

# Herodion water project dries up

By ASHER WALLFISH

Post Knesset Correspondent

The grandiose project to drill a broad-bore deep well between Bethlehem and Herodion, to supply vast quantities of water to Israeli and West Bank consumers, has fallen through, deputy Agriculture Minister Avraham Katz-Oz revealed to the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee yesterday.

The project was due to have been carried out by an American drilling firm, Moriah Enterprises. The firm, owned by a group of fundamentalist Christian investors, was ready to put money into the project jointly with Mekorot, mainly out of religious convictions, it is understood.

Katz-Oz said the investors had totally cooled off, in the wake of pressures exerted by American and other sources. 2 U.-10-1987

Water Commissioner Zemah Yishai said that Moriah's abandonment of the project would compel Mekorot to drill a large number of shallow wells in the Judean Hills at its own expense on behalf of the Civil Administration.

Yishai said that wells had been running dry in the area over the past few years, and farmers' livelihoods were being seriously threatened. The Moriah project would have provided water for Arabs and Jews alike, he said. Now, funds would have to come out of the pockets of the Israel government to make sure the Arab farmers did not suffer from drought, he said. 2 U.-10-1987

The former head of the Civil Administration on the West Bank, Dr. Ephraim Sneh, reportedly resigned two months ago because of his opposition to the Herodion drilling proposal. But when *The Jerusalem Post* asked committee member Pessah Grupper, of the Likud, whether that had been the real reason, he replied "stuff and nonsense."

During the committee session, Katz-Oz warned that Syria's work on diverting the Yarmuk River would not only deprive Israel of an annual 70 million cubic metres of water, but would destroy Jordan's main agricultural projects.

"This would bring a water war upon the Middle East," he warned.