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MIDDLE EAST

TENSIONS RISE AMID MINISTER’S JERUSALEM VISIT



MAJDI MOHAMMED, ASSOCIATED PRESS

People participate in a demonstration in support of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip amid the ongoing Israel-Hamas war, Sunday in Nablus, West Bank.

Officials say 33 aid-seekers killed by Israeli gunfire in Gaza

WAFAA SHURAF, SAM METZ AND SAMY MAGDY
Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — A far-right Israeli minister visited and prayed at Jerusalem’s most sensitive holy site on Sunday, triggering regional condemnation and fears that the provocative move could further escalate tensions. The visit came as hospitals in Gaza said 33 more Palestinians seeking food aid were killed by Israeli gunfire.

With Israel facing global criticism over famine-like conditions in the besieged strip, Itamar Ben-Gvir’s visit to the hillside compound threatened to further set back efforts by international mediators to halt Israel’s nearly two-year military offensive in Gaza.

The area, which Jews call the Temple Mount, is the holiest site in Judaism and was home to the ancient biblical temples. Muslims call the site the Noble Sanctuary. Today it is home to the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the third-holiest site in Islam.

Visits to the site by Israeli officials are considered a provocation across the Muslim world and openly praying violates a longstanding status quo. Jews have been

allowed to tour it but are barred from praying, with Israeli police and troops providing security. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office said after Ben-Gvir’s visit that Israel would not change the norms governing the site.

Ben-Gvir visited following Hamas’ release of videos showing two emaciated Israeli hostages. The videos caused an uproar in Israel and raised pressure on the government to reach a deal to bring home the remaining 50 hostages who were captured on Oct. 7, 2023, in the Hamas-led attack that triggered the war.

Ben-Gvir called for Israel to annex the Gaza Strip and encourage Palestinians to leave, reviving rhetoric that has complicated negotiations to end the war. He raged against a video that Hamas released Saturday of 24-year-old hostage Evyatar David showing him emaciated in a dimly lit Gaza tunnel, and called it an attempt to pressure Israel.

Ben-Gvir’s previous visits to the site have prompted threats from Palestinian militant groups. Clashes between Israeli security forces and Palestinian demonstrators in and around the site fueled an

11-day war with Hamas in 2021.

Sunday’s visit was swiftly condemned as an incitement by Palestinian leaders as well as Jordan, the Al-Aqsa Mosque’s custodian, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Houthi rebels in Yemen said they fired three drones at Israel; Israel’s military said a “suspicious aerial target launched from Yemen” was intercepted.

The videos — released by Hamas and Islamic Jihad, the second-largest militant group in Gaza — triggered outrage across the political spectrum after the hostages, speaking under duress, described grim conditions and an urgent lack of food. Tens of thousands rallied in Tel Aviv on Saturday, calling on Israel and the United States to urgently pursue the hostages’ release after suspending ceasefire talks.

Israel’s mission to the U.N. said it requested an emergency meeting of the U.N. Security Council on the hostages, which will take place Tuesday.

“They do not want a deal,” Netanyahu said of Hamas. “They want to break us using these videos of horror.”

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DOJ presses state commissions for voter and election details

AP tally finds department requested data from at least 15 states despite federal law

ALI SWENSON AND GARY FIELDS
Associated Press

NEW YORK — The requests have come in letters, emails and phone calls. The specifics vary, but the target is consistent: The U.S. Department of Justice is ramping up an effort to get voter data and other election information from the states.

Over the past three months, the department’s voting section has requested copies of voter registration lists from state election administrators in at least 15 states, according to an Associated Press tally. Of those, nine are Democrats, five are Repub-

licans and one is a bipartisan commission.

In Colorado, the department demanded “all records” relating to the 2024 election and any records the state retained from the 2020 election.

Department lawyers have contacted officials in at least seven states to propose a meeting about forging an information-sharing agreement related to instances of voting or election fraud. The idea, they say in the emails, is for states to help the department enforce the law.

The unusually expansive outreach has raised alarm among some election officials because states have the constitutional authority to run elections and federal law protects the sharing of individual data with the government.

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CHARLIE NEIBERGALL, ASSOCIATED PRESS

Voters wait to receive their ballots at a polling place at McDonald Elementary School on Nov. 5, 2024, in Dearborn, Mich.