

S'pore charity raises \$2m more for Gaza aid effort; total now \$10m

Judith Tan
Correspondent

Another \$2 million has been raised during the month of Ramadan by the Rahmatan Lil Alamin (Blessings to all) Foundation, taking the total amount in providing aid, relief and shelter for families and children affected by the ongoing crisis in Gaza to a record \$10 million.

Of the \$2 million raised, about \$400,000 was collected from donation boxes at the 70 mosques in Singapore.

The \$10 million collected since the fund-raiser was launched in October 2023 is the highest raised by the foundation.

Eight million dollars was dispensed to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East by March 2024.

Speaking to the media after Hari Raya Aidilfitri prayers at Masjid Omar Kampong Melaka on April 10, Minister for Social and Family Development and Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs Masagos Zulkifli said this will go a long way in providing the people of Gaza with comfort and assurance that the international community cares.

War broke out when the Hamas militant group, which controls Ga-



Mr Masagos Zulkifli, Minister for Social and Family Development, Second Minister for Health and Minister-in-charge of Muslim Affairs (second from left), greeting the Mufti, Dr Nazirudin Mohd Nasir, before the start of Hari Raya Aidilfitri prayers at Masjid Omar Kampong Melaka on April 10. PHOTO: CHONG JUN LIANG

za, attacked southern Israel on Oct 7, 2023, resulting in the deaths of 1,200 people and more than 250 being taken hostage, according to Israeli figures. According to the Ha-

mas-run Health Ministry, Israel's ensuing bombardment of the small Palestinian enclave of 2.3 million people has killed more than 33,000.

Countries and humanitarian groups have been providing aid to the Palestinians, with the population on the brink of famine, said a UN-backed report by the Integrat-

ed Food Security Phase Classification initiative.

Singapore has sent a medical team to Egypt to treat civilian casualties from Gaza, as well as supplies

such as medicine, sanitation items and food for civilians. Singapore Red Cross has also sent medical supplies, food and water worth at least \$250,000 to civilians in Gaza.

Mr Masagos, who is also Second Minister for Health, told the media he is glad that throughout Ramadan, the Malay-Muslim community worked together tirelessly to improve the lives of the less fortunate in Singapore and overseas.

"It is also in the spirit (of compassion and care) that we want Muslims in Singapore to show that mercy and welfare are not only for Muslims or those who live nearby, but also for those beyond our shores," he said.

"This generosity and care for those in need is the essence of active citizenry in Singapore society," he noted, urging all to continue to make contributions to charity beyond the month of Ramadan. He pointed to pioneers and philanthropists such as the late Hajjah Fatimah Sulaiman and Syed Omar Ali Aljunied, who had done much to benefit current and future generations.

Mr Masagos picked the Hajjah Fatimah Mosque in Kampong Glam to deliver his Hari Raya Aidilfitri message on April 9, and Masjid Omar Kampong Melaka, Singapore's oldest mosque, for his Hari Raya Aidilfitri prayers on April 10.

Built between 1845 and 1846, the Hajjah Fatimah Sulaiman mosque is one of the few mosques in Singapore named after a female benefactor.

Masjid Omar Kampong Melaka, located in Keng Cheow Street, off Havelock Road, was constructed by the Aljunied family – first by philanthropist Syed Omar Ali Aljunied in 1820, and then his son Syed Abdullah Omar Aljunied in 1855.

Mr Masagos said the unity has helped the local Muslim community navigate crisis after crisis, including negative postings on social media. He was replying to a question on a post by the Embassy of Israel in Singapore on March 24, 2024. The post had made claims by citing the Quran and was taken down after intervention by the Singapore Government.

He said the community had remained calm, which helped it overcome challenges with confidence and reiterate its position as a Malay-Muslim community here.

He said the community takes pride in *adab* (the Islamic etiquette of having good manners, respect and appropriateness), uniting it with the larger Singapore society.

About 700 congregants attended prayers with Mr Masagos.

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Health Minister Ong Ye Kung (at right) and Transport Minister Chee Hong Tat with the Regent of Johor Tunku Ismail, his wife Che' Puan Mahkota Khaleeda Johor and their children at the Istana Bukit Serene on April 10. PHOTO: MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS



S'pore ministers attend Johor royals' Hari Raya Open House

Two Cabinet ministers continued an annual tradition when they attended the Johor royal family's Hari Raya Open House on April 10.

During their visit, Health Minister Ong Ye Kung and Transport Minister Chee Hong Tat were hosted to lunch by the Regent of Johor Tunku Ismail at Istana Bukit Serene.

Over lunch, Tunku Ismail and the ministers reaffirmed the strong and historic ties between Singapore and Johor, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in an April 10 statement.

The ministers also conveyed their Hari Raya greetings to the Malaysian King, Sultan Ibrahim Iskandar, and Queen Raja Zarith Sofiah.

The visit reflects the enduring relations between Singapore and Johor, added the statement.

In a Facebook post on April 10, Mr Ong thanked the royal family for their hospitality.

He said: "Singapore values our ties with our Johorean friends. We will continue to work on various projects, such as the Johor-Singapore Special Economic Zone, that are beneficial to both sides, and further strengthen the people-to-people and economic ties between us."

The annual tradition of visiting the Johor royals for Hari Raya Aidilfitri resumed in 2023 after a three-year break due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Kolette Lim

Sharp rise in dengue infections; over 5,500 cases so far this year

Some of those who have been infected recall dreadful time battling illness

Joyce Teo
Senior Health Correspondent

Dengue cases continue to rise here, with the number of new infections hitting 416 in the week of March 31 to April 6. This is 67 cases more than in the previous week.

