Beat: Politics

BREAKING NEWS: UPDATE 2 -- Former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon dead at 85

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USPA News - Former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, considered by many as having been one of Israel`s finest military commanders, died on Saturday, more than eight years after a massive stroke and brain hemorrhage left him in a permanent vegetative state. He was 85. Sharon died at around 2 p.m. local time on Saturday at Chaim Sheba Medical Center near Tel Aviv after his condition sharply deteriorated in recent days, caused by the onset of a blood infection and the failure of several key organs that included his kidney.

His son Gilad confirmed the news saying, "He`s gone." The hospital had said earlier this week that the politician was in a "grave" condition, using a Hebrew term that means a patient is close to death. "His condition is described as grave and his family is at his side at all times," a hospital spokesperson had said on Thursday after his condition deteriorated further. During a news briefing last week, hospital director Dr. Zeev Rotstein said Sharon`s condition was deteriorating slowly. "Ariel Sharon is not suffering. He is receiving maintenance treatment by his physician," Rotstein explained on January 3, adding that he believed Sharon was in his final days. Test results last week showed that Sharon was suffering from a blood infection in addition to the continuing decline of several key organs. But Rotstein later said the former prime minister was fighting "against all odds" and that doctors had been able to stabilize Sharon`s blood pressure and pulse. Sharon is by many considered to have been one of Israel`s finest military commanders and was given popular nicknames such as "The King of Israel" and "The Lion of God." He joined the Likud party after retiring from the army and went on to serve in a number of ministerial posts before becoming the party`s leader in 2000, after which he became prime minister in the following year. But Sharon`s political career came to an abrupt end in January 2006 when he suffered a massive stroke and brain hemorrhage, leaving him in a permanent vegetative state. Some hopes were raised in January 2013 when doctors said the iconic leader had shown "significant brain activity" while viewing pictures of his family and listening to his son`s voice, but no further developments were reported. During a news conference last week, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry praised the former prime minister and said his thoughts are with Sharon`s family. "We remember his contributions, sacrifices he made to ensure the survival and the well-being of Israel, and I have many personal thoughts about my meetings with him on many different occasions - always robust and strong and clear about his positions," Kerry said.

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:
United Press Association, Inc.
3651 Lindell Road, Suite D168
Las Vegas, NV 89103, USA

(702) 943.0321 Local
(702) 943.0233 Facsimile
info@unitedpressassociation.org
info@gna24.com
www.gna24.com