

Thousands attend Land Day rallies

By Yair Ettinger
Haaretz Correspondent

Thousands of people attended peaceful rallies in several towns in the Galilee and Negev yesterday to mark the 28th Land Day protest against government policy toward the Arab community in Israel. A general strike in all Arab towns and villages was also declared, and was partially honored.

The Arab community is protesting against the confiscation of land, demolition of houses, government policy toward the unrecognized Bedouin villages in the Negev, and what it calls continuing neglect, discrimination and provocation against Arabs in Israel.

The police kept a low profile, as it has in other similar events since October 2000, and kept its forces away from Arabeh and other sites of small memorial rallies.

At a rally held yesterday morning in the Arab town of Kafr Kana, MK Abdulmalik Dehamshe (United Arab List) said, "Without land, we cannot realize our right to live in dignity. The time has come for Israel's governments, as well as the police, to relate to us as citizens with equal rights and not as a burden or an enemy."



A youngster holding a Palestinian flag at the Land Day protest rally yesterday in Laqiya, in the Negev. About 150 people attended the rally, which was organized by the Balad party.

Dehamshe also used the opportunity to denounce what he called "the character assassination Israeli propaganda used to justify the killing of [Hamas leader] Sheikh [Ahmed] Yassin. Yassin was not involved in murder. That's a crude lie."

MK Wasal Taha (Balad), who also participated in the Kafr Kana rally, said the Arab public opposes Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan to recruit Arabs into a national service program. "The initiative is meant to blur the Palestinian identity of Arab

citizens of Israel," Taha said. Sheikh Kamal Hatib, leader of the Islamic Movement's northern branch, also participated in the rally along with hundreds of Kafr Kana residents.

The main Land Day rally was held in Arabeh, one of the

main confrontation sites on March 30, 1976, when Arab demonstrators and the police clashed following the seizure of Arab lands in the Galilee. Six Arabs were shot dead during those protests.

Demonstrations were also held in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to mark the anniversary.

According to the Musawa Center for Arab Rights in Israel and the council of unrecognized villages, 72 houses were demolished in the Negev and 269 in the Galilee and triangle during 2003.

Arab organizations and associations held conferences in which they outlined the government's policy toward unauthorized building in Arab and mixed communities. They described this policy as part of the state's plan from 1976 to develop the Galilee, which included confiscating Arab lands.

Over the past week, small protests were held in the unrecognized villages in the Negev and Arab schools throughout the country gave lessons on the history of Land Day.

Eli Ashkenazi adds: During the afternoon, children from the village of Musmus in Wadi Ara threw rocks at cars traveling on Road 65. No one was injured, but two cars were damaged.

18,000 families to get one-time compensation for social cuts

By Ruth Sinai
Haaretz Correspondent

After a delay of many months, about 18,000 families will receive a one-time payment of between NIS 1,000-7,000 as compensation for the cuts in social welfare benefits. The Finance Ministry allotted about NIS 32 million for the program, which will work out to about NIS 1,800 per family.

Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu decided to award this one-time compensation payment immediately after the welfare cuts were implemented last summer. A committee formed to define criteria for this compensation program delivered its recommendations to Netanyahu in October, but the treasury and National Insurance Institute (NII) only acted upon the pro-

posal after social organizations turned to the media and complain that the compensation plan was not being implemented.

The committee, chaired by retired judge Ezra Kama, recommended paying the compensation over a six-month period, but the NII (*bituach leumi*) decided it would be simpler to administer this as a one-time payment.

The families eligible for this allocation are those whose supplemental income benefits and child allowances were reduced by a total of over NIS 1,050 per month. In addition, at least one of the breadwinners in the family must have worked during the month preceding and following the cut in benefits.

Many single mothers, including Vicki Knafo, the activist from Mitzpe Ramon

who camped outside the Prime Minister's Office for months, were furious that they would not receive this compensation, because they did not meet the work requirement.

Benefits expedited for Passover holiday

Minister of Labor and Social Affairs Zevulun Orlev decided yesterday to make a pre-Passover downpayment (50 percent) of the monthly child allowance benefits, originally slated to be paid to Israeli parents on April 14. In addition, the 60,000 families that received supplemental income benefits and report to the government Employment Service will also receive their monthly allocation before the holiday, which begins next Monday night.

