

## 3 hostages freed from Gaza are with the Red Cross

Fragile ceasefire passes first hurdle

AP, DEIR AL-BALAH (GAZA STRIP): The first three hostages set to be released from Gaza were transferred to the Red Cross and were on their way toward Israeli forces, the Israeli military announced on Sunday, hours after the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas took hold.

Israeli media, carrying live footage from Qatar-based Al Jazeera, showed the hostages walking between vehicles as their convoy moved through Gaza City, surrounded by a huge crowd, with many people holding up phones and filming.

The vehicles were accompanied by armed men who wore green Hamas headbands and struggled to guard the cars from an unruly crowd that swelled into the thousands.

Meanwhile, in Tel Aviv, thousands of people gathered to watch the news on large screens erupted in cheers. For months, many had gathered in the square to demand a ceasefire deal.

The deal ushers in an initial six-week period of calm and raises hopes for



This image grab shows one of the Israeli hostages exiting a vehicle to be handed over to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) during the hostage-prisoner exchange operation in Saraya Square in western Gaza City, on Sunday

the release of dozens of militant-held hostages and an end to the devastating 15-month war. A last-minute delay by Hamas put off the truce's start by nearly three hours and highlighted its fragility.

Even before the ceasefire took effect, celebrations erupted across the territory and some Palestinians began returning to their homes. Israel earlier announced the names of the first three hostages to be freed in exchange for the

planned release of 90 Palestinian prisoners.

The truce, which started at 11:15 a.m. local time, is the first step toward ultimately ending the conflict and returning nearly 100 hostages abducted in Hamas' October 7, 2023 attack.

An Israeli official confirmed that Romi Gonen, 24, Emily Damari, 28, and Doron Steinbrecher, 31, were set to be released later Sunday.

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## Cylinder blast triggers blaze at Maha Kumbh

Fire engulfs 18 tents in Sector 19; 15 fire tenders managed to bring the inferno under control

PTI, MAHAKUMBH NAGAR: A big fire broke out at the Maha Kumbh Mela here on Sunday due to a cylinder blast, engulfing 18 tents in Sector 19, officials said. No casualty was reported in the incident.

Thick clouds of smoke enveloped the mela area as panic gripped the nearby akhadas. The officials said 15 fire tenders managed to bring the blaze, which started at around 4 pm, under control within an hour.

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, who was in Prayagraj to review the preparations ahead of Mauni Amavasya, also reached the spot and directed authorities to take steps to avoid any such incident in future, they said.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Adityanath over phone to enquire about the incident. "The chief minister told PM Modi that the blaze was quickly brought under control by teams of SDRF, NDRF and fire department," a senior official said.

Prayagraj Zone Additional DGP Bhanu Bhaskar told PTI that the blaze has been extinguished and the situa-



Firefighters try to douse a fire that broke out in tents during Mahakumbh at Sangam in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, on Sunday

tion is under control.

"...People have been evacuated and the fire has been brought under control. No casualty was reported in the incident. The situation is normal here and losses are being quantified," he said.

Bhaskar said the thatched roofs of the tents caught fire while the rest of the struc-

tures are still there.

Police said that initially straw in a tent caught fire due to which an LPG cylinder exploded.

Prayagraj District Magistrate Ravindra Kumar Mander said that they received information at 4.30 pm about a fire in a tent housing the Gita Press in Sector 19 of fair area.

"The blaze spread to some other tents. Fire brigade and police teams reached the spot and extinguished the blaze. There is no report of any loss of life," Mander said.

The affected area was cordoned off for pilgrims as onlookers shot the rising flames and smoke using their mobile phones.

"I was inside the akhada when I heard a loud sound and saw everybody running. I rushed outside and within minutes there were two more blasts. Soon everybody came out of their camps...my heart is still racing," said Samant Bharti, a seer.

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## RG Kar: Roy should get punishment he deserves, says mom

PTI, KOLKATA: The mother of Sanjoy Roy, who was convicted for the rape and murder of an on-duty medic of R G Kar Medical College and Hospital, on Sunday said if her son is guilty then he should get the punishment he deserves, even if it means hanging. The 70-year-old woman said she would "cry alone" but would accept his punishment as destiny.

A Kolkata court, where Sanjoy Roy's trial was held, will announce the quantum of punishment on Monday. A former civic volunteer with the Kolkata police, Roy was the only person arrested in the case.

Roy's mother Malati told reporters on Sunday that being a woman and a mother of three daughters, "I can feel the anguish and pain of the mother of the woman medic who is also like my daughter."

"If the court decides to hang him to death, I don't have any objection as his crime has been proved in the eye of the law. I will cry alone but accept it as a quirk of fate, something willed by destiny," she said standing on the doorstep of her shanty on Sambhunath Pandit Street, about 5 km away from the commotion and buzz at Sealdah Court the other day.

Asked if she had turned up during any of the court hearings or met Roy at the lockup, she replied "No. Why should I? Despite my failing health, I would have tried to go if the charges were found to be untrue."

Sanjay has three sisters and one of them died years back.

One of the elder sisters, who lives at her in-law's place close to Malati's home, on Saturday said in case he is proven guilty, the law should take its own course punishing him.

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