Palestinians bury dead after bloodiest Gaza day since 2014

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Palestinian medics and protesters evacuate a wounded youth during a protest at the Gaza Stripâ€™s border with Israel, east of Khan Younis, Gaza Strip, Monday, May 14, 2018. Thousands of Palestinians are protesting near Gazaâ€™s border with Israel, as Israel prepared for the festive inauguration of a new U.S. Embassy in contested Jerusalem.

Gaza City: Palestinians observed a strike on Tuesday to mourn dozens killed by Israeli troops in a mass protest on the Gaza border â€" the single deadliest day there since a 2014 war and part of a high-stakes campaign by Gazaâ€™s Hamas rulers to break a decade-long border blockade.

In Mondayâ€™s protest, Israeli forces killed 58 Palestinians, most by gunfire, and injured more than 2,700, Gaza health officials said. In jarring contrast, the U.S. held a festive inauguration ceremony for a new U.S. Embassy in contested Jerusalem just a few miles away.

The juxtaposition of bloodshed on the Gaza border and festivities attended by a high-powered Trump administration delegation â€" captured on split screens in TV broadcasts around the world â€" briefly drew attention to the plight of Gaza and its 2 million people.

The high casualty toll also revived international criticism of Israelâ€™s use of lethal force against unarmed protesters. At the same time, the opening of the embassy, condemned by Palestinians as blatantly pro-Israel, further dimmed prospects of what President Donald Trump had once touted as plans to negotiate the Mideast â€œdeal of the century.â€• The U.N. Security Council planned to meet Tuesday to discuss the violence, though it was not clear what might come out of the session.

A Palestinian woman walks through black smoke from burning tires during a protest on the Gaza Stripâ€™s border with Israel, Monday, May 14, 2018. Thousands of Palestinians are protesting near Gazaâ€™s border with Israel, as Israel prepared for the festive inauguration of a new U.S. Embassy in contested Jerusalem.

Two UN diplomats said members couldnâ€™t reach unanimous agreement on issuing a proposed statement, circulated by Kuwait, that would have expressed â€œoutrage and sorrowâ€• over the killings and sought an independent investigation. The diplomats spoke on condition of anonymity because the discussions were supposed to be private.

For Hamas, the Islamic militant group that seized Gaza in 2007, Mondayâ€™s border protest was the culmination of a weeks-long campaign to try to break the blockade. The group led weekly protests near the border with Israel since late March as part of this push.

On Tuesday, there were no signs that Hamas had made a breakthrough in shaking off the blockade that was imposed by Israel and Egypt in 2007. In a sign of an easing, Egypt extended the opening of its border crossing with Gaza, initially set to continue for four days, by two more days, until Thursday. Typically, the Rafah crossing is closed for most of the

year.

In recent days, there had been negotiations between Egypt and Hamas, presumably on easing the blockade in exchange for ending the protests.

Hamas has said protests would continue in a weekly format, but it was not clear if it would be able to maintain momentum during the fasting month of Ramadan, which begins this week.

Protest organizers said Tuesday was set aside for funerals, in an apparent attempt to lower expectation of another mass protest later in the day.

Hamas had initially said mass border protests would continue Tuesday, which marks the 70th anniversary of what Palestinians call their â€œnakba,â€• or catastrophe â€” the uprooting of hundreds of thousands in the Mideast war over Israelâ€™s 1948 creation.

The border marches are seen as Hamasâ€™ last hope of ending the blockade that has made it increasingly difficult for the group to govern. Other tactics, including three cross-border wars with Israel in a decade and reconciliation with Hamasâ€™ chief Palestinian rival, West Bank-based President Mahmoud Abbas, have failed.

- AP