

Israel selects a new leader

Ousted after 12 years as prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu vows to return.

BY STEVE HENDRIX AND SHIRA RUBIN
Washington Post

JERUSALEM — For the first time in 12 years, Israeli lawmakers voted Sunday to install a government led by someone other than Benjamin Netanyahu, breaking a two-year electoral deadlock, marking a likely shift toward the political center and ending — for now — the reign



Benjamin Netanyahu

of the country's longest-serving prime minister, and one of its most consequential. A raucous parliament, interrupted frequently by shouts of "shame" and "liar" from outgoing conservative lawmakers, voted by a single vote — 60 to 59 — to give power to an unlikely coalition of parties from the right, center and left of Israel's spectrum. The votes elevated Naftali Bennett, an Orthodox leader of Israel's religious-nationalist movement and a former Netanyahu ally, as the country's new prime minister.

"We are incapable of sitting together — what is happening to us?" Bennett pleaded before the vote over boos and catcalls as his own children flashed him heart symbols from the visitors' gallery. "I am proud of sitting with people with who have very different opinions. We have decided to take responsibility."

Several conservative members were ejected from the session. They included lawmaker Itamar Ben-Gvir, a disciple of the banned Kahane Party who



ARIEL SCHALIT | Associated Press
Israel's new prime minister, Naftali Bennett, speaks during a Knesset session in Jerusalem on Sunday.

BEACH TOWN RULES FACE COUNTY HEAT

Maiera Beach's development rules are out of synch with those of Pinellas County. A land use glitch, unrectified for years, poses a quiet threat to many properties. **Local & State, 3A**

COLLEGE, RACE ISSUE BEFORE HIGH COURT

With abortion and guns already on the agenda, the U.S. Supreme Court is weighing a third blockbuster controversy: race in college admissions. **Nation, 6A**

'AMERICA IS BACK,' BIDEN TELLS LEADERS

President Joe Biden uses his first overseas trip to address the pandemic and China's trade practices. Then he goes to meet Queen Elizabeth II. **World, 20A**

STANLEY CUP SEMIFINALS, GAME 1 | ISLANDERS 2, LIGHTNING 1

Goal too little, too late to lift the Lightning



DIRK SHADD | Times

Tampa Bay Lightning players look on from the bench during the final moments of a 2-1 loss to the New York Islanders during the third period in Game 1 in the best-of-seven Stanley Cup semifinal series at Amalie Arena in Tampa. From left are defenseman Erik Cernak, left wing Ross Colton, left wing Ondrej Palat, center Tyler Johnson and left wing Pat Maroon. Brayden Point scored in the final minute for Tampa Bay. Game 2 is at 8 p.m. Tuesday at Amalie Arena. For more on the game, see **Sports, 1C**.

Scientists search for local Red Tide trigger

It's not as simple as connecting the dots to the Piney Point leak, they say.

BY ZACHARY T. SAMPSON
Times Staff Writer

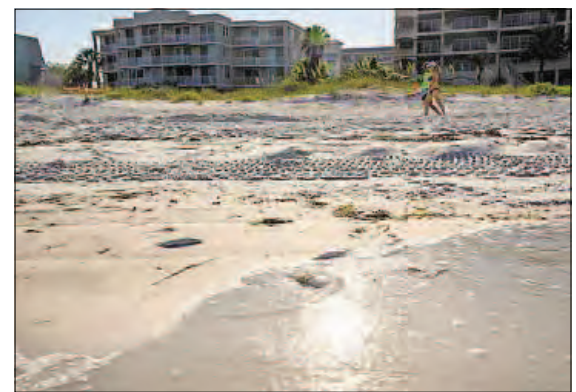
Red Tide has come to Tampa Bay. A patchy bloom suspected to be the reason for fish kills on the Pinellas coast and around Port Manatee showed up two months after 215 million gallons of wastewater were pumped into the estuary from the site of an old fertilizer plant.

People already have suspicions. But can anyone know for sure whether harmful algae are feasting upon pollution from Piney Point?

"Nutrient chemistry in seawater is a complex issue, and this is certainly true for Tampa Bay," said University of South Florida chemical oceanography professor Kristen Buck, who took samples after the Piney Point release. "Red Tides are also a complex phenomenon. At this point we simply do not have data to support a direct cause-and-effect relationship."

While there may not be hard proof, Tampa Bay Estuary Program executive director Ed Sherwood said, it "doesn't take much to put two and two together."

"We didn't see this level of algal production this time last year," he said in an interview. And 2021 has brought uncommonly



ARIELLE BADER | Times
Dead fish lie on the sand at Indian Shores Beach on Thursday, a possible sign of a Red Tide bloom.

Trauma centers or profit centers? HCA cashes in

The hospital chain charges far more than others for its trauma teams.

