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Levi Eshkol, Israel's Third Premier, Dead At 73; Allon Named To Serve Temporarily

JERUSALEM, Feb. 26 (JTA) -- Prime Minister Levi Eshkol of Israel died early this morning following a heart attack at his official residence where he had been recovering from an attack of influenza. A physician was summoned to his bedside shortly after 3 A.M. Jerusalem time (8 P.M. New York Standard Time) when he complained of chest pains. Death came at 8:15 A.M. (1:15 A.M. New York Standard Time). Mr. Eshkol was 73 years old and had suffered two previous heart attacks since 1965. Frequent illnesses in recent months had necessitated his delegation of some functions to his Cabinet colleagues. Public announcement of the death of Israel's third Prime Minister was not made until an hour and three-quarters after his physician, Dr. Moshe Ramilevitz, had pronounced him dead. The news was broadcast over Kol Israel and a mourning crowd assembled almost immediately before his residence in the Rehavia section of Jerusalem, standing there in silence, many weeping openly. An urgent meeting of the Cabinet was held at the Prime Minister's residence and agreed on Deputy Prime Minister Yigal Allon as Acting Prime Minister for the next 30 days. Mr. Eshkol's term of office would have ended next October when general elections were scheduled. He announced his intention of seeking redesignation to the Premiership.

Announcement was made that Mr. Eshkol's body will lie in state in the Knesset Building here beginning tomorrow. Funeral services will be held Friday with interment in the Pantheon of the Nation's Great on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem. At the services, the Army's Chief Chaplain, Rabbi Shlomo Goren, and Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi Isser Untermann will deliver prayers. Sephardic Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Nissim will perform the "keriah" ceremony--the tearing of clothing of the nearest relative. The funeral procession will pass along a two-mile-long route from the Knesset to Mount Herzl so that hundreds of thousands will see it. Mr. Eshkol will be buried near former President Itzhak Ben-Zvi, former Prime Minister Moshe Sharett, and the Zionist Revisionist leader, Vladimir Jabotinsky.

As the news of the Prime Minister's death became known, the country went into mourning. Flags were lowered to half-mast and all places of entertainment were closed. Mourning for a man who was one of the pillars of the world Zionist movement and of the Yishuv, the Jewish community of Palestine, as well as one of the founders of the State of Israel, was mixed here with concern the effect of his sudden death would have on the domestic political situation and on Israel's international position.

Mr. Eshkol and his closest associates, Minister Without Portfolio Pinhas Sapir and former Foreign Minister Golda Meir, were firmly in control of the Israel Labor Party and machinery and were able to keep personal rivalries with regard to the succession in check. The party, with its political alignment with the Mapam Party, has a parliamentary majority. Mr. Eshkol's announcement that he would seek to retain the premiership after the October general elections had averted a bitter struggle within the party by Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, Deputy Prime Minister Allon, and possibly others, to succeed Mr. Eshkol. Political observers here today were concerned that with Mr. Eshkol's death, the country would now have to face this struggle at a time when international pressures called for unity on the part of Israelis.

Israeli officials dismissed as utter nonsense claims immediately broadcast by the Arab terrorist organization, El Fatah, that Mr. Eshkol had died as a result of wounds suffered when the terrorists shelled his residence in Degania last week. They pointed out that Mr. Eshkol had not been in Degania since the beginning of the month.

Eshkol Was Last Of Members Of Second Aliyah To Hold High Office In Israel

JERUSALEM, Feb. 26 (JTA) -- Levi Eshkol was one of the last of the members of the Second Aliyah to hold high office in Israel. Of his contemporaries and associates over a half-century, David Ben-Gurion, whom he succeeded as Prime Minister, is in the political background today, and Mrs. Golda Meir, the former Foreign Minister, no longer holds public office although she remains a power in the Israel Labor Party.

A native of the Ukraine, Levi Shkolnik (he changed his name in 1948 when Israel's Statehood was established) emigrated to Palestine in 1914 and worked as a laborer. When the Jewish Legion was established, he volunteered and saw service along with Mr. Ben-Gurion and the late Itzhak Ben-Zvi, Israel's second president. As a corporal in the Jewish Legion, he witnessed the dedication of the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem, and almost 50 years later, as Prime Minister, participated in the rededication of its buildings there after the road to Scopus had been opened up in the Six-Day War.

