



Confusion clouds efforts to save Gaza ceasefire



The Gaza ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas has looked shaky since it came into force on 19 January but now looks the closest yet to totally falling apart.

Senior Egyptian told that regional mediators Egypt and Qatar were "intensifying their diplomatic efforts in an attempt salvage the ceasefire agreement". A top-level Hamas delegation has now arrived in Cairo for talks "to contain the current crisis", a Hamas official told the BBC. He reiterated his group's "full commitment" to the terms of the deal. On Tuesday, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said: "If Hamas does not return our hostages by Saturday noon, the ceasefire will end and the [Israeli military] will resume intense fighting." was then said that Israel expected the final nine living hostages slated for release in the six-week first phase of the ceasefire to be freed, which is supposed to see a total of 33 captives handed over.

Key ministers then began to weigh in. Miri Regev - a close ally of Netanyahu - said on X the decision was "very clear" and echoed the Trump demand. She said: "By Saturday, everyone will be released!" The far-right Israeli finance minister Bezalel Smotrich - who has threatened to leave Netanyahu's coalition if there is not a return to fighting at the end of the six-week ceasefire deal - went further still.

On social media, he proposed telling Hamas to release all the hostages or else have "the gates of hell" opened, with no fuel, water or humanitarian aid entering Gaza. He said there should be "only fire and brimstone" from Israeli warplanes and tanks, with the strip completely occupied and its population expelled. "We have all the international backing for this matter," he stated.

His comments indicate how Trump's post-war vision for Gaza has strengthened the far-right in Israel. That is said to worry the Israeli security chiefs who negotiated the current ceasefire deal and believe its collapse will endanger hostages' lives. Israeli media report that they are pushing for a way to bring back the next three captives held by Hamas on schedule at the weekend.