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Israel and Middle East News Update

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Reuters

Hamas says it is ready to release all remaining hostages for an end to Gaza war

Hamas wants a comprehensive deal to end the war in Gaza and swap all Israeli hostages for Palestinians jailed in Israel, a senior official from the Palestinian militant group said, rejecting Israel's offer of an interim truce. In a televised speech, Khalil Al-Hayya, the group's Gaza chief who leads its negotiating team, said the group would no longer agree to interim deals, adopting a position that Israel is unlikely to accept and potentially further delaying an end to the devastating attacks that restarted in recent weeks.

i24 News

Gazan food reserves to be depleted within a month, according to Israel

Food reserves and humanitarian aid in the Gaza Strip will last for about another month, according to an assessment by Israel's security apparatus, Israeli broadcaster Kan reported Wednesday. This estimate explains the recent statements by Defense Minister Israel Katz, who is conducting ongoing discussions with the IDF to determine how to deliver humanitarian aid without it falling into the hands of Hamas. According to security sources, "the stopping of trucks carrying food, water, and fuel into the Gaza Strip will put pressure on Hamas," adding that "without the release of hostages, the situation in Gaza will continue to worsen."

i24 News

ICJ extends deadline for Israeli response, confirming i24NEWS report

The International Court of Justice on Thursday confirmed an i24NEWS exclusive report that it would extend the deadline for Israel's response by six months, after evidence presented by South Africa alleging Israel's genocidal actions in the Gaza Strip were not available to review by Israel's legal team in time. Israel will now have until January 12, 2026, before responding to the evidence presented. Two Western diplomats told i24NEWS on Wednesday that South Africa submitted the evidence without allowing Israel's legal team to access it. This constitutes a serious disregard for legal norms.

Arutz Sheva

US strikes fuel sites used by Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen to disrupt terror funding

US forces carried out targeted strikes against fuel infrastructure used by the Iran-backed Houthi terrorist organization in Yemen, US Central Command (CENTCOM) announced Thursday. The operation aimed to eliminate a key source of revenue fueling the group's ongoing attacks and regional destabilization. The Houthi-affiliated Al-Masirah TV reported that at least 17 people were killed and dozens more were injured in the US strike.

Al-Monitor

Lebanon's army expands presence, dismantles 500 Hezbollah sites

Lebanon's army has expanded its presence in the south of the country, dismantling hundreds of Hezbollah military installations and confiscating weapons in accordance with a ceasefire that ended a 13-month war with Israel last November, as the government works to establish a monopoly on arms across the country, Lebanese officials revealed on Thursday. The Lebanese military has dismantled more than 500 military sites belonging to Hezbollah and other groups

in southern Lebanon since the ceasefire entered into force on Nov. 27, 2024, a diplomat familiar with the matter told The Washington Post on Thursday, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Reuters

Iraqi and Syrian leaders meet in Qatar, marking a significant first encounter

Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani met on Thursday in Qatar with Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa, the first encounter between the two leaders, Iraqi and Syrian state news agencies reported. The meeting was brokered by Qatar, with Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani present. It came ahead of Sharaa's expected attendance at the Arab Summit in Baghdad on May 17.

Commentary:

Israel Hayom

Egypt Demands Gaza's Demilitarization

By Danny Zaken and Shachar Kleiman

- Prime Minister Netanyahu held a telephone consultation last night to discuss the hostage negotiations. All of the senior defense officials were party to the telephone conversation, as were several senior cabinet ministers. M, the GSS official who is overseeing the negotiations, briefed the people who were party to the conversation on the current state of affairs.
- Progress has been made in the hostage negotiations, at least according to the information that has been obtained by Israel Hayom. Despite the fact that Hamas informed Egypt and Qatar ([the latter of] which is now playing a secondary role as a mediator) that it objects to certain sections

- of the proposal, Hamas has not rejected it formally. It has demanded clarifications about some of the sections and revisions to others.
- Egypt passed on Hamas's position to Israel and the United States, stressing that it had not rejected the proposal entirely, and had only objected to issues that could be discussed. Based on available information, Hamas does not object in principle to the immediate release of nine hostages as soon as an agreement about a deal is reached.
 - Israel is demanding the release of ten hostages [immediately] and a second group once progress in the negotiations is made. Hamas is not opposed in principle, but wants to release fewer living hostages and a larger number of bodies of dead hostages, and to keep a group of hostages in captivity until the war is fully over.
 - Progress has also been made on the issue of an Israeli withdrawal in the first stage of the agreement. Hamas is prepared to accept a partial IDF withdrawal—from the territories that it has seized since January—and to wait with a withdrawal from the Philadelphi Corridor until an intermediary stage of the negotiations. Israel, however, is unwilling to withdraw fully from the territories it has seized since January, and is certainly unwilling to withdraw from the Philadelphi Corridor.
 - The main bone of contention is the nature of the negotiations that will be held in the course of the ceasefire. Egypt and the US are trying to mediate a compromise on that issue. It is clear to everyone that the disagreement between Israel and Hamas about the “day after” appears to be unbridgeable, which is why the focus at present is on articulating the issues that are to be discussed in the negotiations.
 - Hamas has demanded that the issues to be negotiated include a full end to the war, a full IDF withdrawal from all territory in the Gaza Strip and the full reopening of the Rafah border crossing. Israel is demanding the full demilitarization of the Gaza Strip in return for ending the war and the release of all the hostages—namely, that Hamas be completely disarmed.
 - The wording that the parties are currently working on uses vague language about the conditions for ending the war, and speaks in general terms about protecting the security of Israeli citizens and the residents of Gaza.
 - The goal is to reach a ceasefire agreement and a hostage release in hope that a breakthrough might be achieved [further ahead].
 - One of the significant changes in the negotiations in recent days has been American pressure on Egypt to persuade Hamas to disarm. The Egyptians have gradually begun to come down from the fence and have impressed upon Hamas that this is likely to be a condition for ending the

war. That would explain the public remarks by several Hamas leaders, as well as a statement that was issued in the name of the “resistance organizations and the national organizations,” which offered lengthy explanations about the importance of the “resistance” retaining its arms as a means of defending Palestinian honor and even Egypt itself.

