

Coalition deal: Kotel deal will implement egalitarian prayer section

Norwegian Law would bring Anglos into Knesset * The coalition agreement reached by Yamina and Yesh Atid gives significant powers to party leaders.

By GIL HOFFMAN JUNE 8, 2021



American family celebrates bar mitzvah summer 2017 in the Azarat Yisrael plaza at Robinson's Arch archaeological site at southern end of the Western Wall.

(photo credit: MARC ISRAEL SELLEM/THE JERUSALEM POST)

The new government being formed by Yamina leader Naftali Bennett will implement a resolution creating a state-recognized egalitarian prayer section at the southern end of the Western Wall that was passed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government and

then abandoned under haredi (ultra-Orthodox) pressure four years ago, sources familiar with the negotiations revealed on Monday.

Implementing the Western Wall deal was put in the coalition agreement at the request of Yisrael Beytenu, whose leader, Avigdor Liberman, voted against cancelling the deal in 2017. Some of the agreements reached with different parties, including on matters of religion and state, contradict each other and are unlikely to be implemented.

But sources involved in drafting the coalition agreement said the Western Wall deal would come to fruition because all the parties that will be in the government support it.

The Western Wall deal called for a large, state-recognized egalitarian section that would be created at the southern end of the Western Wall and would be accessible from the main Western Wall complex and run by a board, including progressive Jewish representatives and members of the Women of the Wall organization.

Bennett built a plaza at the southern end of the wall in 2014 that was set to be upgraded as part of the Western Wall agreement, which was written by current Attorney-General Avichai Mandelblit when he was Netanyahu's cabinet secretary.

The coalition agreement will also include the immediate formation of a committee headed by a Supreme Court judge to probe the Meron disaster, ironclad guarantees that the rotation between Bennett and Yesh Atid head Yair Lapid would be implemented and a bill that could prevent Netanyahu from returning to power, Channel 12 reported. The bill would institute a four-year cooling-off period for anyone who has served eight years as prime minister.

Yamina said much of the Channel 12 report was inaccurate and based on outdated versions of agreements. The party said the coalition would back term limits but denied that the coalition would back a bill that would prevent Netanyahu from running.

The Likud complained that the bill was draconian and belonged in regimes like Iran, Syria and North Korea.

“Prime Minister Netanyahu fought against Iran, and Bennett is bringing an Iranian-style bill,” the Likud said in a statement. “Bennett is crossing every redline in his crazy pursuit of the premiership at any price.”

Another anti-Likud bill that will be pursued by the coalition would allow four MKs to break off from the party, instead of a third of the faction, which would be 10.

The coalition agreement reached by Yamina and Yesh Atid gives significant powers to party leaders Bennett and Yair Lapid in running the government together, sources familiar with the negotiations revealed on Monday.

Bennett will serve as prime minister and Lapid as alternate prime minister until August 2023, when they will switch positions, according to the deal, but they will make key decisions together regardless of who is in power.

For instance, every bill supported by the coalition will require the approval of both the prime minister and the alternate prime minister, who will have mutual veto power.

The votes of the right-wing bloc, Yamina and New Hope, will have the same weight as those of the other six parties in the coalition combined in the cabinet and the Ministerial Committee on Legislation.

In the security cabinet, there will be 12 ministers, six each from the Right bloc and the remaining six parties, to keep the two blocs equal.

For a new party to join the coalition, both the prime minister and alternate prime minister would have to agree.

In addition to legal guarantees that the change in power between him and Bennett would take place, Lapid told the Yesh Atid faction, there was also full trust between him and Bennett.

The coalition agreement also calls for updating the Norwegian Law, which allows ministers and deputy ministers to resign from the Knesset to be replaced by the next candidate on their party's list, to give the coalition parties more MKs to work for them in the Knesset. If the ministers quit their posts, they would return to the Knesset automatically.

New Hope and Meretz, which have six seats each, could have three new MKs enter the Knesset. Yamina, Labor and Yisrael Beytenu, which have seven seats, and Blue and White, which has eight, could have four MKs join, and Yesh Atid, which has 17, could have five.

Each party will decide on its own how and when to implement the law. But every party in the coalition is expected to implement it at least partially.

In New Hope, the bill will return former MKs Zvi Hauser, Michal Shir Segman and Hila Shay Vazan to the Knesset. In Meretz, former MK Michal Rosin would return, along with former Tel Aviv-Jaffa councilwoman Gabi Lasky and Druze educator Ali Salalha.

Labor would return former MK Nachman Shai to the Knesset, along with Haifa councilwoman Naama Lazimi, advertising executive Gil Beilin, the son of former justice minister Yossi Beilin, and Labor secretary-general Eran Hermoni.

In Yamina, the candidates expected to join are deaf activist Shirley Pinto, French-speaking lawyer Yomtov Kalfon, Ashdod councilwoman Stella Weinstein, who represents the Russian-speaking sector in the party, and Nahariya Councilwoman Orna Shtarkman. If MK Nir Orbach quits the Knesset, the next candidate in Yamina to enter would be Chicago-born Bennett adviser Jeremy Saltan.

South African-raised former MK Ruth Wasserman Lande would return in Blue and White. North Carolina-born environmental activist Alon Tal would also enter the Knesset for the party.

Among Yisrael Beytenu's new MKs would be Yossi Shain, head of Tel Aviv University's School of Political Science. In Yesh Atid, one of the candidates who would enter would be Philadelphia-born former MK Moshe Tur-Paz.