

Netanyahu vows to continue Gaza war after cabinet approves truce deal

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Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu (2nd R) heads a security cabinet meeting to vote on a Gaza ceasefire deal, in the occupied al-Quds on January 17, 2025.

**Notice the war criminal's drink of choice: Coca-Cola
(Photo by AFP)**

Tel Aviv, January 18 (RHC)-- Benjamin Netanyahu has promised to continue the war on the Gaza Strip in a bid to stop far-right finance minister Bezalel Smotrich from exiting his cabinet, Israel's biggest newspaper Yedioth Ahronoth reports.

The report comes as the office of the Israeli prime minister says his cabinet voted to approve a Gaza ceasefire on Saturday after a delay which sparked fears that opposition from his coalition regime's extremist members could halt an agreement.

According to Israeli media reports, Smotrich met Netanyahu before the approval, demanding not only guarantees that Israeli troops would return to the Gaza Strip but that Israel would retain control over the flow of humanitarian aid into the besieged Palestinian enclave.

"Without a full return to war, we will resign," Smotrich, head of the Religious Zionism party and one of the staunchest opponents to a deal, reportedly said. He felt like his demands were met following the latest meeting with Netanyahu, Yedioth Ahronoth reported.

The Israeli minister previously released a statement, saying he would only remain in Netanyahu's cabinet if he promised to resume the war following the six-week first phase of the Gaza ceasefire deal.

Smotrich has been urged by Israel's extremist security minister and head of the far-right Jewish Power party Itamar Ben-Gvir to support him in thwarting the agreement.

Ben-Gvir has said he will resign if the cabinet approves the ceasefire deal.

The ceasefire plan for Gaza is comprised of three phases, beginning with Israel's release of some 1,000 Palestinians in exchange for Hamas' release of female captives.

Israeli authorities said Saturday 737 prisoners and detainees will be freed as part of the first phase of the deal -- none before 4:00 pm local time (1400 GMT) on Sunday.

The second and third stages, if agreed on during the first phase, would see the remaining Israeli captives released, Israel's complete withdrawal from Gaza, and a reconstruction plan for the enclave, among other things.

Netanyahu's reported promise to resume the war following the first phase may jeopardize the prospects of a lasting ceasefire, which is one of Hamas' key conditions for any negotiations.

The Israeli military has continued its ferocious pounding of the Gaza Strip despite the talk of the ceasefire agreement.

Since Wednesday, when it was announced that a ceasefire agreement had been reached, at least 169 Palestinians have been killed in Israeli aggression in Gaza, according to the local health ministry.

Palestinians spoke of powerful airstrikes across the enclave over the past two days which have pushed the number of those killed since the October 2023 onslaught on Gaza up to nearly 47,000 people, even though experts believe the toll to be significantly higher.

Hamas's armed wing, the Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades, has also warned that Israeli strikes are risking the lives of captives and could turn their "freedom... into a tragedy."

[SOURCE: PRESS TV and NEWS AGENCIES]

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