

Tap shut on 3 indebted moshavim

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MERON. - The Mekorot water company yesterday reduced supplies to three more moshavim in the Merom HaGalil region because of outstanding debts. The company warned it would take similar action against other farming settlements in Galilee and the north unless they paid their bills.

Minister of Agriculture Arye Nehamkin yesterday ordered Mekorot to renew water supplies to all the moshavim that had been cut off, and to refrain from pressing them to pay their water debts.

Nehamkin said that the question of the moshavim's water debts would be settled within the framework of the implementation of the Ravid Committee's recommendations on the rescheduling of moshav debts.

"We have tried, where possible, to assist the farmers because of their financial problems, but we cannot wait forever," Mekorot spokesman Mordechai Yacovich told *The Jerusalem Post*.

He noted that some of the settlements had debts dating back 18 months, while many others owed money from the summer.

The moshavim Shamai, Shefer and Elifelet were the ones to feel the squeeze yesterday as Mekorot turned off the taps, except for two hours. Yacovich said the restrictions would remain in force until the moshavim paid up. Moshav Dovev is next on the list unless its members fulfil their promise to pay by next week.

Yacovich said normal water supplies had been resumed to several other settlements in the region, which had suffered cutbacks earlier

this month, after they had made arrangements or pledges to reimburse the water company.

Moshav Avivim, which had received water for two hours a day for the past three weeks, has also been reconnected, even though the settlement has no money to cover its debts. Supplies were resumed after it transpired that IDF soldiers in the north also received their water from the same pipe that serves Avivim.

The moshavim maintained they had paid their water bills to their regional purchasing organization which has since collapsed without transferring the money to Mekorot. Settlement leaders said that even if they managed to cover some outstanding bills, they had no money to pay for recent and current water supplies, unless the government implemented its economic bail-out plan for the country's crippled farming settlements.

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