

Israel delays release of Palestinian prisoners, cites 'humiliating' handovers of hostages

PTI, TEL AVIV: Israel says the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners is delayed "until the release of the next hostages has been assured, and without the humiliating ceremonies" at handovers of Israeli captives in Gaza.



Palestinian children and journalists disperse as Israeli tanks enter the Jenin camp for Palestinian refugees in the occupied West Bank

The statement by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office came early Sunday as vehicles apparently carrying prisoners left the open gates of Ofer prison, only to turn around and go back in.

The release of 620 Palestinian prisoners had been delayed for several hours and was meant to occur just after six Israeli hostages were released on Saturday. It was meant to be the largest one-day prisoner release in the Gaza ceasefire's first phase.

Five of the six hostages freed Saturday were escorted by masked, armed militants in front of a crowd to a display that the UN and others have criticised as cruel after previous handovers.

The Israeli statement cited "ceremonies that demean the dignity of our hostages and the cynical use of the hostages for propaganda purposes". It was likely a reference to a Hamas video showing two hostages who have yet to be released watching a handover in Gaza on Saturday and speaking under duress.

Hamas had released the last six living hostages ex-

pected under the ceasefire's first phase, with a week remaining in the initial stage. Israel's announcement abruptly put the future of the truce into further doubt.

Freed were three Israeli men seized from the Nova music festival and another taken while visiting family in southern Israel during the Hamas-led October 7, 2023, attack that

triggered the 16-month war in Gaza. The two others were held for a decade after entering Gaza on their own.

Five were handed over in staged ceremonies that the Red Cross and Israel have condemned as cruel and disrespectful.

Omer Wenkert, Omer Shem Tov and Eliya Cohen were posed alongside Hamas fighters. A beaming Shem Tov, acting under duress, kissed two militants on the head and blew kisses to the crowd. They wore fake army uniforms, though they were not soldiers when abducted.

Cohen's family and friends in Israel chanted "Eliya! Eliya! Eliya!" and cheered.

"You're heroes," Shem Tov told his parents as they later embraced, laughing and crying. "You have no idea how much I dreamt of you." His father, Malki Shem Tov, told public broadcaster Kan his son was held alone after the first 50 days

and lost 17 kilograms (37 pounds).

Earlier Saturday, Tal Shoham, 40, and Avera Mengistu, 38, were freed. Mengistu, an Ethiopian-Israeli, entered Gaza in 2014. His family told Israeli media he has struggled with mental health issues. The Israeli-Austrian Shoham was taken from Kibbutz Be'eri. His wife and two children were freed in a 2023 exchange.

Later, Israel's military said Hisham Al-Sayed, 36, was released. The Bedouin Israeli entered Gaza in 2015. His family has told Israeli media he was previously diagnosed with schizophrenia.

Israel's government didn't respond to questions about the delay in releasing prisoners. Hamas accused Israel of violating the ceasefire deal, with spokesperson Abdel Latif Al-Qanou accusing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of "deliberately stalling".

Spain smashes human trafficking ring

AFP, MADRID: Spanish police said Sunday they had dismantled a human trafficking ring they said had exploited more than 1,000 women in the past year, mainly Colombians and Venezuelans.

"The victims, mainly of South American origin, were lured to Spain with bogus job offers," police stated, adding they had rescued 48 women in an operation which brought 48 arrests.

Most of those detained, including the three alleged ring leaders -- two Colombian women and one Spaniard -- were held near the eastern city of Alicante.

The women were recruited in their home countries, "mainly in Colombia and Venezuela, with false job offers" in the cleaning or beauty sectors.

On arrival in Spain "they were transferred to clubs where they were sexually exploited" and "forced to work all hours," according to police.

MORE OBITS ON PAGE 10

DEATH
AUGUSTINE ALELUIA DA COSTA
 MUNDVEL, VASCO
 Born 27-03-1957 Died 22-02-2025
 Loving son of Late Joaquim Mariano Dcosta & Late Pasquela Dcosta. Husband of Adelina Dcosta. Father of Late Joaquim Dcosta, Jimmy Dcosta, Valanki Dcosta & Filomena Dcosta. Father in law of Rony Braganca, Tony Fernandes, Fatima Dcosta & Lucia Dcosta. Loving Grandfather of Velron, Velika, Janica, Janelly, Adele, Ailya, Troy, Tyrone, Trystan
 Funeral cortege will leave his residence, Mundvel, Vasco on 25th February 2025 at 3:15 pm to St Andrews church, Vasco for Eucharistic Celebration at 3:30 pm, followed by burial at St Andrews Church Cemetery, Vasco
 Relatives, Neighbour & Friends kindly accept this only intimation