Non-Jewish parents of soldiers are now eligible for citizenship

By Relly Sa'ar
Haaretz Correspondent

The ministerial committee on the Population Registry, chaired by Interior Minister Avraham Poraz, yesterday defined the procedure for granting Israeli citizenship to non-Jewish parents of soldiers who serve in the Israel Defense Forces. The decision has the status of an emergency order and will remain in effect for five years. It will apply retroactively to soldiers who have completed their service, as well as those who are still in uniform.

The committee's decision stipulates that non-Jewish parents will be eligible for temporary resident status after the soldier completes one year of service. Permanent residency status will be granted after the soldier com-



Avraham Poraz

pletes his or her mandatory service and the parents been in Israel for four years. A year later - after five years of residency - the parents will be able to apply for citizenship.

The committee limited this citizenship option to the par-

ents of a soldier; the soldier's extended family will not be eligible under this new regulation.

As temporary residents, the soldier's parents will receive work permits and government health insurance benefits. Permanent residency status expands these rights to include welfare and mortgage eligibility, as well as the right to vote in local (but not Knesset) elections.

Poraz succeeded in enacting the new regulations despite the opposition of committee members Minister for Diaspora Affairs Natan Sharansky, Tourism Minister Benny Elon, Absorption Minister Tzipi Livni and Welfare Minister Zevulun Orlev, who argued that the changes in would have a detrimental effect on the state's Jewish character.

News in Brief

Better to be a slave in Egypt, workers cry

Municipal workers from Kiryat Malachi demonstrated yesterday at the Kissufim border with the Gaza Strip, declaring, "We'd rather be slaves again in Egypt than be slaves in Israel." The workers, who have not received salaries for four months, also sent a letter to Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak expressing this sentiment. The demonstration was part of a series of alternative protests organized by the Histadrut labor federation, which does not want to strike local services during the Passover holiday season. (Nir Hasson)

Board okays Negev 'Wine Route' project

The national planning council yesterday approved the Wine Route (*Derech Hayayin*) project including the establishment of 31 single-family ranches in the Ramat Hanegev area. About half of the farms, ranging from tens to hundreds of dunams each, are already in operation. Environmentalists had opposed the project, citing both the unjust allocation of national resources and the project's environment impact. The board gave its approval despite noting that the private homesteads "are not consistent with Israel's planning trends." It also stipulated a number of conditions with its approval. For example, the ranch owners will need to present a detailed program for tourism services. (Nir Hasson)

Court: Wife killer has to compensate kids

In a precedent-setting ruling, Tel Aviv District Court yesterday ordered a man convicted of killing his spouse to pay his three children a total of NIS 114,000 in compensation. The convicted man, 61-year-old Yehezkel Yair, was sentenced to life in prison. The three-judge panel accepted the prosecution's argument that nothing in the law prevents a court from attaching additional penalties onto a life sentence. Judge Tehiya Shapira wrote in the court's ruling, "Why should the murderer's punishment be different than that of a rapist or thief?" (Zvi Harel)

Rabid jackal hunt on in northern Tel Aviv

Tel Aviv veterinary services are hunting a pack of jackals suspected of having rabies. A dead jackal with the disease was found Monday night in the Kfar Hayarok area, on the border between Tel Aviv and Ramat Hasharon. Lookouts were posted overnight and bait containing an oral rabies vaccine was distributed in the area. The Uzbek sheepdog that killed the jackal is being held in quarantine, along with her nine puppies. According to city veterinarian Zvi Galen, jackals are considered very resistant to rabies and rarely contract the disease. (Tsahar Rotem)

'Making honey in Israel is a bitter business'

By Roni Singer

Shai Spector from Kfar Rut, a small moshav near Modi'in, loves his bees. When he gets started talking about them, it's almost impossible to get him to stop. "But despite the fact that I love it - I've been doing this since the army - I would do something to make a living if I had another alternative," he says sadly.

Farmers in all parts of the country have suffered in recent years from a rash of agricultural theft. Beekeepers have counted 450 stolen hives since January. Spector says that at least 100 of his beehives are stolen each year. "Each hive costs about one-thousand shekels, so this means a lost each season of about NIS 100,000. Just a few weeks ago, I had 70 hives stolen from the Beit Kama area and three weeks ago another 52 were stolen from me at Ben Shemen," he says.

