli and US officials have voiced concern that Hezbollah will entrench its popularity by moving fast to help people whose homes were destroyed or damaged in the 34-day conflict with Israel.

Hezbollah has not said where the funds are coming from to compensate people for an estimated 15,000 destroyed homes. The scheme appears likely to cost at least \$150 million. The Lebanese government has yet to launch anything similar. "Nobody helped us other than Hezbollah," said Fayrouz Ali Jaber, 53, as she waited for the \$12,000 which she said she would use to house her family of nine. "The state hasn't helped us, or looked out for us. It doesn't even know us." Her home was in Haret Hreik in Beirut's southern suburbs. "It was a deluxe flat, furnished with everything," she said. "Nothing survived."

Al-Fadl Shalaq, head of the Council for Development and Reconstruction, said the devastation from the 34-day conflict exceeded that caused by Lebanon's 1975-1990 civil war. He put the material loss at \$3.6 billion.

Late last night, Israeli warplanes flew over Lebanon's Bekaa Valley and the north of the country but did not launch an attack, a security source said. A Reuters reporter said military jets, helicopters and drones had circled over the area and had come under anti-aircraft fire but had not been hit and had not opened fire themselves.

Trying to bolster a five-day-old truce, Lebanese troops moved deeper into the south and about 600 deployed in Shebaa village, near the Israeli-occupied Shebaa Farms enclave.

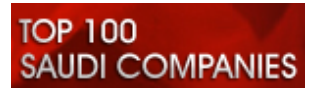
The Lebanese Army has had no presence in the area since an Arab decision allowed Palestinian guerrillas to operate there nearly 40 years ago. Israel's 1982 invasion expelled the Palestinians and Hezbollah took over the region after the Israeli military ended a 22-year occupation of the south in 2000.

The Shebaa Farms is a small patch of land claimed by

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Lebanon, but occupied by Israel since it captured the Golan Heights from Syria in the 1967 War. The United Nations deems the territory Syrian until such time as Syria cedes it to Lebanon.

On Thursday, the Lebanese Army began deploying a force that will eventually number 15,000 soldiers south of the Litani River, about 20 km from the border with Israel.

UN Deputy Secretary-General Mark Malloch Brown yesterday made an urgent appeal for European countries to provide troops for a peacekeeping force. "The particular appeal I want to make today is that Europe comes forward with troops for this first wave," he told journalists.

While around half a dozen countries have offered troops, European powers expected to have provided key contributions have proven reluctant to give firm troop pledges for a 3,500-strong vanguard force due to be in place in 10 days. "The next few days are going to be very challenging to make sure that we meet this commitment to 3,500 troops, or 7,000 boots on the ground in 10 days from now," Malloch Brown added.

Italy's government approved sending troops and the defense minister said his country might eventually lead the mission. Officials have said Italy might contribute up to 3,000 troops.

Malaysia, which has offered between 850 and 1,000 troops, said Israel should have no role in deciding which countries make up the expanded UN peacekeeping force. "We're going to be on Lebanese territory... We're not going to be on Israeli territory," said Malaysia's Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar on his return from Lebanon.

Malaysia holds chairmanship of the 56-nation Organization of the Islamic Conference, and does not recognize Israel. Syed Hamid was responding to reports that Israel did not want peacekeepers from nations not having diplomatic relations with it.



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