

Shimon Peres, former Israel PM and President, dies at 93

28/09/2016 21:24 by admin

Jerusalem: The former Israeli PM and president, Shimon Peres, who was celebrated around the world as a Nobel prize-winning visionary who pushed the Jewish state toward peace, died early Wednesday.

Shimon Peres, former Israel PM and president, dies

He suffered a stroke two weeks ago and his condition improved before a sudden deterioration on Tuesday.

Mr Peres, who was one of the last of a generation of Israeli politicians present at the new nation's birth in 1948, served twice as the country's prime minister and once as president.

The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss Peres' health with the media. The family said it would issue a formal announcement shortly.

Peres' condition worsened following a major stroke two weeks ago that led to bleeding in his brain. He was sedated and on a respirator during most of his hospitalization.

Peres, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, is the elder statesman of Israeli politics, one of the country's most admired leaders and the last surviving link to its founding fathers.

In an unprecedented seven-decade political career, Peres filled nearly every position in Israeli public life and was credited with leading the country through some of its most defining moments, from creating its nuclear arsenal in the 1950s, to disentangling its troops from Lebanon and rescuing its economy from triple-digit inflation in the 1980s, to guiding a skeptical nation into peace talks with the Palestinians in the 1990s.

A protege of Israel's founding father David Ben-Gurion, he led the Defense Ministry in his 20s and spearheaded the development of Israel's nuclear program.

He was first elected to parliament in 1959 and later held every major Cabinet post – including defense, finance and foreign affairs – and served three brief stints as prime minister.

His key role in the first Israeli-Palestinian peace accord earned him a Nobel Peace Prize and revered status as Israel's then most recognizable figure abroad.

And yet, for much of his political career he could not parlay his international prestige into success in Israeli politics, where he was branded by many as both a utopian dreamer and political schemer.

His well-tailored, necktied appearance and swept-back gray hair seemed to separate him from his more informal countrymen. He suffered a string of electoral defeats: competing in five general elections seeking the prime minister's spot, he lost four and tied one.

He finally secured the public adoration that had long eluded him when he was chosen by parliament to a seven-year term as Israel's ceremonial president in 2007, taking the role of elder statesman.

Peres was celebrated by doves and vilified by hawks for advocating far-reaching Israeli compromises for peace even before he negotiated the first interim accord with the Palestinians in 1993 that set into motion a partition plan that gave

them limited self-rule.

That was followed by a peace accord with neighboring Jordan. But after a fateful six-month period in 1995-96 that included Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's assassination, a spate of Palestinian suicide bombings and Peres' own election loss to the more conservative Benjamin Netanyahu, the prospects for peace began to evaporate.

Relegated to the political wilderness, he created his non-governmental Peres Center for Peace that raised funds for cooperation and development projects involving Israel, the Palestinians and Arab nations. He returned to it at age 91 when he completed his term as president.

Shimon Perski was born on Aug. 2, 1923, in Vishneva, then part of Poland. He moved to pre-state Palestine in 1934 with his immediate family.

Her grandfather and other relatives stayed behind and perished in the Holocaust. Rising quickly through Labor Party ranks, he became a top aide to Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister and a man Peres once called "the greatest Jew of our time."

At 29, he was the youngest person to serve as director of Israel's Defense Ministry, and is credited with arming Israel's military almost from scratch. Yet throughout his political career, he suffered from the fact that he never wore an army uniform or fought in a war. Of his 10 books, several amplified his vision of a "new Middle East" where there was peaceful economic and cultural cooperation among all the nations of the region.

Despite continued waves of violence that pushed the Israeli political map to the right, the concept of a Palestinian state next to Israel became mainstream Israeli policy many years after Peres advocated it.

Shunted aside during the 1999 election campaign, won by party colleague Ehud Barak, Peres rejected advice to retire, assuming the newly created and loosely defined Cabinet post of Minister for Regional Cooperation.

In 2000, Peres absorbed another resounding political slap, losing an election in the parliament for the largely ceremonial post of president to Likud Party backbencher Moshe Katsav, who was later convicted and imprisoned for rape.

Even so, Peres refused to quit. In 2001, at age 77, he took the post of foreign minister in the government of national unity set up by Ariel Sharon, serving for 20 months before Labor withdrew from the coalition.

Then he followed Sharon into a new party, Kadima, serving as vice-premier under Sharon and his successor, Ehud Olmert, before assuming the presidency.

- AP inputs