

Qatar announces Israel and Hamas agreement on Gaza truce and captive exchange, while Netanyahu says aspects unresolved



The office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says that several aspects of the proposal are ‘unresolved.’

Palestinians react as they wait for news of a ceasefire deal with Israel, in Khan Younis in southern Gaza [Hatem Khaled/Reuters]

Doha, January 15 (RHC)-- Mediator Qatar says that Israel and Hamas have reached an agreement to halt the 15-month war in Gaza and exchange Israeli captives for Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli prisons.

Qatar's Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani announced the agreement in Doha on Wednesday. He said the ceasefire would take effect on Sunday, January 19.

Hamas had earlier told Al Jazeera Arabic that its delegation delivered its approval of a ceasefire and prisoner exchange agreement to mediators.

But the office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that some aspects of the proposal were “unresolved.” “Several clauses in the framework remain unresolved, and we hope that the details will be finalised tonight,” Netanyahu’s office said in a statement.

Netanyahu is expected to convene his cabinet on Thursday, according to Israeli media reports.

The proposed agreement would take place over three stages, the Reuters news agency reported, quoting an official briefed on the talks. In an initial six-week phase, Israeli forces would gradually withdraw from central Gaza and Palestinians would be allowed to return to their homes in northern Gaza.

Hamas would release 33 Israeli captives over those six weeks, including all female soldiers and civilians, children and men over 50, Reuters reported. Israel would release 30 Palestinian prisoners for each civilian captive released and 50 Palestinian prisoners for every Israeli soldier.

Talks on the second phase would begin by the 16th day of the first phase, and are expected to include the release of the remaining captives and the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza.

A third phase was expected to include the return of dead bodies and the start of reconstruction in Gaza, Reuters reported.

Netanyahu held a meeting on Wednesday with Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and Defence Minister Israel Katz. After the meeting, Smotrich released a video, saying: “There is only one thing before my eyes, and that is the fulfilment of all the goals of the war.”

Both Smotrich and firebrand National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir have been squarely against a deal, threatening again this week that they might quit the government if it is passed. Ben-Gvir met with a number of Knesset lawmakers on Wednesday.

Israel has previously said a main goal of its war is to “destroy” Hamas along with securing the release of captives still held in Gaza.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Tuesday that Hamas has recruited almost as many new fighters as it has lost in its war with Israel, adding that the group cannot be defeated by “a military campaign alone.”

Washington has also been trying to rally its allies behind the idea of a “reformed” Palestinian Authority eventually taking over the enclave to prevent a re-emergence of Hamas.

On Wednesday, representatives of about 85 countries gathered in Oslo's City Hall to discuss ways of moving towards a two-state solution. Norwegian Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide said it is time to address "what will happen after the ceasefire."

Speaking to Al Jazeera, Israeli affairs analyst Dan Perry said the prospect of a ceasefire is generating two main reactions in Israel: first, joy at the likely release of Israeli captives and the end of the war and, second, concern that Hamas, though militarily depleted, would effectively be left in power.

"It is clearly evident that if Israel pulls out of Gaza, Hamas would remain in charge," Perry said. "And for this, I think many would blame Netanyahu because there is an obvious alternative to Hamas in the form of the Palestinian Authority."

As the ceasefire and captive-prisoner exchange deal appeared to be inching closer to the finish line, the Israeli military ramped up deadly attacks across the Gaza Strip.

At least 59 people were killed in Israeli attacks on Wednesday, medical sources told Al Jazeera.

The situation for the 2.3 million Palestinians living in Gaza remains dire with air and ground attacks continuing and most aid blocked by Israel.

The Ministry of Health in Gaza said on Wednesday that Israeli attacks since the start of the war have killed at least 46,707 Palestinians, up by 62 from a day earlier. The number of people wounded has also risen to at least 110,265 people, it said.

People in Gaza are keeping an eye on the developments in Doha, but at the same time, people are dying by the hour, said Al Jazeera's Hani Mahmoud, reporting from Deir el-Balah in central Gaza.

"The more we hear about a potential ceasefire agreement, the higher the pace of the attacks, the more families are being targeted and killed. Over the past 72 hours, more people have been targeted inside residential homes."

They included a family targeted in an overnight attack in Deir el-Balah that killed at least 12 people, including children, and an air strike on the Bureij refugee camp, where Israeli bombs killed at least five people.

The Israeli army also ordered new forced displacements, this time for Palestinians living in the Jabalia area of northern Gaza, where a siege lasting more than 100 days has so far left more than 5,000 people killed or missing.

Israeli shelling on Wednesday cut off electricity to northern Gaza's Indonesian Hospital as attacks on healthcare facilities are ongoing after the Israeli military torched Kamal Adwan Hospital last month and arrested its director.

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