

# Gaza truce in effect, setting stage for prisoner swap, aid delivery

## International Desk

A four-day cease-fire between Israel and Hamas began Friday, allowing sorely needed aid to start flowing into Gaza and releasing of dozens of prisoners of both sides.

The first group of 13 Israeli hostages released by Hamas crossed into Egypt. The first exchange Friday afternoon involved swapping 39 Palestinian prisoners – 24 women, including some convicted of attempted murder for attacks on Israeli forces, and 15 teenagers jailed for offenses like throwing stones – for 13 Israeli prisoners, Palestinian authorities said.

There were no reports of fighting in the hours after the truce began. The deal offered some relief for Gaza's 2.3 million people, who have endured weeks of Israeli bombardment and dwindling supplies of basic necessities, as well as for families in Israel worried about their relatives imprisoned during Hamas' Oct. 7 attack.

## Optimism for aid

UN agencies have voiced hope that the shaky truce would allow aid to flow to northern Gaza for the first time in weeks, while the World Health Organization said it is working on further hospital evacuations. Aid agencies have said they are aiming to deliver supplies to the northern part of the Palestinian enclave, where hospitals

have collapsed due to bombings and lack of fuel, and where there are major concerns about dehydration and disease outbreaks.

WHO spokesperson Christian Lindmeier said the agency was working on further hospital evacuations as soon as possible. "We're extremely concerned about the safety of the estimated 100 patients and health workers remaining at Shifa (Hospital)," he said.

Tommaso Della Longa, spokesperson for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, told Reuters that its local partner had a convoy of ambulances heading north to evacuate patients from Ahli Baptist Hospital.

## Iran's pivotal role

Ahead of the cease-fire, Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian on Thursday held talks with Hamas politburo chief Ismail Haniyeh in Doha, where he has traveled as part of a regional tour for consultations amid the Israeli invasion of Gaza.

Meanwhile in Doha, Qatar's Foreign Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani discussed the exchange of prisoners with Amir-Abdollahian and thanked Iran for its "pivotal role and valuable efforts in helping to achieve a humanitarian cessation of the war against Gaza".



"We have reached a good stage," the Qatari minister said, adding the first priority is the cease-fire, and then "our effort is to extend the temporary cease-fire and stop the war and killing of Palestinians completely and prevent a return to war".

Amir-Abdollahian also welcomed the truce, saying if the Israeli regime continues the war, "the situation in the region will become more tense and the reactions will be more widespread". Also on Wednesday, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi said that Israel has fallen short of realizing all of the

goals that it had sought by launching its ongoing war against the Gaza Strip.

The president pointed to the regime's killing of more than 14,500 Palestinians so far during the war, saying, "Killing of women and children does not mean victory."

The truce raised hopes of eventually winding down the conflict, which has flattened vast swaths of Gaza, fueled a surge of violence in the occupied West Bank, and stirred fears of a wider conflagration across the Middle East. Israel, however, has said it is determined to resume its massive offen-

sive once the cease-fire ends.

On Friday, there was calm after weeks in which Gaza saw heavy bombardment and artillery fire daily as well as street fighting as ground troops advanced through neighborhoods in the north. The last report of air raid sirens in Israeli towns near the territory came shortly after the truce took effect.

Not long after, four tankers with fuel, and four with cooking gas entered the Gaza Strip from Egypt, Israel said.

UN aid agencies pushed back against the claim, saying fuel deliveries were

closely supervised and urgently needed to avert a humanitarian catastrophe since fuel is required to run generators that power water treatment facilities, hospitals and other critical infrastructure.

The Israeli military dropped leaflets over southern Gaza, warning hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians who sought refuge there not to return to their homes in the territory's north, the focus of Israel's ground offensive.

**AP, Reuters, AFP, Press TV, and the Guardian contributed to this report.**

## Tehran raps European Parliament's anti-Iran resolution

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman vehemently condemned the "interventionist" resolution that the European Parliament (EP) recently passed about what they called the situation of human rights in the country. Nasser Kanaani, in a statement released on Friday, said the resolution approved by the legislative body of the European Union stems from the "destructive approach that several European currents have adopted vis-à-vis the Islamic Republic of Iran," Press TV reported.

"The European Parliament's meddling resolution indicates the confusion of a number of European parties over the reality of the Islamic Republic of Iran's might and anti-arrogance stances," the senior Iranian diplomat said as he denounced the EP's resolution.

