

World

Evictions and emotions on tense day in Gaza

Settlers rage at soldiers as pullout starts

By Andrea Stone
USA TODAY

MORAG, Gaza — Israeli soldiers and police faced off against angry settlers as Israel's withdrawal from Gaza and the northern West Bank officially began. Early today, Israeli police cut through the main gate of Neve Dekalim, Gaza's largest settlement, seizing control of a flash-point with Jewish settlers who have resisted orders to leave.

The police said that eliminating the gate would allow people to freely exit the settlement today, the last day for residents to leave voluntarily. Hundreds of activists, many of them youths, blocked roads from entering Monday, and moving trucks struggled to get through the crowd. There were few protesters in Neve Dekalim early today.

After midnight, settlers remaining in Gaza are to be forcibly removed by Israeli forces.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon conceded in a nationally televised speech Monday that the pullout is painful, but he said it is essential for Israel's future. "We cannot hold Gaza forever. More than a million Palestinians live there, doubling their numbers every generation."

Sharon also called on Palestinians to crack down on militants and stop violence against Israelis.

In scenes likely to be repeated with greater intensity when the army begins removing any settlers who stay past midnight, religious Jews accused soldiers who were delivering eviction notices of betraying their own people.

At a Cabinet meeting on Monday, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres tried to assure the Israeli public that "despite the pain that we all feel," the withdrawal "presents a new opportunity for peace that Israel must take advantage of. We also hope that the Palestinians will take advantage of this opportunity."

Israel is removing about 9,000 settlers from all 21 settlements in Gaza and four in the West Bank. The government says two-thirds of the families in Gaza have accepted compensation offers. Those who refuse to go could lose a third of the money, which ranges from \$150,000 to \$400,000 per family.

Shalom said the Palestinian Authority "is working to coordinate all aspects of the pullout with Israel." The authority deployed police near Gaza settlements to prevent looting and militant attacks.

Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas issued a statement praising the pullout but said Israel should do more. "The Israeli withdrawal ... is a very important and historical step, but it is an initial step that should take place not only in Gaza, but in the (entire) West Bank and East Jerusalem," he said.

Abbas also announced that long-delayed legislative elections would be held Jan. 21. A Palestinian government spokesman, Saeb Erekat, said the move was meant to demonstrate that Palestinians are on the road to establishing a democracy.



Countrymen: A settler joins Israeli soldiers in an embrace Monday as a synagogue is dismantled in the settlement of Nisanat in northern Gaza. Settlers have until midnight today to leave.



Clearing the way: Israeli police force opens the gate of the largest Jewish settlement, Neve Dekalim, early today. Settlers and activists had blocked others from leaving the settlement voluntarily Monday.

In Israel and the settlements, Jewish opponents of the withdrawal vowed to disrupt it. "The prime minister has broken my heart," said Amir Spolinsky, 35, a resident of the West Bank settlement of Tadmor, which isn't included in pullout. Spolinsky, an Orthodox Jew, brought his wife and six children, ages 1 to 13, to a rally outside Sharon's office in Jerusalem. He said he "couldn't just sit at home when the land of Israel is threatened."

In the Morag settlement in Gaza, Ayelet Zuckerman, 26, confronted Col. Erez Zuckerman, commander of Israel's elite Golani Brigade, as he delivered eviction notices. Tears streaming down her cheeks as she held her 1-year-old son, Sandek screamed: "We are one people. How can the army do such a thing? Do you know that we love you? Can't you love us in return?"

Zuckerman sweat pouring down his face and chest, responded, "We do love you. All of the Golani Brigade has come to offer you help."

The military brigade was formed in 1948 during Israel's war of independence and is famous as the unit that captured the Kotel Heights from Syria in 1967, when Israel also took Gaza and the West Bank.

Morag was founded as a secular settlement in 1982 but has become more religious. Monday, 16 of the settlement's 36 families remained. Early in the day, men prayed as girls in orange shirts, the color of the settlers' resistance movement, danced and sang. The women locked arms when the first soldiers arrived. In the end, they let the soldiers in. Israeli soldiers and police had trained for this day for months.

Settlers took turns berating soldiers, who stood by patiently,

sometimes giving a sympathetic nod. Mostly, the soldiers showed little expression. In one of the most emotional moments of the day, Zuckerman hugged a frenzied settler who for more than 20 minutes had spewed invective at him.

The commander went to several homes to deliver eviction notices. At the home of Yotam and Shira Reuven, he shook their hands. Afterward, Yakov Reuven, 45, said, "I looked into the whites of his eyes, and I understood exactly what he wanted from me. It was a relief because I anticipated this meeting for a long time." He said he would end 15 years of residence today in the settlement where six of his eight children were born.

