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Established 1919

HAARETZ

ENGLISH EDITION

הארץ

Thursday, January 1, 2026 | Tevet 12, 5786. Vol 106/32492

ISRAEL'S LEADING DAILY NEWSPAPER

www.haaretz.com

Top court halts state watchdog's October 7 probe

Petitioners argued that the investigation could compromise a future state inquiry

Chen Maanit

The High Court of Justice issued an interim order on Wednesday suspending State Comptroller Matanyahu Engلمان's investigation into the October 7 massacre, prohibiting him from summoning witnesses to provide testimony or documents.

The petitions were filed in June 2024 by the military and the Movement for Quality Government, a rights group, arguing that the probe would compromise a future state commission of inquiry, and would infringe upon the rights of those being investigated. The order was issued by Justices Daphne Barak-Erez, David Mintz and Alex Stein.

The state comptroller had been investigating several facets of the security failure on October 7, including the Nova party massacre, the defense of Gaza border communities and the conduct of the cabinet, the Israel Defense Forces, the Shin Bet security service and the intelligence community both before and at the war's outbreak. The order mandates that Engلمان cannot publish the reports or drafts compiled so far.

In their ruling, the justices issued a conditional



Engلمان Spokesperson's Office

PM plays down settler violence

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order instructing the state comptroller to justify his review into policy matters related to October 7, explain how the review would protect the rights of those being investigated and show that the review would not hinder future probes into security issues.

The Movement for Quality Government lauded the High Court's decision, saying the order "proves our stance was correct.

"An event like the October 7 disaster requires a comprehensive, indepen-

dent and non-partisan investigation by a state commission of inquiry alone," the group said.

The military prosecution also welcomed the decision, saying it "reflects the importance the court attaches to the need for a careful and balanced examination of the issue, while preserving the rights of IDF soldiers and the principles of due process."

Engلمان is expected to end his term as state comptroller this July, making it unlikely that he would be able to fully complete the investigation even if allowed to proceed.

The October Council, a group representing the families of those killed and wounded on October 7, welcomed the decision.

"The justices' decision is correct, responsible and necessary given the scale of the disaster and its consequences," the group wrote. "The bereaved families, survivors of captivity, families of the kidnapped, residents of the Gaza border communities and reservists demand the truth. Not a partial review. Not a cover-up. No substitutes: a state commission of inquiry, now."

See **PROBE**, Page 2



Border Police officers checking the identity cards of residents of the Bedouin village of Tarabin on Wednesday. Police sources said they thought vehicles were torched in Lehavim in revenge for a police raid on the village. (See story, Page 4, and editorial, Page 5.)

Eliyahu Hershkovitz

142 retired judges condemn Smotrich's attacks, over 700 academics call for ouster

Haaretz

More than 700 faculty members at Israeli universities and colleges have signed a petition calling for the dismissal of far-right Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and his prosecution for incitement to violence, while 142 retired judges, including all living Supreme Court

presidents, condemned on Wednesday the attacks on Supreme Court President Isaac Amit.

The petition follows Smotrich's repeated accusations on Tuesday that Supreme Court President Isaac Amit is a "violent, ruthless, megalomaniac who is stealing Israeli democracy," and that as a result, "we will run

him over – there will be no other choice."

"These destructive, completely unjustified attacks by elected officials and government ministers, have become a daily spectacle of unbridled systemic madness and a threat to the country's democratic infrastructure," the retired judges wrote in a public letter. "We feel a real

danger to the wellbeing of President Amit."

In an interview with Army Radio, Smotrich refused to apologize for his remarks, and accused Amit of acting forcefully and "trampling the people" of Israel. He later doubled down on a post on X, claiming that Amit "snatched the role of Supreme Court president without authority,"

despite the position traditionally being filled by seniority through an appointed committee.

The minister's remarks come amid escalating right-wing criticism of the Supreme Court, which critics claim is overly left-leaning and not representative of the government elected by the Israeli public.

Public Defender's Office: Palestinian prisoners were denied drinking water

Chen Maanit

Throughout the war in Gaza, Palestinian security prisoners were denied access to drinking water as a form of collective punishment, sometimes for hours and as long as half a day, according to reports by representatives of

the Public Defender's Office who visited security prisons in 2024. The Association for Civil Rights in Israel petitioned the Jerusalem District Court to release the reports last January; the state has so far refused to do so, citing national security concerns and potential harm to hostages

still in Gaza until recently. On Tuesday, the Justice Ministry sent six of the reports to ACRI, saying that changed circumstances had made their delivery possible.