CONDOLENCE
 The committee and all members of Menino Jesus Chapel, Padriguelem deeply mourn the sad demise of
CAMILO FERNANDES (CAMILSON) (Vanelim, Colva)
 (Ex - President of Menino Jesus Chapel Padriguelem, Colva)
 And convey our heartfelt sympathies to the bereaved family members.
 Rebello Publicity & Funeral Services Margao 9822383992

FIRST DEATH ANNIVERSARY
 IN LOVING MEMORY OF
ANTONIO JOAO VAS (SANTANINHO)
 (Ex Employee Directorate of Settlement & Land Records)
 (HOD Draughtsman & Survey Department. KEMCO Doha Qatar)
 (BATIM - GOA VELHA)
 There will be an Eucharistic celebration for the soul of ANTONIO on Tuesday (TOMORROW) 25th Feb 2025 at Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, Batim at 4.00 pm followed by prayers and blessings at the grave.
 Offered by his wife Leonildes Julieta de Miranda (Juliet), Children Lloyd / Rowena, Sheryl Vas and grandson Dylan
 RELATIVES AND FRIENDS, KINDLY ACCEPT THIS AS THE ONLY INTIMATION

POILEA VORSACHO UGDAS
TEREZINHA SALINA A. PEREIRA (CELINA)
 Mogache Main, amkam jivitant tuven soglem dilem Koxtt korun Ihanantle vkhod korun xikoun vaddoie Aiz tukach lagon maim ani monis zaunk paule Tujem rinn amchean farik korun zaunche nam Mogache maim, upkar tuje sodanch amchea kalzant astole .
 Astoli Povitr Misachi Bhett 24ver Fabrerache 2025, sokalchea 8:00 vaztam, Mae De Deus Igrjont, Majorda.
 Bhettoit Dukest Kutumb: Put; Milagres, Franxavier, John Pereira ani famil Pacheco Vaddo, Majorda.

RETURNED TO THE LORD
 "Precious in the sight of the Lord. Is the death of his faithful one"
 PSALM 116:15
ANITA ROSADA MARIA CABRAL E RODRIGUES
 (CHICALIM)
 BORN : 24/06/1965
 DIED : 23/02/2025
 Beloved wife of late Brian Kenneth Rodrigues, Loving Mother/Mother-in-Law of Donnie/Simona, Elton. Daughter of late Caetano/late Antoneta Cabral, Daughter-in-law of late Osterio/late Elvira. Sister/Sister-in-Law of late Matilda/late Antonio Da Costa, Maria/George Albuquerque, Clea/Santan Moniz. Sister-in-law of Sr. Alba Rodrigues (PBVM), Celina /late Wilson Fernandes, Donald/Violet Rodrigues . Affectionate Grandmother of Dannalee Sairah.
 Funeral Cortege will leave her residence, TODAY, 24th February, 2025 at 3.00 p.m. to St. Andrews Church, Vasco-da-Gama for Eucharistic Celebration at 3.30 p.m. followed by burial.
 RELATIVES, & FRIENDS KINDLY ACCEPT THIS AS THE ONLY INTIMATION

Cong MLAs continue dharna in Rajasthan Assembly over suspension of 6 MLAs

PTI, JAIPUR: The deadlock between the opposition Congress and the government over the comment of minister Avinash Gehlot on former prime minister Indira Gandhi during the Question Hour on Friday continued with the Congress MLAs carrying on their 'dharna' in the Assembly.

The Congress MLAs have been sitting on the 'dharna' since Friday evening after the House was adjourned. They spent nights there, demanding that the comments be expunged from the proceedings and suspension of their six MLAs, including PCC chief Govind Singh Datasara, be revoked. Leader of Opposition Tikaram Jolly said on Sunday that the 'dharna' will continue if the demands are

not met. He said that the government itself does not want to end the deadlock and the ministers have held talks with the agitating Congress MLAs in the Assembly just for "formalities".

Minister of State Jawahar Singh Bedham and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Jogaram Patel met the senior Congress MLAs on Saturday night but the talks remained inconclusive. On Friday night also, the ministers held talks with Jolly and other senior MLAs.

Government chief whip Jogeshwar Garg moved a proposal to suspend Congress MLAs Govind Singh Datasara, Ramkesh Meena, Amin Kagzi, Jakir Hussain, Hakam Ali and Sanjay Kumar, which was passed by a voice vote.

Zelenskyy says may be forced to sign mineral agreement with US in exchange for continued aid

AP, KYIV: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Sunday said he may be forced to sign an economic agreement with the United States that would ensure continued aid for Ukraine in return for the US making a profit from minerals in the country.

