



Hamas delays release of captives over Gaza aid

International Desk

Hamas delayed release of the Israeli captives on Saturday, the second day of the four-day cease-fire until Israel lets aid into northern Gaza.

Earlier the day, Egyptian officials had said that Hamas was to release 14 Israelis for 42 Palestinian prisoners held by Israel as part of an exchange on the second day of a cease-fire that has allowed critical humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip.

The armed wing of Hamas said it had decided to delay Saturday's scheduled second round of captive releases until Israel committed to allowing aid trucks to enter northern Gaza. Hamas' al-Qassam Brigades said the captive releases would be delayed if Israel did not adhere to the agreed terms for the release of Palestinian prisoners.

There was no immediate Israeli response to the statement. On the first day of the four-day cease-fire, which has given Gaza civilians their first respite after seven weeks of war, Hamas released 24 of the approximately 240 prisoners taken during its October 7 attack on Israel, and Israel freed 39 Palestinians from prison. Those Hamas freed from captivity in Gaza were 13 Israelis, 10 Thais, and a Filipino.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman confirmed on Saturday his country's mediation for the release of the 10 Thai prisoners following the request of Thai authorities from Tehran.

On Saturday, Hamas provided mediators Egypt and Qatar with a list of 14 captives to be released, and the list was passed along to Israel, according to an Egyptian official. A second Egyptian official, also speaking on condition of anonymity, confirmed the details.

Under the truce agreement, Hamas will release one Israeli for every three prisoners freed. It was not immediately clear how many non-Israeli captives may also be released.

Overall, Hamas is to release at least 50 Israelis, and Israel will reciprocate by freeing 150 Palestinian prisoners during the four-day truce, all women and minors.

Israel has said the truce can be extended an extra day for every additional 10 prisoners freed — something United States President Joe Biden said he hoped would come to pass.



AFP

'Huge victory'

John Bolton, the former US national security advisor, called the truce "a huge victory" for Hamas fighters over Israel, arguing that Hamas wants to turn the four-day pause into a permanent cease-fire by attempting to "break the morale" or the resolve of the Israeli military — thus giving its fighters an advantage over Israel.

He said the prisoner exchange deal has costs as well as benefits, and it's the Hamas fighters who stand to gain most. Separately, a Qatari delegation arrived in Israel on Saturday to coordinate with parties on the ground and "ensure the deal continues to move smoothly," according to a diplomat briefed on the visit.

The start of the truce Friday morning brought the first quiet for 2.3 million Palestinians reeling and desperate from relentless Israeli bombardment that has killed more than 14,800, driven three-quarters of the population from their homes, and leveled residential areas. Rocket fire from Gaza fighters into Israel went silent as well.

Focus on criminals' trial

Iran's top human rights official said criminal Israeli authorities must be brought to trial for their atrocities against the Palestinian nation, stressing that the Islamic Republic is seriously following up on the matter.

In an interview with the Alalam television news network, Kazem Gharibabadi, secretary of Iran's High Council for Human Rights, said, "Criminal officials of the Israeli regime must be tried. The Islamic Republic of Iran has placed particular focus on the issue, and Iranian lawyers and jurists have, for this reason, had interactions with their counterparts in other countries to follow up on the case. The matter is also being pursued by judicial authorities of other Muslim states."

The top Iranian rights official went on to sharply criticize certain Muslim countries for their

refusal to cut off diplomatic ties with Tel Aviv and expel Israeli ambassadors, boycott products linked to Israel, and impose an embargo on all oil and energy exports to the Israeli-occupied Palestinian lands.

Pro-Palestinian protesters

Meanwhile, on Saturday, thousands of pro-Palestinian protesters gathered in London in the latest of a series of protests calling for a permanent cease-fire in Gaza.

The Met Police had warned those who gathered at Park Lane for the march to Whitehall that they would not tolerate any behavior supporting what they called "terrorism".

Within minutes of the marchers gathering, one man was arrested on suspicion of inciting racial hatred after officers spotted him carrying a placard with Nazi symbols on it.

Around 1,500 officers were being deployed for the protest. Officers along the route handed out leaflets to provide "absolute clarity" on what was deemed an offense.

Ade Adelekan, the deputy assistant commissioner of operations at the Metropolitan Police Service, said: "This sets out that anyone who is racist or incites hatred against any group should expect to be arrested, as should anyone who supports Hamas or any other banned organization."

The force had come under severe pressure from politicians over the decision to allow that march to go ahead, with Suelia Braverman, the former UK home secretary, accusing it of showing bias in favor of left-wing protesters.

The Stop the War Coalition, which organized the protest, rejected the label of "hate march" deployed by Braverman before she was sacked by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak.

Israeli-owned ship targeted

A suspected drone attack hit a container ship owned by an Israeli businessman in the Indian

Ocean, according to a United States defense official.

The container ship owned by an Israeli billionaire came under attack in the Indian Ocean, an American defense official said Saturday.

The Friday attack on the CMA CGM SYMI came as global shipping increasingly finds itself targeted in the weeklong war that threatens to become a wider regional conflict.

The defense official, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence matters, said the Malta-flagged vessel was suspected to have been targeted by a triangle-shaped, bomb-carrying drone while in international waters. The drone exploded, causing damage to the ship but not injuring any of its crew.

"We continue to monitor the situation closely," the official said. Al-Mayadeen, a pan-Arab satellite channel that is politically allied with the Lebanese resistance group Hezbollah, also reported that an Israeli ship had been targeted in the Indian Ocean. The channel cited anonymous sources for the report.

CMA CGM, a major shipper based in Marseille, France, referred questions to SYMI's owner, Singapore-based Eastern Pacific Shipping. That company is ultimately controlled by Israeli billionaire Idan Ofer.

A statement issued on behalf of Eastern Pacific acknowledged the company is "aware of claims that a container ship under the company's management was targeted in a possible security incident overnight on Friday."

"The vessel in question is currently sailing as planned," the statement said. "All crew members are safe and well."

The company, through representatives, declined to answer any questions. The Israeli military referred questions to the Israeli Foreign Ministry, which did not respond, either.

AP, Reuters, The Telegraph, Al Jazeera, Press TV, and IRNA contributed to this report.



Palestinians leaving the north walk through the Salaheddine road in the Zeitoun district on the southern outskirts of Gaza City on November 25, 2023, on the second day of a truce between Israel and Hamas.

MAHMUD HAMS/AFP

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