Contributing: Michal Schonbrun and Michele Chabin in Jerusalem; wire reports

'Army of activists' sets up camp in support

By Matthew Gutman
USA TODAY

KFAR DAROM, Gaza — All Tzvia Savir, 38, wants is a single shelf to call her own in this settlement's remote-camp kitchen refrigerator.

The mother of nine moved five weeks ago from the West Bank settlement of Eilon Moreh, which is being dismantled, into one of the scores of tents that dot this isolated Jewish enclave in Gaza. Along with as many as 6,000 other activists, she evaded an Israeli blockade and sneaked into the Gush Katif bloc to fight Israel's plan to evacuate 25 settlements.

Backed up toilets, swarms of mosquitoes and frequent Palestinian mortar attacks — not to mention the scarcity of refrigerated shelf space — make "just surviving to the evacuation itself a big challenge," Savir says.

On Wednesday, Israeli forces will enter the settlements to remove any people who have refused to leave by the end of the day today, as ordered by Israel's parliament.

The miserable conditions and heat are taking their toll on what the Yeshiva Council of Jewish Settlements has called its "army of activists," Council spokesman Helik Navon says. "You see it in their eyes, the terrible conditions."

Of the dozen or so tent camps scattered about the Gaza settlements, conditions at Kfar Darom may be the most dismal, settlement leader Asher Miztari says. With as many as 800 activists shoe-horned in a settlement built for 300, the residents met Monday

to discuss "ways of feeding the people and making sure they don't suffer heatstroke," he says.

On the one hand, says Savir, "we are living history. On the other hand, there is so much tension because of the conditions." She says she has no intention of leaving until "we are delivered from the government's decision" (to quit the settlements). Savir says what keeps her going is faith in God and a devotion to the so-called Greater Land of Israel, a concept based on the notion that Israel should remain in the territories for religious, national and security reasons. Opponents of the pullout say this includes Gaza.

One of the camp's youth, Yair Ben David, 19, a religious student from the West Bank settlement of Be'er El, offers a tour of his sleeping space: a dirt rectangle inside a tent he is sharing with 100 other young men. He tries to keep it clean, "but the tanks that rumble by every day kick up all of this," he says, wiping powdery dust from the makeshift shelf he built above his desk.

Because of the mortar attacks from the neighboring Palestinian village of Deir al-Balah, many of the youths decided to move to musty bomb shelters.

These hardships don't seem to deter Ben David, who expresses the resignation many feel here about the inevitability of the withdrawal. "I am not worried," he says. "It seems it will be over soon."

Palestinians celebrate pullout as 'turning point' in conflict

By Martin Patience
USA TODAY

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza — Convoys of yellow minibuses cruised the city's streets Monday, blowing their horns and flying the Palestinian flag in celebration of the end of 38 years of Israeli occupation.

Militant factions hoisted banners throughout Khan Younis, a city of

270,000 that is 10 miles south of Gaza City, proclaiming Israel's withdrawal from 21 Gaza settlements and four in the West Bank a victory for the Palestinians. One Hamas banner read: "The happiness of liberation will not let us forget the pain of the prisoners."

Near the barricaded Jewish settlement of Neve Dekalim on the edge of Khan Younis, a crowd of

mainly young Palestinian men gathered to hear a senior Hamas leader deliver a short speech. "We see this as a turning point in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict," said Abu Tiyeb as he was jostled by the crowd. Arabic music blared from a cream-colored Mercedes parked nearby. "We hope that Abu Awan (former leader Yasser Arafat) is here with us to celebrate."

Later in the day, a 12-foot-tall portrait of Arafat, who led the Palestinian people for 35 years, was hung from the side of a house 200 yards from the soon-to-be empty settlement.

The celebrations mark the official start of the Israeli withdrawal begun just after midnight Monday. Hundreds of Hamas supporters

gathered at the Kaber mosque in Khan Younis, where they heard Ahmad Al-Khatib, a senior figure in the movement, castigate the Palestinian Authority for negotiating with the Israeli government. He claimed Hamas "resistance" was the reason Israel was leaving Gaza. "May God bless those who touch weapons," he said.

Not everyone thought there was

a reason to celebrate. Ahmed Abu Nasser, 30, who lives in the area, said the festivities were premature. "Why should we celebrate when the occupation still exists?" asked the unemployed laborer.

In Khan Younis town center, sweet shop owner Ashraf Abul, 30, said, "I'm happy and optimistic that our circumstances will change."