He was a founder of the colony of Degania Beth, Lake Tiberias, where he maintained a home and was an active member of the Jewish labor movement all his life. His political rise was slow and laborious and his role was overshadowed by the great luminaries of the Zionist labor movement--Mr. Ben-Gurion, the late Chaim Arlosoroff and the late Moshe Sharett. First in the Zionist movement and the Jewish Agency and then in the Israel Government, he proved himself in difficult assignments with the portfolios of agriculture and finance.

Mr. Eshkol became Prime Minister and Minister of Defense on June 26, 1963 when Mr. Ben-Gurion stepped down in his favor and he held both posts until May, 1967 when, on the eve of the Six-Day War, he surrendered the Defense post to Gen. Dayan.

Previously, Mr. Eshkol and Mr. Ben-Gurion had split over the so-called "Lavon Affair" and Mr.

Ben-Gurion sought the defeat and removal from the political scene of the man he had designated to succeed himself. In his struggle with Mr. Eshkol over the "Affair," Mr. Ben-Gurion seceded from the Mapai Party with a group of his followers, among them Gen. Dayan, set up an independent labor party (Rafi) and began to build up Gen. Dayan as a challenger to Mr. Eshkol and as a future Prime Minister.

The major threat to Israel's existence posed by the Arab states in May, 1967 lead to the establishment of a Government of National Unity and, ultimately, to the return of Rafi to a new, united Israel Labor Party--a step that Mr. Ben-Gurion bitterly opposed and still refuses to accept. Mr. Eshkol displayed superb political skill in creating the new Labor Party and in welding together the dissident elements which had broken away from Mapai over the years. But even his critics conceded that he was more than a politician and was entitled to be called a statesman with a complete grasp of Israel's domestic and international problems.

Mr. Eshkol professed himself to be a Socialist but of the Fabian brand. He never believed that Socialism in itself would solve the "Jewish problem" and he cooperated with other parties and people of other views. Above all, a practical man, he knew and was prepared to take steps that other Socialists regarded with dismay to attract capital to Israel and to develop the country's economy.

In his foreign policy, Mr. Eshkol represented the trend in Israel which was prepared to go to great lengths to achieve a stable peace and which considered that a bad peace was preferable to a good war. He was ready to make compromises but he was firm on such issues as the permanent unification of Jerusalem. His personal efforts at diplomacy--his visits to Britain and the United States--were successful and had tangible results but, basically, Mr. Eshkol's major interests were economic problems and home affairs generally.

Mr. Eshkol was not so preoccupied with the problems of Israel as to forget the Jewish communities overseas. He was deeply interested and concerned in developing as strong ties as possible between the Diaspora and the State and he was deeply concerned over the problems of the Jews abroad--the threat to the Jewish communities in the Soviet Union and Poland, their suffering in the Arab states, the threat of assimilation and alienation in the more prosperous lands. He was also concerned that younger Israelis know more about their Jewish heritage and their kinship with the Jews outside Israel. Mr. Eshkol was married twice. He had four daughters by his first wife, Elisheva. He remarried in 1964 and is survived by his second wife, Mrs. Miriam Eshkol.

'Embodiment Of All That Is Good In The Jewish Character'

Amos Ben Vered, JTA's Jerusalem correspondent, writes: "Levi Eshkol had been considered by all sections of Israel's population as the embodiment of all that is good in the Jewish character. He was an unbeatable optimist. He had a keen sense of humor and could with perfect timing relieve tense moments with a joke, often in Yiddish. Mr. Eshkol was a father figure, even when he was younger. Often he would address even his elders with the word 'Kinderlach' (children). Always bubbling over with good spirits, Mr. Eshkol was the perfect negotiator.

