

# Hamas says ready to start Gaza ceasefire talks 'immediately'

AFP:: Hamas on Friday said it was ready to start talks "immediately" on a proposal for a ceasefire in Gaza, where the civil defence agency said Israel's ongoing offensive killed more than 50 people.

The announcement came after it held consultations with other Palestinian factions and before a visit on Monday by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to Washington, where President Donald Trump is pushing for an end to the war, now in its 21st month.

"The movement is ready to engage immediately and seriously in a cycle of negotiations on the mechanism to put in place" the terms of a draft US-backed truce proposal received from mediators, the militant group said in a statement.

Hamas ally Islamic Jihad said it supported ceasefire talks, but demanded "guarantees" that Israel "will not resume its aggression" once hostages held in Gaza are freed.

Trump, when asked about Hamas' response aboard Air Force One on Friday, said: "That's good. They haven't briefed me on it. We have to get it over with. We have to do something about Gaza."

The conflict in Gaza began with Hamas's unprecedented attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, which sparked a massive Israeli offensive aimed at destroying Hamas and bringing home all the hostages seized by militants.

Two previous ceasefires brokered by Qatar, Egypt and the United States have seen temporary halts in fighting, coupled with the return of Israeli hostages in exchange for Palestinian prisoners.

Netanyahu earlier on Friday vowed to bring home all the hostages held in Gaza, after coming under massive domestic pressure over their fate.

“I feel a deep commitment, first and foremost, to ensure the return of all our abductees, all of them,” he said.

Trump said on Thursday he wanted “safety for the people of Gaza”.

“They’ve gone through hell,” he said.

– 60-day truce proposal –

A Palestinian source familiar with the negotiations told AFP earlier this week that the latest proposals included “a 60-day truce, during which Hamas would release half of the living Israeli captives in the Gaza Strip” – thought to number 22 – “in exchange for Israel releasing a number of Palestinian prisoners and detainees”.

Out of 251 hostages seized by Palestinian militants during the October 2023 attack, 49 are still held in Gaza, including 27 the Israeli military says are dead.

Nearly 21 months of war have created dire humanitarian conditions for the more than two million people in the Gaza Strip, where Israel has recently expanded its military operations.

The military said in a statement it had been striking suspected Hamas targets across the territory, including around Gaza City in the north and Khan Yunis and Rafah in the south.

– Civil defence says aid-seekers killed –

Gaza civil defence official Mohammad al-Mughayyir said Israeli strikes and gunfire killed at least 52 people on Friday.

The Israeli military said it was looking into reports, except for a handful of incidents for which it requested coordinates and timeframes.

Media restrictions in Gaza and difficulties in accessing many areas mean AFP is unable to independently verify the tolls and details provided by the civil defence agency.

In a separate statement, the Israeli military said a 19-year-old sergeant “fell during combat in the southern Gaza Strip”.

Mughayyir said the Palestinians killed included five shot while waiting for aid near a US-run site near Rafah in southern Gaza and several who were waiting for aid near the Wadi Gaza Bridge in the centre of the territory.

They were the latest in a spate of deaths near aid distribution centres in the devastated territory, which UN agencies have warned is on the brink of famine.

The US- and Israeli-run Gaza Humanitarian Foundation has distanced itself from reports of deadly incidents near its sites.

– Displaced civilians –

Mughayyir told AFP that eight people, including a child, were killed in an Israeli air strike on the tents of displaced civilians near Khan Yunis on Thursday.

The civil defence official said eight more people were killed in two other strikes on camps on the coast, including one that killed two children early Friday.

The Israeli military said it was operating throughout Gaza “to dismantle Hamas military capabilities”.

The Hamas attack of October 2023 resulted in the deaths of 1,219 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli official figures.

Israel's retaliatory military campaign has killed at least 57,268 people in Gaza, also mostly civilians, according to the Hamas-run territory's health ministry. The United Nations considers the figures reliable.

AFP