The head of the Honey Council, Shahaar Tene, ex-

plains that there are two main periods when theft is at its peak. The first is in the winter, when thieves make off with the entire hives, which are light to carry but already strong. "All the thieves need to do is place the hive in an open field and wait for honey," he says. Later, in the spring and early summer, when the hives are full of honey, the thieves come and take the honey without bothering to steal the hives.

Now, as March ends and the honey begins to accumulate in the hives, the beekeepers anticipate a growing wave of theft. According to the Honey Council, most of the thieves are from the Palestinian Authority: "I personally know them," says Spector. "There are two powerful middlemen in operating in the PA. One is in Jericho and the second in Dahariyeh. They are the ones who steal the most from us."

Tene attributes the theft to the Palestinians' strong affection for honey: "Most of

their sweets are based on honey, which is a basic staple in their cuisine. Their problem is that the Palestinian growers are not that professional and their growing areas are problematic. Therefore, they steal from us."

The main problem for the beekeepers is that it is so easy to steal their hives and honey. The hives are placed in different areas each time, but these are generally isolated and unguarded areas. "And, anyway, the thieves are professional. They scout out the area first and locate the hives, and several days may pass until I, or another grower, come to the areas and sadly discover that everything is gone," Spector says.

This also explains why the insurance companies refuse to cover the beehives unless the beekeepers pay premiums of hundreds of thousands of shekels. "Many of us try to guard the beehives, but it's impossible. I myself sat ambush, camouflaged, for many long days, just like I did in Lebanon, and guarded the beehives. But I have another hundred like this in the north and south. Who will guard them?" Spector asks.

Many beekeepers have stopped reporting to the police each time a theft occurs. The commander of the Modi'in police, Superintendent (Rav-Pakad) Yossi Kedem, recalls only two reports of theft filed by Spector in the recent past. But he remembers that when they caught the thieves, they were immediately released by the court.

"I simply don't bother anymore. The only thing I get is a piece of paper confirming that a complaint was filed," Spector explains. Tene is especially critical of the courts:



Beekeeper Shai Spector tending to his hives.

Nir Kajri

FENCE

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the Palestinians, the Ariel bloc settlements would be annexed to Israel, and so these blocs will then be linked to the separation fence. As things stand today, however, construction of the fence around the settlement blocs is not an option due to stiff international pressure, the sources say.

A local fence, not connected at this stage to the long separation fence, is to be built around the West Bank town of Ariel and the Immanuel settlement. At Kedumim, settlers object to the construction of a

fence; and no fence is to be built for the time being at Karnei Shomron.

U.S. officials oppose the creation of fenced-off "enclaves" in the Ben-Gurion International Airport area (around the Beit Aryeh settlement), and along Route 443 (the Jerusalem-Modi'in road). According to the plan approved on October 1, the fence is to wind around two sides in these areas, leaving tens of thousands of Palestinians penned inside. Israel has been sharply criticized for this plan to create a large "holding pen" for these Palestinian residents.

Responding to this criticism,

Defense Ministry officials decided to build a major fence along the western-southern side of the areas, along the Green Line, and a less imposing fence on the eastern-northern side of the enclaves. As the construction work proceeds, a fence will run along the north-east sides, but it will not be continuous, and will thus not "imprison" the Palestinians.

Another change will involve the stretch of the fence running between Jerusalem and the southern Hebron Hills. The fence is to be moved closer to the Green Line in this area, so as to minimize burdens caused to Palestinians.

GANGS

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of time that has passed since he set up, and closed, the business. Thus he was questioned as a witness, not a suspect, on Sunday.

Although many people have been arrested in the "assassins" case over the past six

weeks, it is still not clear when indictments will be filed. The police are finding it difficult to come up with solid evidence against Rafi and Moshe Ohana. According to the intelligence information in police hands, they are the suspected contractors who hired the assassins.

For weeks the police have been trying to persuade Char-

lie Sheerit, a key suspect, to turn state's witness, dangling hundreds of thousands of shekels in front of him as bait.

But so far he refuses to sign on and that is holding up the prosecution and could result in very weak indictments instead of a trial that ends with many key underworld figures being put away for a long time.

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