

HOPE INCREASING
OVER CEASE-FIRE
IN GAZA CONFLICT

‘AT THE FINAL STAGES’

Deal Swaps Prisoners for
Hostages, and Details
Pullout by Troops

This article is by Adam Rasgon,
Aaron Boxerman, Isabel Kershner
and Michael D. Shear.

JERUSALEM — Israel and Hamas are “on the brink” of agreeing on a cease-fire in Gaza and the release of hostages held there, Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken said on Tuesday, raising hopes for some respite to the violence after more than 15 months of war.

“It’s right on the brink, it’s closer than it’s ever been before,” Mr. Blinken said at an Atlantic Council event in Washington. “But right now as we sit here we await final word from Hamas on its acceptance. And until we get that word, we’ll remain on the brink.”

A person familiar with the negotiations said Tuesday evening that Israel and Hamas had been locked in on the deal, with both appearing prepared to publicly accept it in the very near future. The person, who requested anonymity because a deal had not been announced, said the atmosphere was tense but hopeful.

Neither Israeli nor Hamas officials have publicly confirmed their position on the cease-fire proposal, although Mr. Blinken suggested that Israel was on board with the agreement and that the deal’s fate now rested with Hamas.

Negotiators said Hamas seemed ready to accept the deal, including its details about the exchange of Palestinian prisoners for hostages, and the specific movements of Israeli troops as they withdrew from positions in Gaza, according to the person familiar with the discussions.

But the person cautioned that the agreement has more than 100 parts and that no diplomatic deal of that complexity can ever be considered completely done until the parties announce it publicly.

U.S. officials have made optimistic remarks about cease-fire talks in the past, only for negotiations to repeatedly break down into mutual recrimination. And representatives of other mediating countries, including Qatar and Egypt, have warned that even substantial progress could be dashed at the last minute.

“We believe that we are at the final stages, but until we have an announcement — there will be no announcement,” Majed al-Ansari, spokesman for Qatar’s foreign ministry, told reporters Tuesday.

Still, in recent weeks officials familiar with the talks have expressed greater hope for a deal. Mediators had “managed to minimize a lot of the disagreements between both parties,” Mr. al-Ansari said, adding that they were focused on “the final details of reaching an agreement.”

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HAIYUN JIANG FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Pete Hegseth, President-elect Donald J. Trump’s pick for defense secretary, faced a tense Senate confirmation hearing on Tuesday.

Wildfire Evacuees Scrambling to Find Shelter

By JESUS JIMÉNEZ
and JACK HEALY

92,000 Are Displaced
in a Region Already
Short on Housing

ALTADENA, Calif. — Tens of thousands of wildfire evacuees in Los Angeles are now scrambling to find — and hold onto — temporary shelter, exacerbating the housing shortage in one of America’s least affordable cities.

With 92,000 people across Los Angeles still under evacuation orders on Monday, the displaced were scattered across Southern California, in shelter beds, hotel rooms, relatives’ spare rooms and friends’ couches, unsure about where to go next as extreme fire danger looms for another week.

The hunt for longer-term housing already has sparked bidding wars in some neighborhoods on

the edges of the fires. In the ritzy Brentwood neighborhood adjacent to the Palisades fire, one real-estate agent suddenly got 1,000 applicants for a new rental listing. In Pasadena, a family whose home burned in the Eaton fire in Altadena said they were about to lose their emergency short-term rental where they have been staying since the fires to a family willing to pay \$8,000 a month.

Some evacuees, like Lila King, are staying in their vehicles.

Ms. King, 75, has been bouncing between motels and sleeping in her truck with her 40-year-old son since they were displaced by the Eaton fire.

Ms. King recently had surgery after she broke several ribs in a fall, and the nights sleeping in her truck have left her aching. She said she has been living off tacos from a nearby gas station, and wondering when, if ever, she will be able to return to her mobile home in Altadena, the unincorporated community at the foot of the San Gabriel Mountains that was devastated by the Eaton Fire.

“We’re trying to get some help to get a place,” she said. “I’m worried.”

The American Red Cross and
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ISADORA KOSOFSKY FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A shelter at the Westwood Recreation Center in Los Angeles is one of eight that have been opened.

Report Refuses
To Give Trump
Pass for Jan. 6

By ALAN FEUER
and CHARLIE SAVAGE

Jack Smith, the special counsel who indicted President-elect Donald J. Trump on charges of illegally seeking to cling to power after losing the 2020 election, said in a final report released early Tuesday that the evidence would have been sufficient to convict Mr. Trump in a trial, had his 2024 election victory not made it impossible for the prosecution to continue.

“The department’s view that the Constitution prohibits the continued indictment and prosecution of a president is categorical and does not turn on the gravity of the crimes charged, the strength of the government’s proof or the merits of the prosecution, which the office stands fully behind,” Mr. Smith wrote.

