

15.02x29.5	1	1	עמוד	the jerusalem post - front	24/07/2014	43515633-0
י א י ר פ ר ג ' 1 1 - 64221						

Thai worker dies in Ashkelon mortar shell attack

Farm laborer is third civilian fatality in Israel since start of operation

• By BEN HARTMAN
and SHARON UDASIN

A Thai man became the third civilian fatality in Israel since Operation Protective Edge began 16 days ago, when a mortar shell fired from the Gaza Strip hit a greenhouse in a farming community in the Ashkelon Coast Regional Council on Wednesday.

An IDF helicopter flew the agricultural worker, whose name was not released by press time, to Barzilai Medical Center in Ashkelon, but he was declared dead shortly after arrival.

Lachish subdistrict police are examining the circumstances of the death. Mortar shells tend to not set off the Code Red rocket siren, and typically there is no warning before the shell hits.

MK Zvulun Kalfa (Bayit Yehudi), chairman of the Knesset's Agricultural Lobby, slammed the government for failing to provide adequate protected spaces for southern farmers.

"Without cement shelters the next tragedy is only a matter of time," he said. "I call on the government to get its

act together and send shelters to the farmers in the South. Abandoning the agricultural areas now will lead to huge economic damage and to a shortage of produce."

Yair Farjoun, head of the Ashkelon Coast Regional Council, expressed sorrow over the death of the worker, saying that open areas were the workplace of farmers.

"We feel deep sadness by the death of the migrant worker," Farjoun said. "We were prepared for the possibility that there would be loss of life. We send our condolences to the victim's family and continue to give our backing to the IDF and the security forces."

Rocket alert sirens blared in Ashkelon as well as in many communities surrounding Gaza on Wednesday and the Iron Dome rocket defense system intercepted several projectiles.

Five rockets were intercepted over the Ashkelon Coast region, five were intercepted over the city of Ashkelon and one was intercepted over Sderot.

Three civilians have been

See THAI, Page 10

THAI

Continued from Page 1

killed in Israel since Operation Protective Edge began 16 days ago.

Dror Hanin, 37, a father of three, was killed July 15 by a mortar while delivering food to IDF soldiers at Erez crossing. A rocket killed Ouda Lafi al-Waj, 32, a Beduin security guard who lived near Dimona, on July 19. His baby daughter is still in the hospital.

Dov Amitai, president of the Farmers Association in Israel, called on the government to take responsibility for protecting agricultural workers.

"Unfortunately, the pessimistic outlook about loss of life in agricultural areas, known as 'open areas,' is not for show but a real threat to people's lives," Amitai said. "I call upon the Israeli government, and the Defense Ministry in particular, to stop deflecting responsibility among the ministries and act immediately to fortify areas lacking passive and active protection."

Despite the constant rocket barrages, many farms – and the foreign workers who take part in tilling their land – continue to operate.

Pnina Mor Menasheos, the manpower manager for Hishtil Nurseries Ashkelon, said 170 workers are working in its fields and greenhouses. Of those, 50 are foreign workers: 38 agricultural students from Rwanda and the Philippines and 12 full-fledged workers from Thailand.

"They come to work every day," Menasheos told *The Jerusalem Post* on Wednesday afternoon. "I can't say that they aren't scared. They are afraid like everyone but they go out every day to work."

While many agricultural spaces in the South remain unprotected from rockets, Hishtil has invested about NIS 900,000 in installing 17 shelters among the Ashkelon site's fields and greenhouses, Menasheos said.

"We need to protect our workers," she said. "It's important that they work in security."

The sirens continue to sound in the area "all day," according to Menasheos.

The farm managers have been training the workers to know exactly where to go when the sirens wail, in the 30 seconds they have to get to shelter, she said. In addition, they are explaining to workers that Israel is operating against Hamas and not the Gazan civilians, and foreign and Israeli workers are operating seamlessly together, she added.

About a week ago, a rocket struck in an open area nearby the Hishtil fields, causing a fire near the greenhouses. In addition, the area has been the recipient of large amounts of shrapnel following Iron Dome interceptions, Menasheos explained.

"All the time shrapnel is falling on us," she said. "Therefore, we tell our workers to stay in the protected spaces for 10 minutes [after the siren]."