

Israel demands release of **all hostages** after Hamas backs new truce offer

Mediators are awaiting an official Israeli response to the plan

● Qatar expressed guarded optimism for the new proposal

● The latest deal proposes an initial 60-day truce

● Netanyahu faces increasing pressure at home to end the war

AFP | Jerusalem, Undefined

A senior Israeli official yesterday said the government stood firm on its call for the release of all hostages in any future Gaza deal, after Hamas accepted a new truce proposal.

Mediators are awaiting an official Israeli response to the plan, a day after Hamas signalled its readiness for a fresh round of talks aimed at ending nearly two years of war.

Mediator Qatar expressed guarded optimism for the new proposal, noting that it was "almost identical" to an earlier version agreed to by Israel.

Speaking on the condition of anonymity, a senior Israeli official told AFP the government's stance had not changed and demanded the release of all hostages in any deal.

The two foes have held on-and-off indirect negotiations throughout the war, resulting in two short truces during which Israeli hostages were released in exchange for Palestinian prisoners, but they have ultimately failed to broker a lasting ceasefire.

Qatar and Egypt, backed by the United States, have mediated the frequent rounds of shuttle diplomacy.

Egypt said Monday that it and Qatar had sent the new proposal to Israel, adding "the ball is now



Palestinians gather to receive cooked meals from a food distribution center in the Nuseirat refugee camp in the central Gaza Strip



A Palestinian boy pulls a wheelchair past destroyed buildings in the al-Tuffah neighbourhood of Gaza City

in its court".

Qatari foreign ministry spokesman Majed al-Ansari said

on Tuesday that Hamas had given a "very positive response, and it truly was almost identical to

what the Israeli side had previously agreed to". "We cannot make any claims

Australia chides Israel after diplomats' visas revoked

Sydney, Australia

Australia's foreign minister on Tuesday criticised Israel for revoking visas held by Canberra's diplomatic representatives to the Palestinian Authority.

Israel's tit-for-tat move followed Australia's decision on Monday evening to block a far-right Israeli politician from the country ahead of a speaking tour.

Australia and Israel have been increasingly at odds since Canberra declared it would recognise a Palestinian state at the UN General Assembly in September.

Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong said revoking the diplomats' visas was an "unjustified reaction" by Israel.

"At a time when dialogue and diplomacy are needed more than ever, the Netanyahu Government is isolating Israel and undermining international efforts towards peace and a two-state solution," she said in a statement.

Israeli Prime Minister Ben-

jamin Netanyahu hit back on Tuesday, slamming his Australian counterpart Anthony Albanese as "a weak politician who betrayed Israel and abandoned Australia's Jews".

The Australian government on Monday cancelled the visa of far-right Israeli politician Simcha Rothman, whose ultranationalist party is in Netanyahu's governing coalition.

Rothman had been scheduled to speak at events organised by the Australian Jewish Association.

Hours later, Israel's Foreign Minister Gideon Saar said he had revoked the visas of Australia's representatives to the Palestinian Authority.

"I also instructed the Israeli Embassy in Canberra to carefully examine any official Australian visa application for entry to Israel," he said.

"This follows Australia's decisions to recognise a 'Palestinian state' and against the backdrop of Australia's unjustified refusal to grant visas to a number of Israeli figures."

that a breakthrough has been made. But we do believe it is a positive point," he added.

Mounting pressure

According to a report in Egyptian state-linked outlet Al-Qahera News, the latest deal proposes an initial 60-day truce, a partial hostage release, the freeing of some Palestinian prisoners and provisions allowing for the entry of aid.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has yet to publicly comment on the plan, but said last week that his country would accept "an agreement in which all the hostages are released at once and according to our con-

ditions for ending the war".

Senior Hamas official Mahmoud Mardawi said on social media that his group had "opened the door wide to the possibility of reaching an agreement, but the question remains whether Netanyahu will once again close it, as he has done in the past".

Hamas's acceptance of the proposal comes as Netanyahu faces increasing pressure at home and abroad to end the war.

On Sunday, tens of thousands took to the streets in the Israeli city of Tel Aviv to call for the end of the war and a deal to free the remaining hostages still being held captive.

Ex-owner of world's largest rhino farm arrested for **trafficking**

AFP | Johannesburg, South Africa

South African police said they arrested Tuesday the former owner of the world's largest rhino conservation farm on charges of smuggling the horns of the endangered animals.

John Hume was arrested with five other people following a "complex investigation into transnational trafficking of rhino horns" that began in 2017, the police's specialised Hawks unit said.

Trading in rhino horns is legal in South Africa among citizens however local laws do not allow for their export due to an international ban.

Hume, in his mid 80s, owned the largest rhino farm in the world until 2023 when it was bought by the African Parks NGO.

The 7,800-hectare (19,270-acre) "Platinum Rhino" site in the North West province is home to around 2,000 animals, 15 per-



A ranger measures a rhino's horn to be trimmed at John Hume's Rhino Ranch in Klerksdorp, in the North Western Province of South Africa

cent of the world's remaining wild population of southern

white rhino.

Investigators said they had discovered allegations of fraud involving government officials

who issued permits for about 964 rhino horns to be sold locally but which were instead shipped to illegal markets in Southeast Asia.

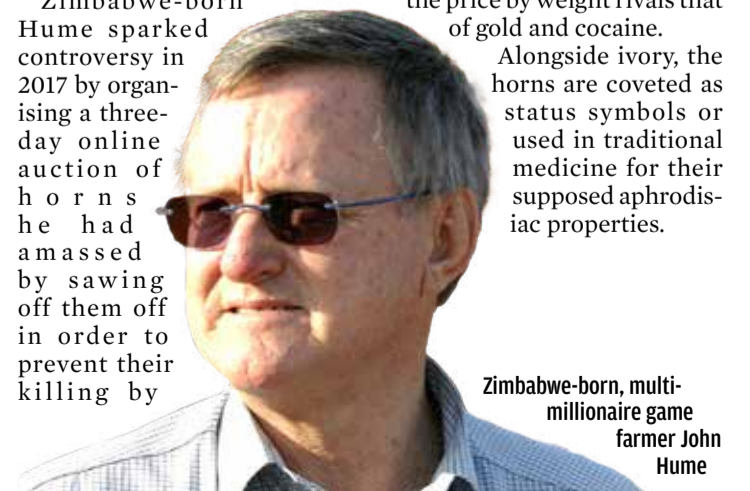
Hume and the five others appeared in a magistrate's court in the capital Pretoria and were granted bail, Hawks spokesman Christopher Singo told AFP.

Zimbabwe-born Hume sparked controversy in 2017 by organising a three-day online auction of horns he had amassed by sawing off them off in order to prevent their killing by

poachers, though the sale attracted fewer buyers than anticipated.

Once abundant across sub-Saharan Africa, rhino numbers fell dramatically due to hunting by European colonisers and large-scale poaching, with their horns highly sought after on black markets, particularly in Asia, where the price by weight rivals that of gold and cocaine.

Alongside ivory, the horns are coveted as status symbols or used in traditional medicine for their supposed aphrodisiac properties.



Zimbabwe-born, multi-millionaire game farmer John Hume