

With Deadline Approaching, Government Coalition Beginning to Take Shape

With eight days to go before deadline, it appears that a breakthrough has been achieved in the coalition negotiations to establish Israel's next government, led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The progress can be mainly attributed to the fact that Yesh Atid leader Yair Lapid has seemingly given up on receiving the foreign affairs portfolio, which Netanyahu has reserved for Yisrael Beytenu leader Avigdor Lieberman. Netanyahu is offering Lapid the finance portfolio, although number 3 on Yesh Atid's list MK Yael German told Army Radio on Friday morning that no official offer to Lapid has been made. "Lapid heard about Likud's offer of the Finance Ministry through the media. No official offer has been made, and that is why Lapid has said he is not ruling anything out," German said. If Lapid does decline the Treasury post, the portfolio would then be offered to Habayit Hayehudi leader Naftali Bennett.

If Lapid does not want the finance portfolio, he could receive the interior portfolio or another top economic role instead.

Yesh Atid is also expected to get the education and housing ministries, as well as chairmanship of the Knesset Finance Committee. Overall, Yesh Atid will likely have four or five ministers and two deputy ministers.

If Bennett becomes finance minister, Habayit Hayehudi is expected to have three ministers (one of whom will be the religious affairs minister) and one deputy minister (who will be deputy defense minister).

An agreement is also emerging on how many overall ministers

there will be in the next government. Lapid's original demand was that there be only 18 ministers, but it appears likely that there will be 24.

Likud-Beytenu will apparently have 12 ministers – eight from Likud and four from Yisrael Beytenu. Netanyahu will inform members of his party next week of which roles they will receive. It seems Likud will keep the communications and transportation portfolios and Yisrael Beytenu will retain the internal security, immigrant absorption and energy and water resources portfolios. Moshe Ya'alon from Likud is set to be appointed defense minister.

It is believed there will be eight deputy ministers in the next government (two from Yesh Atid, one from Habayit Hayehudi, one from Hatnuah and the rest from Likud-Beytenu).

Current Likud ministers will likely all remain ministers in the next government and may be joined by Tzachi Hanegbi. All current Yisrael Beytenu ministers will also apparently remain, except for Uzi Landau, who may receive a deputy ministerial position. In place of Landau, Yair Shamir will receive a ministerial post. Yisrael Beytenu MK Faina Kirschenbaum is a candidate for a deputy ministerial position.

The identity of the next Knesset speaker will be determined next week. The two candidates, both from Likud, are Reuven Rivlin, who was the speaker of the 16th and 18th Knessets, and Yuli Edelstein. It is not certain if Netanyahu will intervene in the matter or if he will permit a secret party vote to be held without publicizing whom he supports.

Agreements have also been reached on core issues, including a new enlistment law. Under the law, the state will give draft exemptions and full funding to 2,000 yeshiva students, while the rest will have to enlist in the Israel Defense Forces or perform national service. If they refuse, their financial benefits will be stripped and funding for their yeshivas will

be cut off.

Meanwhile, Labor leader Shelly Yachimovich said on Thursday that Labor would join the coalition if Habayit Hayehudi were to leave ahead of the signing of a peace agreement with the Palestinians.

“We won’t thwart a historic development that advances us toward peace with our neighbors,” Yachimovich said. “We won’t prevent the signing of an agreement. But until then, the Labor Party will be a fighting opposition.”

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