The reports are based on three visits by representatives of the Public Defender's Office to southern

Israel's Ketziot Prison in May, June and September 2024. One of the reports stated that among the findings of the first two visits was a policy of denying continuous access to drinking water for part of the day. In addition, it said, prisoners relayed that the denial of access to water

was "sometimes carried out as part of collective punishment from time to time, and in other places it is a regular practice for about half the day." According to the latest report, the policy of restricting drinking water ended before the September visit.

The Israel Prison Ser-

vice denied the findings. In a statement, the agency said the claims of denial of access to drinking water or of collective punishment of prisoners is untrue. "The Israel Prison Service operates in accordance with the law and all prisoners and detainees have regular access

to drinking water and basic necessities. At the instruction of National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, since October 7 [2023] the incarceration conditions of security prisoners in Israel have been worsened. This decision ... affected all security prisoners held in Is-

rael, not just those captured on the day of the massacre or during the fighting in the Gaza Strip. They apply to security prisoners residing in the Gaza Strip or the West Bank, as well as to citizens of Israel."

See **WATER**, Page 2

Israel recognizes Somaliland: The right move, for the wrong reasons



A woman and child next to a mural of Somaliland's flag in Somaliland, in 2022. Brian Inganga/AP

Analysis **Dahlia Scheindlin**

If international relations were forged based on historic fairness alone, the sovereignty of Somaliland, a small territory on the northern edge of the Horn

of Africa, would have been widely recognized already.

Almost from the start, its people regretted and rejected their country's ill-fated unification with

Somalia in 1960, then they endured discrimination, violence and even ethnic cleansing under Somalia's dictator Siad Barre during the 1980s and early '90s. In 1991 the leadership unilaterally seceded, a move furiously rejected by Somalia which remains

unrecognized internationally, based on norms favoring Somalia's sovereign integrity.

Yet since that time, Somaliland has leaned towards democratic rule and held peaceful transitions of power through elections. Despite failing to win recognition from any country until last Friday, it has been among the most stable entities in the Horn of Africa.

These strong credentials had little or nothing to do with Israel's surprise announcement last week that it recognizes Somaliland. The decision was grounded exclusively in interests, opportunity and great power politics – not on principles or ideology. Israel is certainly not concerned by the contradiction of recognizing a unilaterally declared state for the second time (after recognizing Kosovo in 2020), while hermetically rejecting all international recognition of Palestine.

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HAARETZ Online now

Gaza's water is back

But its sewage is heading straight for Israel's coast

'Only the lie remains'

Bedouin village that voted Likud now target of Ben-Gvir



Ilan Assayag

Will 2026 be a year of recovery?

Israel tourism ticks up in 2025, still far below prewar peak

Ben Kroll

Roughly 1.3 million tourists visited Israel over the course of 2025, nearly 35 percent more than the previous year, as the ceasefire in Gaza, that went into effect in October, continues to hold – according to the annual report released by the Tourism Ministry on Wednesday.

While the figure marks a marginal improvement in comparison to the roughly 962,000 tourists who visited in 2024, it is still a significantly lower number than the 3.01 million tourists who visited in 2023.

Some 400,000 American tourists visited Israel in 2025, the most from any country in the world. Second on the list was France with 159,000, and the United Kingdom ranked third with 95,000 tourists.

Those three countries accounted for more than half of all foreign visitors in Israel during the past year.

Russia came in fourth place on the list, with 64,000 tourists, followed by Germany (38,000), Ukraine (31,000), Canada (28,000) and Romania (27,000).

In its report, the ministry said it surveyed "thousands of tourists" that entered Israel during the



Two surfers dressed as Santa Claus decorating a Christmas tree for a tourism ad, in Tel Aviv last month. Ohad Zwigenberg/AP

first six months of 2025, finding that the average tourist spent \$1,622 (\$1,166 shekels) during their stay, up from \$1,427 (4,550 shekels) in the prior year.

It's unclear if that can be attributed to additional spending or a rise in costs, since the same survey also found that the average stay in Israel went down from 11.4 days in 2024 to 9.3 days in 2025.

The survey also found that only 14 percent of tourists said they were visiting for a vacation, while 45 percent said they were

visiting family and friends, and 12 percent said they were visiting for business purposes.

"With the removal of travel warnings and an increment in flights, 2026 is expected to be a year of recovery," Tourism Minister Haim Katz said in a statement accompanying the report.

"The data on incoming tourism is encouraging," he added. "The demand for Israel among supportive audiences and core countries, with the U.S. at the top, is still strong."



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