

Strike raises pressure on Israeli prime minister as U.S. prepares what it calls a final ceasefire deal



Tel Aviv, September 2 (RHC)-- A general strike has disrupted industry, services and education across parts of Israel as demands for the government to agree a ceasefire deal and bring remaining captives home from Gaza grow.

Monday's general strike, called by the country's largest labour union Histadrut – the first since the start of the war in Gaza in October – was aimed at disrupting sectors of the economy including banking and healthcare, and shutting down the country's main airport and education institutions.

The action was prompted by the discovery on Sunday of the bodies of six of the 250 or so captives taken by Hamas on October 7th. About 100 were released under a truce in November while several have since been killed by the constant Israeli bombings.

Huge rallies were held on Sunday calling on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to secure a ceasefire deal that would bring the remaining captives home. Both Israel and Hamas claim that the other side is blocking an agreement.

U.S. President Joe Biden is reported to be working on what sources in Washington have branded a "final" proposed deal, in another apparent effort to raise the pressure.

Annon Bar-David from Histadrut, which represents hundreds of thousands of workers, called the strike, which was backed by Israel's main manufacturers and entrepreneurs in the high-tech sector. "We must reach a deal," Bar-David told a news conference on Sunday. "We are getting body bags instead of a deal."

Reports suggest that the walkout was highly effective in some parts of Israel.

Ben Gurion airport, Israel's main air transport hub, was closed from 8 a.m. (05:00 GMT) by a two-hour walkout. Israeli media has since reported that workers and civil aviation companies have decided to prolong their action.

The Manufacturers Association of Israel said it backed the strike and accused the government of failing in its "moral duty" to bring the captives back alive.

Histadrut said banks, malls, government offices and public transit services joined the strike. Municipalities in the highly-populated central area, including Tel Aviv, were also participating, leading to shortened school hours and cancellations for public daycares and kindergartens.

Many municipalities, however, including Jerusalem, were not participating.

Meanwhile, the government appears to have secured a legal order to halt the strike, having appealed on the grounds that it was politically motivated.

According to news agencies, Israel's Labour Court in Tel Aviv has ruled that the strike must end at 2:30 p.m. (11:30 GMT). Media outlet N12 reported that Histadrut Chairman Bar-David had instructed workers to return to work following the court's order.

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