On Thursday, the EP adopted a resolution on the human rights situation in Iran, condemning what it claimed were rights abuses against women in the country. The nonbinding resolution was adopted by 516 votes in favor, 4 against, and 27 abstentions.

Kanaani went on to criticize certain European countries for siding with terrorist groups over the past four decades against the Iranian nation, stating that their "theatrical measures and bogus humanitarian slogans" will never erase their "dark records" of sponsoring anti-Iranian criminals.

"Whilst the public opinion across the world, including European countries, is distressed, traumatized, and infuriated by continuation of the most inhumane crimes in Gaza, which are being committed by the apartheid and child-killing Israeli regime, and asks the officials of their respective countries to stop the genocide and war crimes against the defenseless and oppressed people of Gaza by raising their voices in streets of various cities across that continent (Europe), the European Parliament that alleges to be the symbol of democracy, so-called human rights, and humanitarian values has turned a blind eye to the most unprecedented and barbaric collective punishment and vicious massacre of tens of thousands of innocent Palestinian citizens, of whom 70 percent are women and children," he said. The spokesman emphasized that Europeans' double standard would not go unnoticed by the world's scholars and those whose consciences are awakened.

## Bibi's cabinet at end of rope



By Mehdi Shakibaei

Israel's affairs expert

## OPINION EXCLUSIVE

One should hesitate before using the term cease-fire for the pause in fighting between Is-

rael and Hamas. Usually, cease-fire is used to describe a cessation of war between two countries or armies in the traditional sense. Therefore, using the term may mislead some to believe that Israel and Palestine, with their traditional armies, are two parties to a conflict, which is simply not true as their power is incommensurable. So, I

prefer to coin and use the term "an agreement to stop Israeli crimes". The attack on October 7 by Hamas came as a massive shock to the Israeli regime and plunged it into analysis paralysis. As Israel was not in a stable position, it rushed to declare certain goals and milestones that has yet to achieve. Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime

minister, shared three goals: conquering Gaza, destroying Hamas, and freeing captives.

To attain these goals, it first bombarded Gaza heavily and then launched a ground assault. For 47 days, its Western allies turned a blind eye or actively backed the crimes of Israel. Netanyahu further declared that after conquering Gaza, it would relinquish the control of the enclave to neither Hamas nor the Palestinian Authority but rather to Egypt, Jordan, the Islamic Cooperation Council, or the United Nations. When the ground invasion was met with difficulties and resistance from Hamas and other groups, Tel Aviv cunningly changed its declared goals by focusing on freeing captives rather than crushing Hamas. Nevertheless, IDF forces failed to find even one captive after days of committing various crimes in Gaza since the ground assault started. Not only that, but it suffered casualties, too. Israel's Merkava tanks and some of its elite forc-

es were hunted by Hamas fighters in Gaza.

These facts, along with domestic pressure coming from the families of the captives and international pressure from public opinion in support of Gazans, pushed Israel's hand to yield to Hamas's demands. The agreement between Israel and Hamas basically reflects the same demands that Hamas made two weeks prior, which were rejected by Israel at the time. This was, in fact, another defeat that Israel suffered after Operation Al-Aqsa Storm.

Now, the question in everyone's mind concerns whether the cease-fire will hold or be broken by Israel to start the war anew? As long as there's occupation in Palestine, the conditions for Israel and Palestinians will be unstable. Since 2008, the Israelis have waged several major wars against Palestinians, the root of which is in the occupation. But this time, I believe that the cease-fire will hold. This, of course, does not mean that Israel has let Palestinians be, at least not until this cabi-

net is in office. From the viewpoint of the current hawkish Israeli cabinet, this cease-fire agreement is a defeat. They think the further they retreat on the battlefield, the faster their collapse will occur. Thus, it would come as no surprise if, despite pressure from the US, the IDF violated the agreement. In the end, however, the cabinet has no choice but to accept defeat and face reality. The reality is that Netanyahu's cabinet will fall apart. The US administration and Joe Biden are standing ready to accelerate Netanyahu's downfall when the opportunity arises. Now, the opportunity seems to have presented itself to see the ouster of Bibi's cabinet as the immediate result of the agreement. The US seeks to see Netanyahu's opposition assume power to create a so-called lasting state of affairs in Israel and Palestine. Whether they will reach their goal or not remains to be seen, but what is certain is that Netanyahu and his war-mongering cabinet are at the end of their rope.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi  
Cartoonist

