

FIRST PHASE OF GAZA PEACE DEAL

Does it mean the end of war?

REUTERS

US President Donald Trump says the deal agreed between Israel and Hamas marks the first steps toward a "strong, durable, and everlasting peace" that will end the two-year-old Gaza war.

Yet the agreement signed after indirect talks in the Egyptian resort of Sharm el-Sheikh, a favoured location for Middle East peace conferences over the decades with a patchy record of success, is only an initial phase involving a ceasefire, a handover of hostages held in Gaza in exchange for Palestinian prisoners inside Israel, and a partial withdrawal of Israel from the enclave.

Plenty of pitfalls remain after negotiators left for later discussions about some of the thornier issues on which previous initiatives have foundered, such as the full extent of an Israeli withdrawal, the disarmament of Hamas, how to guarantee that war will not resume after this phase -- and who could provide such a guarantee.

Not yet. Trump demanded Israel halt its bombing when Hamas first indicated partial acceptance for his 20-point plan on Friday. That has not happened. Scores of Palestinians have been killed since then in airstrikes and shelling, particularly in and around Gaza City, the focus of a recent Israeli offensive.

However, the bombardment has been more sporadic since Trump declared a deal had been secured on Wednesday, prompting celebrations in Israel, where families of hostages were jubilant in Tel Aviv's so-called hostages square, and in Gaza, where people gathered among the ruins even as blasts could be heard.

While this is a partial deal, a notable difference from previous ceasefire arrangements is that there is no deadline for reaching a full deal. It does not set a deadline of a few weeks, after which hostilities could resume if talks falter.

The jury is still out on whether that



makes this deal more durable. There are those among Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's religious nationalist coalition who are already talking of more war. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, a staunch opponent of any concession to Palestinians, has called for Hamas to be destroyed after the hostages are returned.

But on this occasion, Trump has been far more vocal in his determination to hold feet to the fire on both sides, leaving less room for Israel to relaunch its offensive or Hamas to delay, even if past experience counsels caution over too much optimism.

Trump announced his plan standing next to Netanyahu in Washington last week with what seemed a "take-it-or-leave-it" offer for Hamas. Yet when Hamas gave only a partial acceptance, Trump immediately demanded Israel stop bombing. And as the days ticked by in the Sharm el-Sheikh talks, he warned Hamas "all HELL, like no one has ever seen before, will break out" if

it did not sign up.

By stamping his authority, Trump may have gone some way to answering the key question of who will guarantee this deal does not collapse at the next hurdle.

The timeline is emerging but still seems fluid.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said the ceasefire would take effect once the agreement is ratified by his government, which would convene after a security cabinet meeting on Thursday.

An Israeli government spokeswoman said a ceasefire would go into force within 24 hours of the cabinet meeting. After that 24-hour period, the hostages held in Gaza will be freed within 72 hours, she said.

A source briefed on details of the agreement said earlier that Israeli troops would begin pulling back within 24 hours of the deal being signed.

Humanitarian aid to Palestinians

should then start to flow. Calling for full access for humanitarian workers in Gaza, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said the United Nations was ready to help and "prepared to move -- now."

Trump's plan also calls for an international stabilisation force, which could start taking shape after a meeting of European ministers and top officials from Arab states in Paris on Thursday. They were also due to discuss issues such as future governance of Gaza, aid, reconstruction and demilitarisation.

Israeli President Isaac Herzog's office said Trump was expected to be in Jerusalem on Sunday.

Both Israel and Hamas have shown a readiness to respond positively to pressure from Trump and others, but each side faces their own political calculations.

For Netanyahu, agreeing to the plan seems based on a calculation he can stay on the right side of the United States, Israel's vital ally, and win over an Israeli public desperate to see an end to the war, while conceding as little as possible to avoid alienating his religious nationalist coalition partners. The 20-point plan, for example, offers a possible pathway, albeit highly conditional, to a Palestinian state although Netanyahu has said that will never happen.

Hamas has dropped its opposition to any deal that was only partial because of the risk of war resuming once hostages were handed over. It has also signed up to a deal calling for demilitarisation, which it had repeatedly rejected.

