

4-day truce begins in Gaza, setting stage to swap dozens of hostages for Palestinian prisoners

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Online Desk: A temporary truce in the Israel-Hamas war took effect early Friday, setting the stage for the exchange of dozens of hostages held by militants in Gaza for Palestinians imprisoned in Israel.

The halt in fighting began at 7 a.m. local time (0500 GMT) and is to last at least four days. During the truce, Gaza's ruling Hamas group pledged to free at least 50 of the about 240 hostages it and other militants took in their deadly Oct. 7 attack on Israel. In turn, Israel is to free three Palestinian prisoners for each released hostage. The releases are to take place in stages over the next four days.

The truce deal was reached in weeks of intense indirect negotiations, with Qatar, the United States and Egypt serving as mediators. If it holds, it would mark the first significant break in fighting since Israel declared war on Hamas seven weeks ago.

About 1,200 people were killed by Hamas attackers in Israel on Oct. 7. Israel responded with a massive air and ground offensive that has devastated large swaths of Gaza and killed at least 13,300 Palestinians.