"Mr. Eshkol's greatest achievements," writes Mr. Ben Vered, "which may be the ones that will secure his place in history, are the unification of Israel in the face of adversity and the resounding victory over the Arabs during his Premiership. It was under his leadership that a dream as old as Labor Zionism was realized--the formation of an absolute majority in the Parliament."

Shazar Will Ask Knesset Leaders To Form Government After Mourning Period

JERUSALEM, Feb. 26 (JTA) -- Under Israeli law, the present coalition Cabinet may remain as a caretaker Government under Gen. Allon until national elections are held in November. Under Israel's basic law--the "little constitution"--President Zalman Shazar is required to start consultation with Knesset (Parliament) leaders on the formation of a new Government as soon as the traditional seven days of mourning are over. The candidate named by the President then has a maximum of 45 days to form a Cabinet. If he fails, another candidate must be named to try. Theoretically this process can continue until the elections with a caretaker Government in control, but the latter would lack the authority of a new Government formed and given a Knesset vote of confidence. For one thing, coalition discipline would not be binding on its members.

There is no lack of candidates. A likely successor until a short time ago was former Finance Minister Pinchas Sapir. He was considered by many to be the most powerful man in the Government and was the closest confidant of Mr. Eshkol. But Mr. Sapir, who is now a Minister Without Portfolio and secretary-general of the Israel Labor Party, is believed to have put himself out of the running by some "dovish statements". He vehemently opposed the economic integration of the West Bank with Israel, a move favored by Defense Minister Moshe Dayan.

Gen. Dayan, the hero of the 1956 Suez Campaign, is regarded by many Israelis as the architect of the 1967 victory. He is clearly the most popular candidate for the Premiership. But in Israel, Prime Ministers are not chosen by popular vote but by party secretariats and central committees. Knowledgeable observers believe the successful candidate will be a compromise figure chosen not for the number of his friends but for his lack of enemies. It is almost certain that the choice will be made by the Israel Labor Party which commands with its Mapam partner a majority in the Knesset. Among the other candidates most frequently mentioned are Mr. Allon, Foreign Minister Abba Eban and former Foreign Minister Golda Meir. Mrs. Meir is 71, ailing and an outspoken "hawk" but she may be proposed as an interim Premier pending elections.

Allon Will Be First Sabra In Israel's History To Be Premier

JERUSALEM, Feb. 26 (JTA) -- Maj. Gen. Yigal Allon, Acting Prime Minister, will be the first Sabra (native-born Israeli) to hold the Premiership since Israel was founded in 1948. His predecessors--David Ben-Gurion, Moshe Sharett and Levi Eshkol--were all born in Russia and emigrated to Palestine as young men.

Gen. Allon was born in 1918 at Kefar Tabor in Lower Galilee. His mother's family had been in Palestine since medieval times. His father was brought to the country as a boy. He was educated at the Kadoorie Agricultural College, at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and at St. Anthony's College, Oxford. In 1937 he was one of the founders of Kibbutz Ginossar on the shores of the Sea of Galilee which is still his home.

Gen. Allon received his military training in the Haganah, the defense force of Jewish Palestine formed in 1920. He saw his first combat in the Arab uprising of 1936. In 1941 he was a founder of Palmach, Haganah's striking force, and was its commander from 1945-48. He commanded Israeli forces in some of the major battles of the 1948 War for Independence and later resigned from the Army to resume his studies.

He has been a member of the Knesset since 1954, representing the moderate Socialist Achdut Avodah faction which was one of three that merged last year to form the Israel Labor Party. Gen. Allon joined the Cabinet in 1961 and served as Minister of Labor. He was appointed Deputy Prime Minister by Mr. Eshkol last year and was also given the portfolio of the new Ministry for Immigrant Absorption. Gen. Allon is married and the father of two children. He has published three books about the Army and Palmach.

