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Ramallah is never a quiet city but today, here in its heart, it was frenetic.

Ahead of us, three coaches edged their way through the crowds, accompanied by motorbikes and Palestinian police officers, pushing people out of the way.

And on board, peering out of the windows, dozens of people about to walk into freedom. As they left the coaches, the air was punched and cheers rang out.

Each of these men - they were all men - had been convicted by an Israeli court of serious offences, including attempted murder and terrorism.

And yet here they were, leaving the coaches, soaking up the acclaim of the West Bank's largest city.

Their freedom is one of the prices Israel is paying to reclaim its hostages.

As the coaches came past, we met Safia, who was waiting for her son Ismail to arrive. He had been convicted of attempted murder; in the eyes of Israelis, her son was a dangerous criminal but to those who had gathered to welcome these men, they were political prisoners, finally released.

Safia, a frail, short woman, dropped to her knees to pray as the coach rolled past, thanking God for her son's return. The prisoners' journey had started on the other side of Ramallah when their coaches were ushered away from an Israeli prison as part of a convoy of military vehicles.

We, along with other journalists and a group of curious locals, had been watching the prison from a nearby ridge when we saw a convoy forming.

That time, there were no coaches, but some of the vehicles came up to the ridge to force us to move.

We moved to another location and saw tear gas being used at the end of the street.

And then, far earlier than predicted, we saw the coaches being driven along the street and away from the prison.

More tear gas was fired.