He continued: “Indeed, but for Mr. Trump’s election and imminent return to the presidency, the office assessed that the admissible evidence was sufficient to obtain and sustain a conviction at trial.”

The Justice Department delivered the 137-page volume — representing half of Mr. Smith’s overall final report, with the volume about Mr. Trump’s other federal case, accusing him of mishandling classified documents, still confidential — to Congress just after midnight on Tuesday.

The report amounted to an extraordinary rebuke of a president-elect, capping a momentous legal saga that saw the man now poised to regain the powers of the na-

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E.P.A. Warns of ‘Forever Chemicals’ in Fertilizer

By HIROKO TABUCHI

For the first time, the Environmental Protection Agency on Tuesday warned that “forever chemicals” present in sewage sludge that is used as fertilizer can pose human health risks.

In an extensive study the agency said that, while the general food supply isn’t threatened, the risk from contaminated fertilizer could in some cases exceed the E.P.A.’s safety thresholds “sometimes by several orders of magnitude.”

Reversal on Sludge Use
After Long Praising It

A growing body of research has shown that the sludge can be contaminated with man-made chemicals known as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, which are used widely in everyday items like nonstick cookware and stain-resistant carpets. The chemicals, which are linked to a range of illnesses including an in-

creased risk of cancer, do not break down in the environment, and, when tainted sludge is used as fertilizer on farmland, it can contaminate the soil, groundwater, crops and livestock.

Last year, The New York Times reported that 3M, which for decades has manufactured PFAS, found as early as 2000 that the chemicals were turning up in sludge samples from municipal wastewater plants across the country. In 2003, 3M told the E.P.A. of its findings.

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Taser Use by Mississippi Police Goes Unchecked

This article is by Nate Rosenfield,
Brian Howey and Sarah Cohen.

JACKSON, Miss. — Last summer, a Mississippi police officer approached Vivian Burks as she sat in her car at a local park reading the Bible.

He was cordial at first, offering to help Ms. Burks replace her expired tags with the new ones she had in her car. But the encounter changed quickly after the officer, Blaine Musgrove, said he smelled marijuana and a second Carthage police officer demanded to search

Patchy Rules Lead to
Abuse and Injury

the vehicle.

When Ms. Burks, a 65-year-old great-grandmother with no criminal record, tried to get back into her car, the officers grabbed her and ordered her to place her hands behind her back, body camera footage shows. When she did not immediately comply, Officer Musgrove pressed his Taser into

her back and shocked her, sending her to the ground in a heap.

Over the next 30 seconds, the video shows, Officer Musgrove shocked her three more times as she twisted her hands to avoid being handcuffed and begged the officers to stop, repeatedly shouting, “I’m sick!” The officers called an ambulance and then left her moaning for help until the paramedics arrived.

“I couldn’t breathe,” Ms. Burks told reporters in an interview. “I just thought that they were going

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INTERNATIONAL A4-9

Using a Play to Set War Aside

A drama teacher offers teenagers in Kyiv, Ukraine, a moment of hope with a piece written just for them. PAGE A6

Overwhelmed at the Border

As migrant crossings spiked in 2023, Mexico rebuked its immigration chief, an investigation shows. PAGE A4

NATIONAL A10-19

Hochul Proposes a Tax Cut

The New York governor’s State of the State speech responded to voter dissatisfaction evident in November, especially regarding crime. PAGE A11

Bill on Trans Athletes Passes

House Republicans pushed through a measure barring transgender girls from teams for female students. PAGE A18

BUSINESS B1-5

Turning the Page at MSNBC

The left-leaning news network’s president is stepping down after viewership fell sharply after Election Day. PAGE B1



FOOD D1-8

All Night at the All-Night Diner

The city that doesn’t sleep? The bustle of activity at one restaurant shows that the description still applies. PAGE D6

An After-the-Holidays Feast

Recipes for tangy beet salad, stunning herbed rice and easy apple tart may help keep the new year on track. PAGE D2

SPORTS B6-10

A Scramble to Move Game

The vast wildfires tormenting Los Angeles forced the N.F.L. to relocate Monday night’s playoff game between the Rams and Vikings to Arizona. It took a team effort to pull it off. PAGE B6

The 76ers Are Staying Put

Philadelphia had approved a plan for a new arena in a struggling part of downtown. But in a surprise turnaround, the 76ers said a new venue would be built near their current one instead. PAGE B10

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Ben Rhodes

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Grabbing the Spotlight

Two stunning solo performances, by Leslie Cuyjet, above, and Symara Sarai, stand out so far at the 2025 Live Artery contemporary dance festival. PAGE C1



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