On the question of a peace settlement with the Arabs, Gen. Allon cannot be described as either a "hawk" or a "dove." The so-called Allon Plan for the West Bank is designed to assure Israel's security while eliminating a heavy concentration of Arabs from Israeli rule. Basically, the plan calls for the establishment of a string of Israeli military settlements along the banks of the Jordan River which would constitute Israel's eastern security frontier. The mountainous hinterland containing the heaviest Arab population in such towns as Nablus, Tulkarem and Jenin would remain demilitarized and would be returned to Jordan. The Jordanians would be provided with an access corridor in the vicinity of Jericho. One version of the Allon plan was said to envision a gradual demilitarization of the Jordan River military settlements as peace and normalcy returned. But a later version said the military strongholds would be permanent. Similarly, one version of the plan reportedly provided access for Jordan to an Israeli Mediterranean port. The Allon Plan basically was said to be favored by a majority of Gen. Allon's Cabinet colleagues.

President Nixon, U Thant, Lyndon B. Johnson Send Messages Of Sympathy To Israel

BONN, Feb. 26 (JTA) -- President Richard M. Nixon, in the West German capital today, said in a letter of condolence to President Shazar: "All Americans join me in sending you and the people of Israel our deepest sympathy for your tragic loss. Levi Eshkol was a man of great compassion and a true servant of his people. We shall all be the poorer for his passing."

Messages of condolence were received from Presidents, Prime Ministers, statesmen and politicians all over the world today by the Israel Government and Mrs. Eshkol. A Vatican spokesman said that Pope Paul VI had received news of the death with "sorrow" and instructed his Secretariat of State to send condolences to President Shazar. The Pontiff and Mr. Eshkol met during the Roman Catholic leader's visit to the Holy Land five years ago. Tass, the Soviet news agency, carried word of his death in a 13-word dispatch, and the Arab press and radio also carried reports. Foreign Minister Michel Debre of France said the death would not make any easier a solution of the Mideast deadlock.

NEW YORK, Feb. 26 (JTA) -- United Nations Secretary General U Thant sent a message to Foreign Minister Eban which said he was "deeply distressed" to learn of the death and asked Mr. Eban to "convey to the members of the Government and the Prime Minister's family my profound sympathy and sincere condolences."

Acting secretary of State Elliot Richardson, in a statement today, said that "the American people have been profoundly moved by news of the death of Prime Minister Levi Eshkol. He was well-known to us as a defender of freedom and a friend of the United States. I express sincere condolences on my personal behalf as well as on behalf of my colleagues." House of Representatives speaker John W. McCormack conveyed sympathy to Israel's Ambassador Yitzhak Rabin.

A statement issued by former President Lyndon B. Johnson today in Austin, Texas said: "The death of Prime Minister Eshkol leaves a void on this earth. Israel has lost one of her bravest leaders. America has lost a staunch and worthy friend. And the world has lost one of freedom's most vigorous champions. I treasure the memory of my personal friendship with him and of the numerous visits we shared. As American citizens, bound by ties of deep feeling to the people of Israel, Mrs. Johnson and I join with them in mourning the passing of this brilliant, able and dedicated leader who gave so much of himself to their cause."

In Washington, Gen. Rabin termed Mr. Eshkol "a man of the people...an architect of Israel's democracy." The envoy said that "from the days of his youth when he labored as a pioneer farmer draining swamps in the Jordan Valley until his last hours as Prime Minister...he devoted his whole being to Israel's

rebirth." The Embassy and Israel's eight consulates throughout the United States--and elsewhere throughout the world--announced a seven-day mourning period and lowered flags to half-staff. All the legations opened memorial books on a table that also bore a picture of Mr. Eshkol and a memorial candle. Processions of Jews and non-Jews everywhere filed into the legations to sign the books.

Senator Edward Kennedy, Massachusetts Democrat, called at the Israel Embassy in Washington this morning to offer his condolences and pay his respects. Sen. Jacob K. Javits extolled "the wisdom, poise and restraint" Mr. Eshkol had shown and said he remained as "an eternal light, not only to the new leaders of Israel but to all the world's statesmen now concerned with this troubled area." He noted that in recent years, the Prime Minister had been "the rock of Israel's determination to survive and to perform its historic mission as a haven for the oppressed and persecuted Jews of the world and as a model of freedom and justice for small nations." Mayor John V. Lindsay of New York said Mr. Eshkol had been "a statesman of the front lines" and that "he guided his nation at a time when danger and turmoil constantly surrounded it." The Mayor declared that "those who would honor Levi Eshkol's memory can do it best by redoubling their commitment to preserving the nation in whose service he died."

