



Gaza truce finally signed

Israel confirms all parties have signed the first phase of a Gaza ceasefire and hostage deal in Egypt

● Hostage releases to begin within 72 hours

● Israel to free hundreds of Palestinian prisoners

● Trump to visit Jerusalem, possibly Gaza

AFP | Sharm el Sheikh

Israel said yesterday that all parties have signed the first phase of a Gaza ceasefire and hostage release deal, in a major step to end a war that has killed tens of thousands of people.

The agreement in Egypt follows a 20-point peace plan for Gaza announced last month by US President Donald Trump, after more than two years of war sparked by Hamas's October 2023 attack on Israel.

Trump was expected to be in Jerusalem on Sunday, the office of his Israeli counterpart said, after the US leader said he might also go to Egypt and consider going to Gaza.

With Israel's security cabinet due to meet from 1400 GMT, a ceasefire was to take hold in devastated Gaza "within 24 hours", government spokeswoman Shosh Bedrosian said.

"The final draft of phase one was signed this morning in Egypt by all parties to release all the hostages," she told journalists.

"Now phase one stands very clear: all of our hostages, the living and the deceased, will be released 72 hours later, which will bring us to Monday," she said.

At 1500 GMT, Israel's full cabinet will meet to approve the deal, under which the military should withdraw from Gaza and release hundreds of Palestinian prisoners in exchange for the hostages.

The deal also envisions a surge of aid into Gaza, where the UN has declared famine.

The Israeli army said it was preparing to pull back troops in Gaza, in line with the agreement.

Trump's plan also calls for the



A smoke plume billows following Israeli bombardment on the Gaza Strip as seen from across the border in southern Israel

disarmament of Hamas and for Gaza to be ruled by a transitional authority headed by the US president himself, though these points have yet to be addressed in discussions.

A source within Hamas told AFP the group will exchange 20 living hostages all at the same time for nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners as part of the deal's first phase.

'Tears of joy'

The announcement sparked joy in Gaza, much of which has been flattened by bombardment and most of whose residents have been displaced at least once over the past two years.

"Honestly, when I heard the news, I couldn't hold back. Tears of joy flowed. Two years of bombing, terror, destruction, loss, humiliation, and the constant feeling that we could die at any moment," displaced Palestinian Samer Joudeh said.

In Israel, thousands of people gathered in a Tel Aviv square to celebrate, some holding photos of hostages still in Gaza and waving Israeli and US flags.

Many wore stickers reading:

The final draft of phase one was signed this morning in Egypt by all parties to release all the hostages. Now phase one stands very clear: all of our hostages, the living and the deceased, will be released 72 hours later, which will bring us to Monday

GOVERNMENT SPOKESWOMAN SHOSH BEDROSIAN

"They're coming back."

"We have been waiting for this day for 734 days. We cannot imagine being anywhere else this morning," said Laurence Ytzhak, 54.

The deal was thrashed out in indirect negotiations behind closed doors in a conference centre in Sharm El-Sheikh, an Egyptian resort town on the Red Sea.

While Arab leaders including Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas said they hoped the ceasefire would lead to a permanent

solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict, there was no indication the talks were addressing any of the deeper issues at stake.

'With God's help'

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he would bring the hostages home "with God's help", while Hamas has submitted a list of Palestinian prisoners it wants released from Israeli jails in the first phase.

The list names 250 Palestinians sentenced to life imprisonment and 1,700 others arrested by Israel since the war began, according to the Hamas source.

High-profile inmate Marwan Barghouti -- from Hamas's rival, the Fatah movement -- is among those the group wanted to see released, according to Egyptian state-linked media.

However, when asked by a journalist at a briefing whether Israel had agreed to release Barghouti, government spokeswoman Bedrosian said: "I can tell you at this point in time that he will not be part of this release."

The talks were taking place under the shadow of the second an-

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Under the first phase of the deal, Hamas will exchange 20 living hostages all at once for nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners, with the release expected to conclude on Monday

niversary of the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack, which resulted in the deaths of 1,219 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on official Israeli figures.

The group also took 251 people hostage into Gaza, where 47 remain, including 25 the Israeli military says are dead.

Israel's retaliatory campaign in Gaza has killed at least 67,183 people, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory, figures the United Nations considers credible.

The data does not distinguish between civilians and combatants but indicates that more than half of the dead are women and children.

Gaza's civil defence agency, a rescue force operating under Hamas's authority, reported several strikes on the territory after the announcement of the deal.

'The fighting must stop'

Pressure to end the war has escalated massively in recent weeks, and a UN probe last month accused Israel of genocide, a charge the government rejected as "distorted and false".

Hamas has also been accused of committing war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Countries around the world welcomed the deal, with UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres saying: "The fighting must stop once and for all."

500 US troops deploy in Chicago ahead of court hearing

AFP | Chicago

Five hundred US troops deployed in the Chicago area yesterday as part of President Donald Trump's hardline immigration crackdown, despite strenuous objections of local leaders seeking a judge's order to block the mobilization.

District Judge April Perry was set to hold a hearing on the issue, a day after Trump called for jailing the Democratic governor of Illinois and mayor of Chicago for resisting his military-backed mass deportation and anti-crime campaign.

The government argues the troops are needed to protect federal agents during immigration raids in the Democratic strong-



Members of the Texas National Guard walk inside the perimeter of a US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention facility in Broadview, Illinois

hold, the third-largest city in the United States, which the Trump administration depicts in exaggerated and lurid terms as "a war zone."

A US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facility in the Chicago suburb of Broadview "has been the target of actual and threatened violence," requiring "assistance from the Department of War," the Trump administration said in a court filing late Wednesday.

Local elected officials were seeking to "second-guess" Trump's judgement, the filing said.

"But responsibility, and accountability, for those decisions should rest with the political branches of the federal govern-

ment, not this Court," the filing argued.

National Guard troops were seen entering the Broadview facility overnight, local media reported yesterday.

The deployment includes 200 National Guard troops from Texas and 300 from Illinois, the US Army Northern Command said in a statement Wednesday evening. They have been mobilized for an initial period of 60 days.

Perry's decision will be closely followed, as Trump has said he could invoke the rarely used Insurrection Act -- which allows the president to deploy the military within the United States to suppress rebellion -- if courts or local officials are "holding us up."



TOP
4
TWEETS

01



Our partnership with India is delivering for British people. 10,000 new jobs created and £1.3 billion of investment back into the UK. Backing British jobs and British business.

@Keir_Starmer

02



For Israelis and Palestinians alike, the ceasefire & hostage release deal offers a glimmer of relief. That glimmer must become the dawn of peace; the beginning of the end of this devastating war.

@antoniouterres

03



I join the @UN Secretary-General's call for an immediate ceasefire in #Gaza. Unrestricted humanitarian access is urgently needed to deliver life-saving food & assistance. @WFP is on the ground and ready to scale up operations, but we need to move NOW-- there is no time to waste.

@WFPChief

04



From Riyadh, I'm in close contact with team in Gaza, US and regional colleagues to seize opportunity of President Trump's peace deal and save as many lives as possible. This moment, for which we have long worked, must not be a false dawn for all who long for end to conflict.

@UNReliefChief

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