



Israel approves extension of Gaza ceasefire



The Israeli government has approved a temporary extension of the Gaza ceasefire for the next six weeks, covering the Muslim Ramadan and Jewish Passover periods

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office made the announcement shortly after the first phase of the previously agreed ceasefire expired at midnight on Saturday. Netanyahu's office said that under a ceasefire proposal by US President Donald Trump's envoy Steve Witkoff, half of the hostages still held by Hamas in Gaza - both alive and dead - would be released on the first day.

The remaining hostages would be freed "if an agreement on a permanent ceasefire is reached". Hamas has not publicly commented on the latest Israeli move. The Israeli government backed the ceasefire extension after a four-hour meeting called by Netanyahu. The prime minister's office claimed that Hamas "has so far refused" to back the Witkoff plan, adding that Israel would immediately start negotiations if the group changed its position.

The US envoy's plan envisages that Israel could return to fighting after 42 days if it believed negotiations on a second phase had failed. On Friday night, Hamas said it would not agree to any extension of phase one without guarantees from American, Qatari and Egyptian mediators that phase two would eventually take and the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza, have barely begun.

There are believed to be 24 hostages alive, with another 39 presumed to be dead. Hamas carried out an unprecedented attack on Israel on 7 October 2023, killing about 1,200 people and taking another 251 hostages. Israel responded with an air and ground campaign in the Gaza Strip, during which at least 48,365 people have been killed, according to the territory's Hamas-run health ministry.