Under pressure from Arab states and Turkey, alongside Trump, Hamas may have had little choice but to accept. But it may be calculating that Trump's determination is the best guarantee that war will not resume for now, while the talks in Sharm el-Sheikh have put the militant group at the negotiating table to shape the future for Palestinians even though the deal seeks to sideline it.

EU chief Von der Leyen survives no-trust motion

AFP, Strasbourg

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen survived two confidence votes Thursday in the European Parliament -- touting "strong support" from the assembly despite the tensions laid bare by the challenge.

The motions of censure against the European Commission president were brought by the hard-left and far-right, which accuse her of a lack of transparency and reject her trade policies.

Neither motion secured the minimum 361 out of 720 votes. But the challenges reflected mounting discontent with von der Leyen's leadership and tested the cohesion of the coalition led by her European People's Party.

Von der Leyen held up the results as evidence of continuing faith in her team, given a wide majority of the assembly had rejected the confidence motions.

"I deeply appreciate the strong support received today," the EU chief wrote on X.



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer speaks with his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi upon his arrival at the Raj Bhavan ahead of their bilateral meeting in Mumbai yesterday. Starmer is on his first visit to India as premier, accompanied by a 125-member delegation, after the two countries signed a trade deal in London in July. Under the accord, India will slash tariffs on imports of British goods such as whisky, cosmetics and medical devices, while Britain will reduce duties on clothing, footwear and food products.

Women must have equal space in politics

FROM PAGE 12

It also urged at least 33 percent nomination for women, with a gradual rise to 50 percent through reforms to the Representation of the People Order; provision of state funding for women candidates; decentralisation of Members of Parliament's powers; protection of women from physical and online violence during polls; and the introduction of a "No Vote" option in all constituencies.

Former caretaker government adviser and educationist Rashed K Choudhury, who presided over the seminar, said it was unfortunate that even after 55 years of independence, women still had to demand their rightful share in politics.

"Women have contributed to every sector -- from foreign currency earnings to healthcare and education -- yet they remain sidelined in decision-making ... We don't seek charity or tokenism; we seek recognition, respect,

and a dignified place in leadership."

Speaking at the event, Fisheries and Livestock Adviser Farida Akhter called for an end to nomination-based reserved seats. "Reserved seats must come through direct election -- no party selection, no tokenism." She criticised parties for treating these seats as a "bonus" for ruling majorities and urged women leaders to reject such humiliation. "We don't want decorative roles; we want real power," she said, adding that women's organisations should also be eligible for nominations alongside political parties.

Senior Supreme Court Advocate Sara Hossain said women's participation must reflect diversity. "Representation should include women of different professions, faiths, ethnicities, beliefs, abilities, and regions."

She added, "Every political party and leader should pledge that women

will not face discrimination -- not in public life, not in social life, and not within family life."

Sara Hossain noted that the judiciary also lacks adequate representation of women and those who believe in gender equality. "That gap must be addressed."

BNP leader Mahbuba Habiba urged all parties to increase direct nominations of women rather than rely on reserved seats, which she said have had limited impact. While acknowledging their temporary role, she called for mandatory quotas and structural reforms so women can compete equally in general elections.

Jamaat-e-Islami's Foreign Affairs Secretary Khandakar Ayesha Khatun said her party's internal ratio of women members has reached 43 percent, surpassing its initial 33 percent target. "Many women now serve as vice chairpersons, commissioners, and councillors. But future

progress must align with social values and familial harmony."

National Citizen Party Senior Joint Convener Samantha Sharmin said Bangladesh's politics remains dominated by money and muscle, pushing women and marginalised groups to the sidelines. "Without reforming party structures and the electoral system, women cannot gain a real foothold in politics."

NCP leader Tajnuva Jabeen said political parties must take responsibility for empowering women at the grassroots and policymaking levels, starting with the promised 33 percent representation. She warned that entrenched political interests often exclude women to preserve corruption and control.

Student leaders Umama Fatema and Ashrefa Khatun, along with other rights activists and political representatives, were also present at the event.

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