# Hamas-run Gaza health ministry says Israeli camp strike kills dozens

AFP- Hamas-run Gaza's health ministry said dozens were killed Saturday in an Israeli strike on a displacement camp in an area where Israel said it targeted Hamas military chief Mohammed Deif.
It is the latest mass-casualty incident in the Al-Mawasi area, where many Palestinians had fled, and came as international mediators pushed on with efforts to halt the nine-month war between Israel and Hamas militants.

A statement from the Gaza health ministry said there were more than "71 martyrs" and 289 people wounded in what it called a "brutal massacre by the occupation", a reference to Israel, at Al-Mawasi camp.

The Israeli military said it had targeted Deif and Rafa Salama, a brigade commander, calling them "two of the masterminds of the October 7 massacre" which sparked the Gaza war.

"The area that was struck is an open area, surrounded by trees, several buildings and sheds. It was not a tent complex, but an operational compound," it said.

A Hamas statement called the claim that Deif had been targeted "false allegations" intended "to cover up the magnitude of the horrific massacre".

AFPTV footage showed sirens wailing and smoke rising in the distance as men used blankets to collect victims. Some were clearly beyond help and lay dead on the road.

"What did we do?" a woman screamed in the street. "What did we do? We were just sitting near the beach."

Israel in May had told Palestinians in the Rafah area to move to a designated humanitarian area in Al-Mawasi on the coast as troops moved in to the southern city of Rafah near the Egyptian border.

There has been widespread global outrage over the war's civilian toll.

The office of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the Israeli leader "issued a standing order to eliminate senior Hamas officials at the beginning of the war".

The office added that Netanyahu had discussed the strike with security and military officials and would hold more meetings "to discuss the next developments and steps".

In Israel, demonstrators were again expected to rally later Saturday demanding new elections and a deal to free hostages still held by Hamas in Gaza.

Gathering by the tens of thousands at times, protesters have stepped up their actions against the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

— Displaced, destroyed —

In May, a fire killed 45 people at a tent city in Al-Mawasi. Israel's military said it had targeted and killed two senior Hamas militants in northwest Rafah in the strike which sparked the blaze, but added its munitions alone could not have caused the fire.

In another incident around the same time, a Gaza civil defence official said an Israeli strike killed 21 people at a displacement camp west of Rafah. Israel's army rejected the allegations, saying it "did not strike" the designated humanitarian area in Al-Mawasi.

In late June, the International Committee of the Red Cross said 22 people were killed by shelling that damaged its Gaza

office, which is surrounded by hundreds of displaced people who sought shelter there.

An Israeli military spokesman said there was “no indication” of an Israeli strike in the Al-Mawasi humanitarian area at that time.

The war started with Hamas’s October 7 attack on southern Israel which resulted in the deaths of 1,195 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli figures.

The militants also seized 251 hostages, 116 of whom remain in Gaza, including 42 the military says are dead.

Israel responded with a military offensive that has killed at least 38,443 people in Gaza, also mostly civilians, according to a toll from the Gaza health ministry issued Saturday afternoon.

The war has left the vast majority of Gazans displaced and short of life-saving assistance in a territory where much of the infrastructure has been destroyed.

— ‘Circles of hell’ —

UN chief Antonio Guterres appealed to donor governments on Friday to resume funding the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, warning there was no alternative to UNRWA as a conduit for aid to Gazans despite longstanding Israeli opposition to the agency.

“Just when we thought it couldn’t get any worse in Gaza — somehow, appallingly, civilians are being pushed into ever deeper circles of hell,” he said.

UNRWA chief Philippe Lazzarini said later that the agency now had enough funds to operate through September.

Israel and Hamas have engaged in months of indirect talks via Qatari, US and Egyptian mediators to reach a still elusive

truce and hostage release deal.

Talks took place in Doha on Wednesday, while Israel said it was sending a delegation to Cairo on Thursday evening for further negotiations.

Netanyahu continues to insist that any deal must allow Israel to meet all its war aims – destroying Hamas as well as bringing home all the hostages.

US President Joe Biden has outlined what he called an Israeli plan for a six-week truce in which hostages held in Gaza would be freed in exchange for Palestinians in Israeli prisons. A second phase would see talks on a full end to the war.

On Thursday, he said: “That framework is now agreed on by both Israel and Hamas.

“There are still gaps to close, but we’re making progress, the trend is positive, and I’m determined to get this deal done and bring an end to this war, which should end now.”

Biden again pressed Israel for a “day-after” plan for Gaza and spoke of diplomatic efforts to persuade Arab states to help with security.

Hamas has proposed an independent and non-partisan government for both post-war Gaza and the Israeli-occupied West Bank, said Hossam Badran, a member of the group’s political bureau.

Badran’s remarks came after Netanyahu – whose critics have accused him of prolonging the war – demanded that Israel retain control of the Philadelphi corridor, Gaza territory along the border with Egypt.

AFP