Strong quake hits northeastern Japan

A magnitude-7.2 earthquake struck northeastern Japan today, triggering two small tsunamis and shaking skyscrapers as far away as Tokyo, 185 miles to the south. At least 27 people were reported injured.

The earthquake's focus was 12.4 miles below the ocean floor about 50 miles off the coast of Miyagi state, the Meteorological Agency said. Two 4-inch tsunamis hit the nearby coast. In 1995, a magnitude-7.3 quake in the western port city of Kobe killed 6,400 people. The depth and offshore location of today's quake helped limit the damage that might have occurred had the quake been centered under a city.

Bullet train service was suspended in northern Japan. Tokyo's Haneda Airport halted flights temporarily, the Nippon news service said.

Pope backs public display of crucifixes

Pope Benedict XVI called for greater display of the Christian cross in public areas, his latest plea against Europe's growing secularization. "It is important that God is visible in public and private houses, that God is present in public life, with the sign of the cross visible in public places," the pope said during Mass at his summer retreat in Castel Gandolfo, Italy.

He mentioned no specific disputes, but the issue of religious symbols in public places has been divisive in Europe. The pope leaves Thursday for Germany, for World Youth Day, a Catholic youth gathering being held in Cologne.

Afghan, U.S. forces battle insurgents

Afghan security forces killed at least 28 suspected insurgents in an offensive against extremists bent on disrupting legislative elections Sept. 18, the Defense Ministry said. In the largest skirmish, Afghan forces in southern Zabul province killed 18 suspected militants and arrested local Taliban commander Mullah Nasir, the Defense Ministry said.

Meanwhile, Army Col. James Yonks, a U.S. military spokesman, said U.S. Marines and Afghan special forces pressed deeper into a valley in Kurar province near the eastern border with Pakistan.

The area is controlled by militants suspected of ambushing a team of U.S. commandos and shooting down a special operations helicopter June 28.

By Paul Lavitt with wire reports

Peace agreement signed in Indonesia

Representatives of Indonesia and the rebel Free Aceh Movement signed a peace accord Monday to end their 30-year conflict. But rebel leaders expressed concern about thousands of government troops that will remain in Aceh province while the separatists disarm under the watch of international monitors.

The peace deal should speed distribution of aid to victims of the Dec. 26 tsunami that killed 130,000 people in Aceh.

The agreement was signed in Helsinki, Finland, by Indonesian justice and Human Rights Minister Hamid Awaludin and Malik Mahmud, an exiled rebel leader. The rebels gave up demands for independence, and the government offered them limited self-government and 70% control of the province's natural resources.

Wall et al. v. Allstate, et al.
No. 03-2700 (Pa. Ct. App. 2004) (En Banc)

NOTICE OF PENDING OF CLASS ACTION, DEBITA V CLAIMS, PROPOSED SETTLEMENT, SETTLEMENT FAIRNESS HEARING AND RIGHT TO APPEAR.

If you owned an insurance policy issued by Allstate Mutual Insurance Company and held that policy on February 18, 1993, you may be included in a class action settlement.

What Is This Lawsuit About?
The lawsuit claimed that beginning in 1987 and continuing through February 18, 1993, the executives who ran Allstate Mutual and Allstate Group attempted to enter into a series of transactions that improperly transferred substantial assets (including Allstate Mutual's equity interest in Allstate Mutual) to Allstate Group. The lawsuit also claimed that Allstate Mutual's management and Allstate Group conspired to make Allstate Mutual's management and Allstate Group shareholders unaware of the lawsuit and to prevent the lawsuit from being filed. The lawsuit also claimed that the lawsuit should be filed in Pennsylvania.

What Does This Settlement Provide?
Settlement of Allstate Mutual Insurance Company v. Wall et al. (No. 03-2700) and Allstate Mutual Insurance Company v. Wall et al. (No. 03-2700) will result in a settlement of the lawsuit. The settlement will provide for the payment of a lump sum to each class member who is eligible to receive the settlement. The settlement will also provide for the payment of a lump sum to each class member who is eligible to receive the settlement.

What You Should Know About This Settlement

If you are included in the settlement, you will receive a check for the amount of the settlement. The settlement will be paid to you in a lump sum. The settlement will be paid to you in a lump sum. The settlement will be paid to you in a lump sum.

What Are Your Other Options?

If you do not want to be included in the settlement, you must file a written objection to the settlement by September 16, 2005. If you do not file an objection, you will be included in the settlement. The settlement will be paid to you in a lump sum.

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