



NAAMEH, Lebanon : A general view shot taken on March 30, 2016, shows trucks dumping their load at the Naameh landfill, just south of the Lebanese capital, Beirut. — AFP photos



NAAMEH, Lebanon : Lebanese schoolgirls play in their garden in the village of Baawarta as trucks are seen in the background unloading garbage at the Naameh landfill.

TO FLEE LEBANON'S TRASH CRISIS, FAMILY HEADS TO SYRIA

'THE SMELL IS WORSE BECAUSE IT'S BEEN THERE FOR SEVEN TO EIGHT MONTHS'

NAAMEH, Lebanon: Imagine living near a trash dump so putrid that you would rather move to war-torn Syria. That's what Fayyad Ayyash, his wife Riham and their four young daughters plan to do next week, leaving behind their home in Lebanon for neighboring Syria. Their modest two-storey house in the town of Naameh, about 20 kilometers (12 miles) south of the Lebanese capital, directly overlooks the infamous and odorous landfill by the same name. "We're going next week. In Syria, there's a possibility I might die. Here, we'll definitely die," Fayyad tells AFP.

From his grassy backyard, dozens of large trucks carrying tons of waste can be seen and smelled lining up to add their load to the "trash mountain." The July 2015 closure of the notorious landfill lies at the heart of Lebanon's trash crisis, which has seen rivers of trash spread across the Mediterranean country, triggering protests nationwide. Then last month, the gov-

ernment made a controversial decision to reopen it and this was the last straw for residents like Fayyad. Pulling out a bright blue inhaler, he says his family has been suffering from respiratory problems for months because of the dump.

His daughters, whose ages range from just under two to 10 years, all have trouble eating and sleeping. "It's always worse at night than during the day. The whole area is swarming with the same smell and the same sickness," he says. Fayyad says it's become so bad, he's decided to flee across the border to the town of Libeen in southern Syria, a country where a conflict has been raging since 2011.

Costly medical bills

The Naameh landfill opened in 1997 and was meant to be a temporary dump, but an alternative site was never opened. For 20 years, the waste generated in Beirut and Mount Lebanon-

the country's most populous areas was dumped in Naameh. The verdant valley swelled into a trash mountain of more than 15 million tons. Furious residents forced the closure of the site in July 2015, saying it was leading to high cancer rates, skin diseases and breathing problems. Uncollected rubbish began piling up around Beirut and its suburbs, emitting a horrible stench that sparked protests in downtown Beirut demanding a long-term solution. After months of political wrangling, Lebanon's cabinet announced a four-year plan to end the waste crisis and its first step was reopening Naameh for two months.

"When the dump reopened, my baby immediately started throwing up again," Fayyad says. Fayyad and his Syrian wife, Riham, are both Druze, an offshoot of Islam. Riham estimates that she spends about \$1,000 (around 880 euros) per month on doctor's visits, inhalers, and other medication for her children.

Pointing to her bare finger, she says she had to sell her wedding ring to cover the costs. "I wish my kids would eat food as much as they take medicine," she says. Riham's family hails from Libeen, in Syria's southern Sweida province. That's where she will travel to next week, in the hope that the open plains there will be good for her children.

Suitcase 'packed and ready'

Sweida, the heartland of Syria's Druze minority, has come under attack by jihadists of the Islamic State group but has seen less fighting than other parts of the country.

"No, it isn't safe, but I'm forced to leave... I have a suitcase packed and ready on top of the closet," Riham says. Farouk Merhebi from the American University of Beirut says the smell has probably made life incredibly uncomfortable for hundreds living within a one-kilometer radius of the dump. Before the crisis began, trash trucks

would dump between 2,800 to 3,000 tons of waste per day in Naameh, says Merhebi, who is AUB's director of environmental health, safety and risk management.

"Now it's about 8,000 to 9,000 tons. The operations almost tripled because they're playing catch-up with the trash that had accumulated," he says. "The waste that has accumulated in streets has fermented, so the smell is offensive... The smell is worse because it's been there for seven to eight months." But the long-term health effects of the dump on the surrounding area remain untested.