Already, more than 5,500 people have contracted the infection in the first 14 weeks of 2024, according to National Environment Agency (NEA) data. And, as at March 25, seven people – most of them elderly – have died of dengue.

In 2023, the number of dengue cases stood at 9,949, and there were six deaths that year.

There are currently 90 active dengue clusters, of which 20 have 10 or more cases, NEA said.

Several clusters where a fast rate of dengue transmission has been observed include a 118-case cluster in Ang Mo Kio Avenue 3 and Avenue 4, an 83-case cluster in Marsiling Road and Marsiling Rise, and a cluster of 53 cases in Gangsa Road.

Cases in Singapore have shot up ahead of the traditional peak dengue season from May to October, and Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Sustainability and the Environment Baey Yam Keng had warned of the rise when he

launched the National Dengue Prevention Campaign 2024 on March 31.

NEA said that since the start of 2024, the weekly number of reported dengue cases has remained high, at above 300.

This, coupled with the high *Aedes aegypti* mosquito population and the low population immunity to all four dengue virus serotypes here, may lead to a surge in dengue cases in the coming months, if insufficient action is taken, the agency added.

Professor Hsu Li Yang, an infectious diseases expert at the NUS Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, said: "We are certainly seeing a higher number of cases during this period as compared with the past few years, with the possible exception of 2020."

In 2020, there were more than 35,000 infections and the highest number of dengue deaths, at 32.

The rise in cases in 2024 could be due to a combination of different factors, with the heat being one possible reason, Prof Hsu said.

NEA has also reported an increase in mosquito-breeding sites, both in and outside of residences.

A dengue infection is not usually serious – the majority are asymptomatic – but it can be unpleasant for some and, in rare cases, severe



Madam Geraldine Tham, 70, suffered from severe dengue on her second infection and had to be hospitalised.

dengue and even death can happen.

People who are older, as well as those with pre-existing medical conditions, are at higher risk of severe illness due to dengue infection, said a spokesperson for the Ministry of Health (MOH).

Those with a second infection also risk a severe illness, as repeat dengue infections have been associated with a higher occurrence of severe dengue.

Madam Geraldine Tham, 70, was one of them. She fell ill with dengue fever in March and was hospitalised in early April at the National Centre for Infectious Diseases (NCID). It was her second dengue infection, and she had diarrhoea, vomiting, stomach cramps and felt cold. Her platelet count dropped so low that the healthcare staff asked her to remain in bed to avoid falls, as there was a risk of profuse bleeding if she were to sustain a cut.

"I got a headache, rashes on my legs and a heavy head," said Madam Tham, who works as a corporate support officer in a school. Brushing of teeth was also out, as there was a risk that her gums

TAKE PRECAUTIONS

Perhaps the main thing is to take precautions against being bitten by mosquitoes at dengue hot spots, and to do our part in eliminating potential mosquito-breeding spots.



PROFESSOR HSU LI YANG, an infectious diseases expert at the NUS Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health.

might bleed.

Fortunately, she recovered and was discharged on April 5.

Dr Chia Po Ying, a consultant at NCID, said that a blood test to diagnose dengue is usually performed when there are symptoms such as sudden fever onset, headache with or without pain behind the eyes, muscle or joint pains, and nausea and vomiting. Symptoms that can develop later include skin rashes, easy bruising and bleeding from the nose or gums. Some older patients, however, may just have fever, she said.

She added that dengue patients who require hospitalisation are predominantly older adults with comorbidities.

The majority of NCID dengue patients do recover well, but there has been a small proportion of patients being admitted with, or who develop, complications, including severe cases, who require intensive care, she said.

For tuition teacher Edwina Shaddick, 35, who caught dengue in 2022 together with her sister, the experience was unpleasant, even though they were able to recover at home. She said she was more or less bedridden for nearly two weeks.

After the sisters recovered, their brother and father came down with dengue fever. Their mother, who also lives in the same household, was the only one who was not affected.

Dengue does not spread from person to person directly. But if a person has dengue, the virus will be in his blood during the first week of infection. If a mosquito bites him during this time, it will become infected with dengue and can then spread the virus to other people through bites.

"Even if one has been diagnosed with dengue, the continued use of insect repellent is recommended to prevent onward spread of the dengue virus to mosquitoes and other people in the community," said Dr Chia.

Ms Shaddick said that the family admitted her father, who was then 72, to hospital because his platelet count dropped to a very low level. But he checked himself out of

hospital so that he could recover at home. "It was quite terrifying because we were worried that he would slip and fall in the middle of the night and then bleed to death," she said.

Dr Chia said that younger people who do not have any pre-existing medical conditions can also suffer from severe dengue.

Logistics manager Lynn Ng, 43, who got dengue in June 2022, recalled feeling "really, really tired" and slightly nauseous about three days before she checked into a hospital.

She also had a throbbing headache. By the time she sought help at the hospital, she said she could hardly walk.

The first night in the hospital, Ms Ng said she kept pressing the call bell for a bag to vomit into. "At one point, I puked out some blood. I lost my appetite and hardly ate."

"I couldn't sleep at night. I was so uncomfortable that I didn't feel like looking at my phone or watching TV. I just laid there on the bed."

After being discharged, the typically athletic woman was not her usual self.

Ms Ng caught Covid-19 later on, and said her dengue experience was far worse. It would be a few months before she regained her fitness.

NEA has urged the public to remain vigilant, use insect repellent and clear out stagnant water.

Prof Hsu said: "Perhaps the main thing is to take precautions against being bitten by mosquitoes at dengue hot spots, and to do our part in eliminating potential mosquito-breeding spots."

MOH advises people to seek medical attention with their primary care doctor if they suspect they have dengue. Those with severe symptoms should seek medical attention immediately.

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