

Israel and Hamas Officially Sign Hostage Deal After Averting Last-Minute Crisis

Early on Friday morning, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) officially announced that Israel and Hamas signed the ceasefire and hostage release deal overnight, adding the agreement would be implemented starting on Sunday.

Previously, the deal had been orally agreed upon and confirmed by Qatar and the U.S., but not yet from official representatives of Israel and Hamas.

The announcement followed a day of last-minute wrangling over final details, with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu threatening to recall the Israeli delegation at one point.

Causes of the delay reportedly included Hamas demands regarding the identity of the Palestinian prisoners who will be released, as well as intense discussions within Netanyahu's coalition to prevent the exit of Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich.

However, talks successfully concluded and after the delegation returned from Qatar during the night, the PMO stated Netanyahu had been "updated by the negotiating team that agreements have been reached on a deal for the release of the hostages."

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Netanyahu instructed the Security Cabinet to convene around noon on Friday to approve the deal.

"Prime Minister Netanyahu expressed his appreciation for the negotiating team and all those who assisted. The Prime Minister's Office Authority for the Hostages and Missing has

updated the families of the hostages,” the PMO added.

Netanyahu also ordered the government’s Coordinator for the Hostages and the Missing, . (ret.) Gal Hirsch, to “coordinate the preparations to receive the hostages upon their return to Israel.”

Before the cabinet convened, Netanyahu held an operational security assessment to discuss the implementation of the agreement, the PMO said.

Also Friday, another delegation of senior security officials will be sent to Cairo to coordinate the implementation of the deal, Israeli media reported.

Following the delays caused by the renewed discussions on Thursday, as well as reports that the government would meet only after the Sabbath on Saturday evening, speculation grew that the release could be pushed back a day or two.

However, the PMO stated that the first hostages are expected to be released on Sunday, after approval of the deal by the cabinet and the government, which is set to convene on Saturday evening.

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A spokesman for the prime minister initially explained the potential delay with a law demanding that opposing petitions to the deal must be given 24 hours to be filed with the High Court. However, the appeal period was later shortened to several hours, allowing the deal to go ahead on Sunday.

Reports of a potential delay had caused angry calls to the government from hostage families and organizations, as well as from Opposition Leader Yair Lapid, who accused it of postponing its meeting “because of the Sabbath.”

"If they were truly Jewish, they would know that the origin of the phrase 'life in danger takes precedence over the Sabbath' comes from the fact that the Mishnah permits the dismantling of a pile of stones on Shabbat in order to save a person buried under it. Yes, that's exactly it (Tosefta, Shabbat 16:14). A criminal government. Heartless," he wrote on □.

Interior Minister Moshe Arbel of the ultra-orthodox Shas party, quickly hit back at Lapid's "words of incitement and hate."

"Lapid is lying again. Playing with the emotions of kidnapped families. After I inquired carefully, Shas chairman Rabbi Aryeh Deri insisted since yesterday and unequivocally demanded that a government meeting be held immediately after the cabinet, even if it is on Shabbat," Arbel explained.

"Lapid apologize! There's no shame in it!"

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