

News and Current Events :: Israel to resume dig near Temple Mount...

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By MATTI FRIEDMAN
Associated Press
Sunday, 14 Oct 2007

JERUSALEM - Israel will resume archaeological excavations near a Jerusalem holy site that has often been a flashpoint for violence, Israeli officials said Sunday. The decision drew Palestinian charges that Israel is trying to scuttle next month's U.S.-sponsored peace conference.

Fearing an outbreak of violence, an Israeli Cabinet minister said he stalled construction for at least two weeks. But officials said they remained determined to push forward with the project.

The dig is located outside the Old City compound known to Jews as the Temple Mount and to Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary, and is home to the gold-capped Dome of the Rock and the Al Aqsa Mosque.

Israel captured the site from Jordan in the 1967 Mideast War and it has since served as a symbol of the two sides' competing claims to Jerusalem. Day-to-day administration of the site remains in Muslim hands.

When the dig began in February, it caused an uproar in the Islamic world, with some Muslims alleging that Israel was plotting to undermine the foundations of the site's mosques.

Israel termed those charges ludicrous, saying the dig was meant to clear the way for construction of a pedestrian walkway up to the compound, replacing one damaged in a 2004 snowstorm. But digging work at the site was quietly halted in June without explanation.

The government's Committee on Jerusalem Affairs voted two weeks ago to resume archaeological work at the site, Jacob Edery, a Cabinet minister and committee member, told The Associated Press. Edery said the dig had been held up since early summer for bureaucratic reasons related to planning permits.

"I'm sorry the work was held up at all, because the walkway was supposed to be almost finished by now," Edery said. He said some aspects of the plan have been modified, but no major changes were made.

After Edery's announcement, Raleb Majadele, the only Arab Cabinet minister, filed an appeal to block the project, which will halt progress for two weeks.

"I want the excavations delayed because it is very bad timing under the present political conditions," he said, citing an upcoming U.S.-hosted peace conference next month and the current Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr.

But Roni Dahan, a spokesman for Edery, said "the idea is definitely to continue excavations there."

When work began, Palestinians charged that Israel did not have the right to make alterations around the holy site, which houses Islam's third-holiest shrine.

Palestinian officials were outraged by Israel's latest decision, saying it endangered the U.S.-sponsored peace conference scheduled to be held in Annapolis, Md., next month.

"Always, whenever there is an important move toward peace, they do something to enrage Palestinians," said Adnan Husseini, an adviser on Jerusalem affairs to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

(http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20071014/ap_on_re_mi_ea/israel_holy_site_1) [CLICK HERE](#) to view the full article.

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