- Khaled Qaddoumi, Hamas’s representative in Iran, said that the terrorist organization would “refuse any ceasefire agreement that does not include an ‘end to the aggression,’ a full IDF withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and a ‘serious’ hostage deal.” Hamas’s monitoring committee asserted that any pause in the fighting without guarantees would be a “political trap” laid by Israel.
- The unanimous view held by Israeli political and defense officials is that the Israeli military pressure has prompted Hamas to soften its stances, coupled with the ongoing protests by the civilian population against Hamas and preparations to create a mechanism for distributing humanitarian aid under Israeli control.
- Nonetheless, time is of the essence, first and foremost on account of the hostages’ condition and the risk to their lives, but also with a view to US President Donald Trump’s upcoming visit to Saudi Arabia. Israeli officials know that the White House wants to see an agreement reached in the interim.

Yediot Ahronot

The New Reality in the Gaza Strip

By Yoav Zitun

- As the attempts to renew the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip flounder, Southern Command officials have come to focus on the so-called “ridge 70” (the name stems from its altitude in meters), which is located on the Gaza side of the border and which overlooks the Israeli communities near the border from urban points, such as Gaza City’s Sajaiya neighborhood.
- At issue is the seizure of an area that runs parallel to the buffer strip that was established between the border fence and urban centers after the October 7 massacre but which was, up until now, too narrow to ensure safe Israeli control over the area. “It will be impossible to return to Kibbutz Nahal Oz if we don’t fully address ‘ridge 70,’” IDF officers said yesterday.

- Military officials said that Hamas has abandoned the new offensive plan it had formulated during the ceasefire and has transitioned to a defensive posture in response to the fighting that Israel has initiated.
- The IDF has recently detected several signs that the fear barrier created by Hamas has begun to break, though a critical mass that might change the situation on the ground has not been created yet. For example, the director of a hospital in the Gaza Strip who posted online a threatening letter that he had received from terrorists in Gaza received public Palestinian support. In addition, the leaders of a clan executed a Hamas policeman and have also allowed local civilians to flee from Gaza City southward.
- Yesterday, for the first time since the end of last month, hundreds of people took part in demonstrations in Beit Lahiya calling to end Hamas's rule and to end the war. The protestors chanted, "Yes to brotherhood, no to terrorism," "we want to live in peace," and "Hamdan and al-Zahar, Gaza is humiliated."
- The demonstrators demanded, among other things, to open the crossings. Children who attended the demonstration held up placards that read: "We want to learn." Unusually, several clan leaders—many of whom are affiliated with Hamas—were filmed at the demonstration. Hamas sent some of its people to the demonstration in an effort to have the main message of the protest be about ending the war, but they were expelled with curses by the demonstrators.
- According to IDF data, about 250,000 Gazans moved to different parts of the Gaza Strip last month. About 350 terrorists were killed since the fighting resumed—40 of them commanders and Hamas officials. A total of 1,200 targets were struck, with the emphasis on damaging Hamas's fighting ability. In the last few weeks, the troops located five terrorist tunnels, some of which were close to the border. A terrorist squad that emerged from one of them on Tuesday fired an anti-tank missile at troops. The terrorist squad members were killed; the IDF did not suffer any casualties.
- "We are advancing slowly and safely, and that is why we have had fewer casualties up until now. The pressure is creating a shift in Hamas toward a hostage deal, and Hamas has come a long way on this issue in the time since we renewed the military pressure," said one IDF official, who admitted: "We're hitting Hamas hard, but we still haven't defeated it."
- Military officials added: "Hamas probably recognizes that this isn't the big attack yet, and that's why it has been conserving its efforts and has moved its forces back, but with every passing day it tries harder to hit

our troops, and with the passage of time and the deeper we move in, the friction will increase.” IDF officials stressed that many efforts were being made to avoid endangering the hostages and said something that has been obvious from day one: “If it weren’t for the hostages, we would have long since gone all-out against Hamas. Obviously, this limits us.”

- Defense Minister Yisrael Katz confirmed yesterday implicitly that Israel was preparing to resume the delivery of humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip, as reported by Yedioth Ahronoth last week, but said that this would be done by means of “a distribution mechanism using civilian companies.” A short time after his announcement, in response to criticism from within the coalition, Katz clarified “in the current reality, nobody is about to send any humanitarian aid into Gaza, and we are not preparing to let in any aid of this kind. I stressed that in regard to the future, a mechanism must be built and civilian companies will be used as a means to prevent Hamas from this in the future.”
- Following the report by Yedioth Ahronoth, Katz was furious and demanded clarifications from IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Eyal Zamir. Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu said, “The report is incorrect.” Ministers Bezalel Smotrich and Itamar Ben Gvir also spoke out against the army’s plans. IDF officials said yesterday “There is no starvation in Gaza and we will act so that there is no humanitarian crisis according to international law. We do not want to give Hamas strength. Stopping the humanitarian aid a month ago undermined Hamas’s governance in the Gaza Strip, it caused a rise in prices and pressure on Hamas by the civilians.”