Beat: Health

Comatose ex-PM Ariel Sharon;near death, hospital says

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USPA News - Former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, who has remained in a permanent vegetative state after suffering a stroke more than eight years ago, is now in a "grave" condition after his condition sharply deteriorated on Thursday afternoon, officials said. Chaim Sheba Medical Center said in a brief statement that Sharon`s condition had sharply deteriorated in the previous hours, describing his condition with 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," the statement added. Meanwhile, a source close to Sharon`s family told the Israeli news website Ynet that the former leader`s children are preparing for his death. "Unfortunately, they understand that this is the end," the source said. "These are Arik`s last days or even hours. It is hard. Eight years we have evaded this moment and now it is upon us, there is no escaping it." 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 is in his final days. Test results last week showed that Sharon, now 85, is suffering from a blood infection in addition to the continuing decline of several key organs that include his kidneys. 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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