"If your conditions are, 'We will not give you aid if you do not sign an agreement,' then it is clear," Zelenskyy said during a news conference at a forum of government officials in Kyiv marking the three-year anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

"If we are forced and we cannot do without it, then we should probably go for it... I just want a dialogue with President (Donald) Trump." The Trump administra-

tion has pressured Zelenskyy to sign a deal allowing the US access to Ukrainian rare earth minerals as a form of compensation for the assistance the US has provided to Kyiv as it defends against Russia's invasion.

Zelenskyy earlier declined to sign off on an initial US offer, arguing it did not provide Ukraine with the security guarantees it needs to deter Russian attacks.

On Sunday, Zelenskyy said he was open to brokering a deal that would let the US profit from his country's minerals, but the USD 500 billion sum initially proposed by the Trump administration wasn't acceptable.

"I am not signing something that will be paid off by 10 generations of Ukrainians," he said.

Zelenskyy's chief of staff, Andrii Yermak, left the Kyiv forum early on Sunday along with Economic Minister Yulia Svyrydenko for what Yermak said were talks with US officials on a potential deal.

He said Ukraine's mineral resources represent "a very important element that can work in the general structure of security guarantees - military guarantees and others."

Zelenskyy says he'd give up presidency for NATO membership

In response to a pointed question from a reporter on whether he would give up his presidency for peace in Ukraine, Zelenskyy said he would do so if it achieved a durable end to the fighting under the security umbrella

of the NATO military alliance.

"If to achieve peace, you really need me to give up my post, I'm ready," he said. "I can trade it for NATO."

His comment appeared to be aimed at recent suggestions by Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin that elections should be held in Ukraine despite Ukrainian legislation prohibiting them during martial law.

Ukraine fears Trump's policy shift toward Putin

Trump's engagement with Russian officials and his agreement to reopen diplomatic ties and economic cooperation with Moscow in recent weeks has marked a dramatic about-face in US policy that has rattled leaders in Ukraine and across Europe.

FROM PAGE 1

GOANS WAKE UP BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE: ACTIVISTS VOW TO PROTECT GOA

He thanked the police for cooperating with him and added that he could read from the faces of the policemen that they were pressured to act against him.

Former Sancoale sarpanch Premanand Naik questioned: "Why the so-called big leaders of the Scheduled Tribes community did not support Kankonkar when he was arrested?"

"With folded hands I demand that they come forward and extend their support to activists like Rama, who are fighting to protect the State," he said.

Rupesh Velip said, "Rama did not want to come out of jail on bail, but we forced him to apply for bail as we feared that anything could have happened to him. He had been fighting for the cause of the people, and it is clear that his arrest was a conspiracy to suppress his voice. But I want to tell the people of the State that the entire ST community and different organisations are together and with him. This is not the first incident of his harassment. So I want to say that we will not remain silent."

Rama Kankonkar was granted conditional bail on Saturday on a personal bail bond of Rs 10,000 and released on Sunday morning, February 23. He was remanded in judicial custody following his alleged statement against the Chief Minister.

DISTRESSED ANJUNKARS SEEK SOLACE FROM HC

"My son's Class X exams start on March 1 and it is sad that music can be heard till early morning. There seems to be no respite even during days of examination. Despite putting up with all the noise during the study holidays, we didn't expect them to carry on," said an infuriated Priya Mendonca, whose son is appearing for the exams.

"We are happy that the name of Janie Crasto has been suggested because despite having a less able son who is a victim of loud music, she has always been in the forefront in our fight against noise," added Mendonca.

Music could be heard being played well beyond the permissible limits set by the Supreme Court around Ozra, South Anjuna and Vaddy in Siolim with only one night club in the name of Goya playing within their sound proof setup till early morning.

"I have been registering complaints on 112 for the last so many months to no avail. It is obvious that the authorities are conspiring with people who have scant regard for Supreme Court directives and it is therefore essential that the High Court set up the noise Monitoring Committee soon," avers local Desmond D'Souza.

"By suggesting the name of Jeremy Ferreira, the Amicus Curiae has picked on an individual who is forthright and has always come forward to help those who are at the mercy of noise polluters,"

said D'Souza whilst handing over screen shots of his complaints made to 112.

Despite the Goa State Pollution Control Board (GSPCB) stating in its affidavit presented to the High Court that "noise meter found in a closed shelter and the device was wrapped in black tarpaulin," in the column against unit Diaz, loud music was heard playing at 1 am. The same affidavit mentions that "closure direction issued" against the unit.

In North Anjuna, despite the affidavit mentioning that closure direction has been issued to Shiva Valley, guests could be seen dancing inside the premises and on the beach till around 2 am. Echo and Vamos in Ozran, Vagator were seen accepting guests and playing music till morning despite a "reminder letter being issued by the Collector for implementation of closure directions."