Merhebi is part of a team at AUB hoping for funding to complete research in the area "to test the surface water, ground water, and some samples of the soil as well as samples of ambient air." But Fayyad and his family say they cannot wait. "Riham's family said they were thinking of coming to Lebanon," he says. "But we told them, 'do you want to die here from the smell?'" — AFP

MEGA INDIA-BACKED COAL PROJECT AWARDED AUSTRALIA MINING LEASES

SYDNEY: A controversial India-backed giant coal project near Australia's Great Barrier Reef was Sunday awarded mining leases, but developer Adani said it would not commit to a final investment decision until legal challenges against it were resolved. The Queensland state government said the Aus\$21.7 billion (US\$16.7 billion) project to build one of the world's biggest mines was awarded three leases. "This is a major step forward for this project after extensive government and community scrutiny," Queensland Premier Anastasia Palaszczuk said in a statement.

"Stringent conditions will continue to protect the environment, landholders' and traditional owners' interests, and our iconic Great Barrier Reef." The state government added that the mining leases at Carmichael in the Galilee Basin were estimated to contain 11 billion tons of coal. Adani welcomed the announcement, saying the leases gave the Indian conglomerate certainty and the firm had the "clear aim of commencing construction in calendar year 2017" pending the finalization of some second-tier approvals. But the company slammed legal challenges by conservationists, which along with the need for state and federal consent, has seen the approvals process stretched to some six years.

"(The) conclusion of second tier approvals and resolution of politically-motivated legal challenges is the company's principal focus, prior to a final investment

decision being made," an Adani spokesman said in a statement. "Having previously sought to progress to the construction phase in 2015, Adani is keenly aware of the risks of proceeding on major works in advance of the conclusion of these matters." The awarding of the leases came two months after state authorities gave the project environmental approval subject to some 140 conditions.

Conservationists have argued the megamine would threaten the heritage-listed Great Barrier Reef, the world's biggest coral reef ecosystem. Adani faces two legal challenges—one from an indigenous group and another mounted by an environmental organization. The organization, the Australian Conservation Foundation, slammed the decision and said its case in the Federal Court would be heard next month. "By granting a licence for this massive coal mine the Palaszczuk government is bowing to the demands of big polluters, not listening to the needs of the people," the foundation's chief executive Kelly O'Shanassy said in a statement.

Researchers say the reef is currently experiencing the worst bleaching on record in its pristine north, with few corals escaping damage.

The biodiverse site is also threatened by climate change, which conservationists said causes the bleaching, as well as farming run-off, development and the coral-eating crown-of-thorns starfish. — Reuters

FIXING VITAMIN D, DEPRESSION AIDS THE HEART

MIAMI: Taking steps to recover from depression and boost vitamin D levels may improve heart health, according to new research out Saturday. The findings were contained in two studies presented at the American College of Cardiology conference in Chicago. The first focused on depression, a known risk factor for heart attack, stroke and even death. Researchers at the Intermountain Medical Center Heart Institute in Salt Lake City studied a registry of more than 7,500 people, and found when depressed patients get effective treatment, they can lower their risk of heart damage to the same level as a person who never suffered from depression.

"Our study shows that prompt, effective treatment of depression appears to improve the risk of poor heart health," said Heidi May, a cardiovascular epidemiologist with the Intermountain Medical Center Heart Institute. However, those who remained depressed had higher rates of heart problems—at a rate of about six percent, compared to around four percent of people without depression. "The key conclusion of our study is: If depression isn't treated, the risk of cardiovascular complications increases significantly," May said.

A second study, also led by May, focused on two measures of vitamin D, which when too low can predict the likelihood of heart attack, stroke, heart failure or death. Some 4,200 people aged 52 to 76 were studied. Most already had coronary artery disease (70 percent) and one quarter were diabetic. For doctors who treat these patients, the most

important measures of vitamin D are known as total vitamin D and bioavailable vitamin D, since both were "the most accurate in predicting harmful cardiovascular events," said the findings.

"Our study found that low levels of both total vitamin D and bioavailable vitamin D appear to be associated with poor cardiovas-

cular outcomes," said May. "And evaluating usable vitamin D could mean the difference on the amount of vitamin D prescribed, if it's prescribed at all." May added that more research was needed to examine Caucasian and African-American patients, since these groups are known to be affected differently by vitamin D. — AFP



SEVILLE, Andalusia, Spain : Anti bullfighting demonstrators shout slogans and hold placards as they protest during a demonstration in Sevilla against animal abuse and bullfighting. — AFP

CLINIC PAGE



Kuwait Times
248 33 199

Dr. Fahad Al-Mukhaizeem
فهد علي المخيزيم

استشاري أطفال
M.B. Bch. FRCPC. FAAP. PEM

Al-Jabriya - Block 1A - St. 1 - Mazaya Building - 15th Floor - Clinic B - Tel.: 22269369 - Fax: 22269368