

Bahrain flies out aid to Lebanon

By GEOFFREY BEW

BAHRAIN sent its first aid consignment worth more than \$900,000 (BD340,200) to Lebanon yesterday as part of relief efforts to help citizens coming under Israeli attack.

A total of 460 containers weighing around 16 tonnes, including food, medical supplies, mattresses, hygiene kits, electrical generators, were loaded onto a Gulf Air plane at Bahrain International Airport.

The airline provided its biggest aircraft, an Airbus A340, to transport the aid that left at 11.10am.

It was flown to Damascus, Syria, and will be taken by lorry to the Lebanese border, where officials from the High Commission of Lebanon will take charge.

From there the aid will be sent to one of five strategically placed distribution centres in Lebanon and Syria so it can be passed to those in need.

Three members of the Bahrain Red



■ Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry board member Jawad Al Hawaj, third from left, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) representative Sayed Aqa, seventh from left, BRCS secretary general and vice-chairman of the National Committee in aid of the Lebanese People Sadiq Al Baloooshi, seventh from right, Dr Al Balooshi, fifth from right, Mr Al Hajjar, fourth from right, and BRCS executive director Mubarak Al Hadi, third from right, are with Gulf Air officials at the airport yesterday

Crescent Society (BRCS) are accompanying the aid to guarantee its safe passage and make sure it is passed on to the appropriate authorities.

It is expected to be in the hands of the Lebanese people at around 7am today.

Around 40 tonnes of aid is expected to leave from Bahrain in the next few weeks and Social Development Minister Dr Fatima Al Balooshi told the GDN that yesterday's consignment would be the first of many from Bahrain.

"We are planning to do it regularly and we will look at having it weekly," said the minister, who chairs the National Committee in aid of the Lebanese People.

"We will have to see, this is the first shipment and it is a learning

process. "Once we have done this we plan the next one."

She said Bahrain was working with the governments of Lebanon, Syria, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and UNDP to ensure the aid reaches those in need.

"We are co-ordinating with everyone so that we can ensure safe passage for delivery," she said.

"It is 99 per cent guaranteed to reach its destination."

Dr Al Balooshi said the aid included (BD226,800) worth of supplies purchased from non-governmental organisations, private sector companies and members of the public.

The aid was funded by the National Committee in aid of the Lebanese People, an association with the Bahraini Embassy in Bahrain.

Prime Minister Nabeeh Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa launched the fund with a donation of (BD1.89m) last month following directives from His Majesty King Hamad bin Khalifa Al Khalifa.

The committee was set up to oversee the account.

Sameer Al-Haddad, secretary of the Bahraini Society (BMS) and



■ Aid is loaded onto the plane and, right, the shipment is checked before being loaded onto the aircraft

general secretary of the Cairo-based Arab Doctors Union, will be among the trio undertaking the journey to Lebanon.

However, he told the GDN he was not worried because they would only be going as far as the port of Antelias.

"I hope it will reach soon because I feel they are in need of more."

Officials from Gulf Air are also delighted to be involved in relief efforts.

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"Morally it is our obligation to help the people of Lebanon and this is the least Gulf Air can do to play a part of that process," said Gulf Air's head of cargo Des Vertannes.

"We are also providing free transport for the three members of the Red Crescent Society, who will be travelling to Damascus (and Lebanon) to ensure the safe distribution of

the aid."

Bahraini food company Ali Rashi Al Amin yesterday said it had donated \$6,000 (BD2,268) to the Lebanon Fund.

Half of it was raised by staff, while the remainder came from the firm's own charity fund.

People wishing to donate money can pay directly into five bank accounts that have

been opened in the name of the National Committee in aid of the Lebanese People.

The banks and account numbers are:

National Bank of Bahrain: 99559676;

Al Ahli Bank: 0016-683880-001;

Bank of Bahrain and Kuwait: 100000188398;

Shamil Bank: 501-2814048-101;

Bahrain Islamic Bank: 1-1084941-2-1.