U.S. Tributes Strike Warm, Personal Note; Recall His Contributions

News of Mr. Eshkol's death came as a blow to the American Jewish community. Leaders of several national organizations planned to fly to Jerusalem to attend the funeral services Friday. It was announced that Rabbi Herschel Schacter, chairman, and Dr. William Wexler, vice-chairman, would represent the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations at the services. A comrade-in-arms, Dr. Judah Lapson, New York educator, who served with Mr. Eshkol in the 39th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers, one of the units comprising the Jewish Legion, was to attend the services as representative of the American Veterans of the Jewish Legion of World War I.

The international inaugural conference of the Israel Bond Organization will open tomorrow in Miami Beach as scheduled. The decision to proceed with the conference was reached at the request of the Israel Government in view of "Israel's urgent need for economic development assistance through the Bond drive." Ambassador Itzhak Rabin was to replace Acting Prime Minister Yigal Allon as the principal speaker.

Many of the tributes to Mr. Eshkol struck a warm, personal note and reflected the varied, close associations with people of many differing interests which Mr. Eshkol had had in his long career in the Zionist movement and as a key figure in the Jewish State. In Geneva, Dr. Nahum Goldmann, former president of the World Zionist Organization and chairman of the Jewish Agency, who had worked with Mr. Eshkol for more than three decades, paid tribute to him as "a man of deep kindness of heart and of great common sense" and who was "born to unite people and settle conflicts."

Many of the statements stressed Mr. Eshkol's contributions to the Zionist movement and his participation as an early immigrant in the process of the physical redemption of Palestine as a Jewish home-land. Dr. Emanuel Neumann, chairman of the Jewish Agency-American Section, recalled Mr. Eshkol's "unsurpassed contribution" as head of the Agency's settlement department from 1951 to 1963, and Mrs. Max Schenk, president of Hadassah, said that he was "one of that great band of leaders who early translated the ideals of Zionism into the practical realities of life in Palestine, first in the kibbutz and then in the high offices which he held." The Israel Bond Organization lauded his "many achievements in agricultural settlement, the redemption of rocky and desert soil and the economic development of Israel." Rabbi Israel Miller, chairman of the American Zionist Council, also recalled Mr. Eshkol's pioneer role and his part in creating "a new form of communal life" and eventually the State of Israel.

Other messages stressed the Prime Minister's humanitarianism and his deep concern for the refugees and the Jews living under conditions of disability and discrimination. Louis J. Fox, president of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, called Mr. Eshkol "the architect of Israel's successful resettlement of hundreds of thousands of refugees." The United Jewish Appeal stressed that Mr. Eshkol "was always intimately associated with the humanitarian goals of the UJA." Louis Broido, chairman, and Samuel L. Haber, executive vice-chairman of the Joint Distribution Committee, in a message to President Shazar, recalled Mr. Eshkol's deep interest and concern over the refugee problem.

Mr. Eshkol's role in the Zionist labor movement was recalled by Leon H. Keyserling, president, and Dr. Sol Stein, executive director of the National Committee for Labor Israel, who noted that during his visits to the United States "he never failed to meet with American friends of Histadrut who shared his dreams of a secure Israel in a peaceful world." Poale Zion, the United Labor Zionist Organization of America, said that Mr. Eshkol exemplified "the chief ideological commands of his movement--practicing what he preached."

Dr. Israel Goldstein, and Mrs. Rose Halprin, co-chairman of the World Confederation of General Zionists, described Mr. Eshkol as "the personification of the noblest aspirations of early chalutzim and modern Zionism." They said he had "served his people with love and his office as Prime Minister with distinction and dignity." Jacques Torczyner, president of the Zionist Organization of America, said that Mr. Eshkol would be "sorely missed." Irving Kane, for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, said that Mr. Eshkol would be remembered as "one of the greatest architects of Israel's development and Israel's defense."