"These places, mostly run by outsiders, do not care for the High Court or any closure notices sent to them. They make a mockery of orders by the Court and this cannot be possible had they not been in connivance with the government," thinks Avelin, who claims she suffers from sleep deprivation due to the noise.

"At Diaz, we not only suffer from noise, but also parking problems as their drunken clients block our pathway. We have to call the police in the morning to clear the road to take my children to school," moans Agnes D'Souza.

"Now that the High Court is going to appoint a new Noise Monitoring Committee, I expect truthful reports to be presented instead of the lies that have been fed all along. The government cannot think that they could be fooling the court all the time," hoped D'Souza.

Disrupting the ambience of children preparing for their final year examinations is the last straw that the locals expected the violators of the law to pull.

ASSAGAO'S BADEM LOCALS MANUALLY PUMP WATER TO MEET DAILY NEEDS

Assagao Sarpanch Hanumant Naik said that the WRD and PWD should actually work in tandem to alleviate the water problems of the residents.

"There is absolutely no clarity on the part of the PWD as to what are their plans and actions with regards to water supply in my village. I was told that the Sonarkhet plant would be ready by February 2025, but work is still behind schedule and I don't know why such an important project is being taken so lightly. Last February, the roads were dug up for laying water pipelines and still now these are being dug up again for the same reason. In fact part of the hotmixed road in Assagao was also dug up. This is a complete joke being played by the PWD and that too when the Chief Minister is handling this portfolio," said Naik.

The sarpanch admitted that the water issue has

been raised at gram sabhas.

The locals from Wards 6 and 7 of Assagao Village Panchayat complained of being the worst hit as they still depend on the old manual pumps to draw water and when summer is at its peak, there is a bee-line to fetch water at the site.

Claiming that some constructions have come up, the locals accused the builders of digging illegal borewells and blamed the WRD for having no mechanism to check this menace.

They complained that the digging of bore wells, has resulted in the wells in their areas to dry up.

In Vazarwada, Anjuna due to bore wells and inadequate PWD water supply, the locals have to depend on private water tankers.

"We have always been seeking accountability with regards to laying pipelines, water supply timings with the PWD but there seems to be some lack of transparency in PWD

projects and people are always kept in the dark. I have been persistently raising this issue at gram sabhas, but even Sarpanch is helpless because the department is just not bothered," complained Owen Braganza, a prominent activist from Assagao.

Meanwhile, the Village Development Committee of Assagao Panchayat has convened a joint meeting with the engineers of PWD, works division XVII (roads, bridges and water section) and the Electricity Department along with panchayat members in the panchayat office at 11 am on February 27, to discuss issues of digging of roads, laying of underground pipes and cables in a haphazard manner in the cross drains and at other places in the panchayat areas. The meeting will discuss water scarcity, frequent breaking of pipelines and repairing the same.

DEATH
 Born: 31.12.1931 Died: 22.02.2025
CELESTINA JOAQUINA DE SOUSA E DA COSTA
 (Nairobi / Aquem Alto, Margao / California / Palmar Grande, Chinchinim)
 Passed away peacefully at Orlim-Goa
 Beloved wife of Late Bernabe Saluzinho da Costa
 Mother of Piety/Late Rita, Zenia/Late Alvaro, Savia/Late Gabriel, Eddie/Libbie, Lydia/Tony, Judy/Richard, Joyce/Luis, Late Freddy, Benny/Arlinda, Late Steve, Grandchildren & Great Grandchildren.
 There will be an Eucharistic celebration for the soul of our beloved Celestina on Monday, 24th February 2025 at 10:00 am at Our Lady of Sorrows Chapel, Palmar Grande, Chinchinim followed by burial at Chinchinim Church cemetery, Chinchinim.
 Relatives & friends kindly accept this as the only intimation.
 diya 9763824344

In our hearts forever

Celestina Joaquina De Souza e Da Costa
 31st December 1931 - 22nd February 2025
 Fondly remembered by her loving grandchildren Denzil/Charity, Saskiya, Joshua, Steeve/Nandinha, Gujje/ Ewan, Grayston/ Felita, Nalika/late Roy, Vanessa/ Iyno, Alston, Aldrich, Aaron, Amanda/Alan, Lionel, Kevin, Luvena/Clemente, Lucita/Sagar, Aldrin/ Gicella, Shanice/ Richie, Tamara, Leroy/ Valessa, Nashville/Edna, Collins and 15 Great Grand children
We love you and will forever miss you darling Nana
 Cozy's Ads, Chinchinim, Navlim, 9850473904