Gaza ceasefire effort shows signs of revival as Israel pounds enclave

Reuters – Signs of renewed activity emerged on Wednesday in the quest for a ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas in the nine-month-old war in the Gaza Strip while Israel launched more strikes on the devastated enclave.

After weeks with little public diplomacy, mediators Egypt and Qatar delivered a response from Hamas to a proposal that would include a release of hostages held in Gaza and a ceasefire in the Palestinian enclave.

Israel is studying the document, said a statement released by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office on behalf of the Mossad spy agency.

Egypt, Qatar and the United States have been trying for months to secure a truce and the release of 120 remaining hostages in Gaza, but their efforts have repeatedly failed.
Hamas says any deal must end the war and bring a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. Israel says it will accept only temporary pauses in the fighting until Hamas is eradicated.

"Israel is examining the response and will respond to the mediators," the Mossad statement said without further details.

Hamas, the Islamist militant group that rules Gaza, said in a statement that its leader Ismail Haniyeh had calls with Qatari and Egyptian mediators around ideas to reach a deal to end the war in Gaza as well as communication with Turkish officials.

The New York Times reported that Israel's top generals want a Gaza ceasefire even if it keeps Hamas in power for the time being, widening a rift between the military and Netanyahu, who

has opposed a truce that would let Hamas survive.

The commanders believe a ceasefire would be the best way to secure the release of the remaining Israeli hostages, and they think over-stretched Israeli forces, running low on munitions, need to regroup in case a wider war breaks out with Lebanon's Hezbollah, the report said, citing six current and former Israeli security officials.

An Israeli strike killed top Hezbollah commander Mohammed Nasser in south Lebanon on Wednesday, prompting retaliatory rocket fire by the Iran-backed group into Israel as their dangerously poised conflict rumbled on.

Sparked by the Gaza war, the hostilities with Lebanon have raised concerns about a wider and ruinous conflict between the heavily armed adversaries, prompting U.S. diplomatic efforts aimed at deescalation.
The war in Gaza began when Hamas gunmen burst into southern Israel on Oct. 7, killed 1,200 people and took around 250 hostages back into Gaza, Israel says. The offensive launched by Israel in retaliation has killed nearly 38,000 people, according to the Gaza health ministry, and has left the heavily built-up coastal enclave in ruins.

At a mall in Karmiel, northern Israel, an Israeli soldier was killed on Wednesday and a second person was wounded in a stabbing, police said. Israel's Ynet news said the assailant, who was also killed, came from Nahaf, a town where members of Israel's Arab minority live.

FAMILIES SLEEP ON THE ROAD, RESIDENTS SAY

On the ground in Gaza, at least 12 people were killed in Israeli strikes in central and northern Gaza, health officials said. Israeli forces also carried out new strikes in the south

amid fierce fighting with Palestinian militants overnight, residents said. Israel’s military said a 21-year-old captain was killed in combat in northern Gaza.

Fighting persisted overnight in two locations in central Rafah, where tanks have seized several districts and advanced further west and north of the city in recent days.
The Israeli military said its forces pursued targeted operations in Rafah, dismantled several military sites and killed Palestinian militants.

An Israeli airstrike also destroyed a U.N. school in Khan Younis in southern Gaza, where displaced Palestinians sheltered. There was no word on casualties from the Gaza authorities.

Smoke rose from the rubble as frantic people rushed in to search for their children and others fled, distraught and wailing. “What is happening to us is unjust. We cannot bear it, we can’t,” one woman said.

Many Palestinians were seeking shelter after Israel ordered them to evacuate areas of Khan Younis and Rafah on Tuesday, which the United Nations said was the largest such edict since 1.1 million people were told to leave the north of the enclave in October.

Khan Younis residents said many families slept on the road because they could not find tents.
The Gaza health ministry said an Israeli airstrike on a house in Khan Younis killed Hassan Hamdan, head of the burns and plastic surgery department at Nasser Medical Complex, along with all his family members.

Israel’s army did not comment on the ministry’s statement and Reuters was unable immediately to verify it.

The last functioning hospital in the area, the Gaza European Hospital, which had housed displaced families as well as

patients, was also evacuated. An Israeli defence official said on Tuesday that hospital staff and patients were told they could stay.

The ceasefire plan on the table, which was made public at the end of May by U.S. President Joe Biden, entails the gradual release of Israeli hostages held in Gaza and pullback of Israeli forces over two phases.

It also envisages the freeing of Palestinian prisoners, with the reconstruction of Gaza and the return of the remains of deceased hostages in a third phase.

Reuters