BY JAY HANCOCK
Kaiser Health News

After falling from a ladder and cutting his arm, Ed Knight said he found himself at Chippenham Hospital in Richmond, Va., surrounded by nearly a dozen doctors, nurses and technicians — its crack "trauma team" charged with saving the most badly hurt victims of accidents and assaults.

But Knight's wound, while requiring about 30 stitches, wasn't life-threatening. Hospital records called it "mild."



JULIA RENDLEMAN | Kaiser Health News

The people in white coats quickly scattered, he remembered, and he went home three hours later.

"Basically, it was just a gash on my arm," said Knight, 71. "The emergency team that they assembled didn't really do anything." Nevertheless, Chippen-

ham, owned by for-profit chain HCA Healthcare, which owns more than 40 Florida hospitals, included a \$17,000 trauma team "activation" fee on Knight's bill, which totaled \$52,238 and included three CT scans billed at \$14,000. His care

Ed Knight went to a hospital owned by HCA in Richmond, Va., after cutting his arm. The charges topped \$50,000.

See **TRAUMA, 11A**

Seeking Black students, USF made some calls

Phone calls helped recruit the most diverse freshman class ever.

BY DIVYA KUMAR
Times Staff Writer

After years of dwindling Black student enrollment, the University of South Florida is on track to welcome the most diverse freshman class in its history.

Admission deposits are up 13 percent for Black students and up more than 3.5 percent for Hispanic students. The \$200 nonrefundable payments are only a tentative commitment to the university and don't always translate to enrollments. But officials see them as a good predictor of how many students will eventually show up to start their college careers.

At a recent board of trustees meeting, university officials said 457 Black students had placed deposits for the summer and fall semesters, compared

See **ENROLLMENT, 6A**

Showers and storms

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79° 86° 86° 81°

70% chance of rain
More, Page 8C

ALGAE continued from 1A

dry weather, meaning heavy rains have not washed excess nutrients, specifically nitrogen, into Tampa Bay. That runoff would provide an obvious alternate source of fuel for the algae.

The state's wildlife agency said the release would not cause the organisms in Red Tide to appear in Tampa Bay, but nutrients in the wastewater could feed them once they arrive.

Scientists, including Buck, want to understand whether the specific nutrients found in the wastewater at Piney Point match those being taken up by the organisms growing around the bay. They plan to use a kind of signature within different molecules — which may act as a natural tracer — allowing researchers to follow where nitrogen goes and how it gets used in the environment.

Sherwood described the process as similar to matching up a fingerprint. It will take time to get back results.

Thick mats of an algae called *Lyngbya* have blanketed waterways around Anna Maria Island in recent weeks, and Red Tide has been found at bloom levels near Port Manatee — where the Piney Point wastewater was discharged — and off Pinellas beaches around Pass-a-Grille, Redington Shores, Indian Shores and Sand Key.

Dead fish have been reported scattered at Sunset Beach, Madeira Beach and Indian Rocks Beach, among other locations, according to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, as well as near the Sunshine Skyway bridge.



DOUGLAS R. CLIFFORD | Times

Effluent flows into a ditch from a leaking wastewater pond at the old Piney Point phosphate plant in April.

Health officials in both Hillsborough and Pinellas have issued advisories warning visitors they could experience mild respiratory issues, similar to a cold, when around a bloom.

Algae use nitrogen to grow. The polluted water at Piney Point put high levels of nitrogen into the bay. It was released through Port Manatee with approval from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, which said it feared that a leaking reservoir at the property could collapse. The state has vowed to hold the private landowner, HRK Holdings, accountable for damages.

Red Tide is not well understood. The algae produce toxins that hurt marine life, and they may make people in the area suffer a cough, itchy throat and irritation in their eyes and noses. Blooms are typically more troublesome for those with chronic respiratory issues like asthma.

Several research projects are underway in an effort to better understand the causes of blooms and ways to possibly mitigate their effects. Carly Jones, a spokesperson for the state

Fish and Wildlife Research Institute, said, "There is no direct link between nutrient pollution and the frequency or initiation of red tides caused by *Karenia brevis*" — the scientific name of the organism that has been found at elevated levels here.

"Piney Point didn't cause the Red Tide in Tampa Bay," Jones wrote in an email to the *Tampa Bay Times*, "but whether or not it might be a contributing factor is a possibility that we are looking into with a number of other collaborators."

"We also just moved from drought conditions into Florida's wet season and have started to see rain for the first time. Both the drought and now the rain may also be playing a role in some of the patterns we have seen, on top of some of the complex ocean currents."

The excess nitrogen dumped into lower Tampa Bay from Piney Point, according to an estimate shared by Sherwood, is similar to pouring about 100,000 bags of fertilizer into the water over several days.

He said he never expect-



ARIELLE BADER | Times

Dead fish wash up on Indian Shores Beach on Thursday. Bloom levels of Red Tide have been found in water samples from along the Pinellas County coast.

ed all the consequences would be immediately obvious. Contaminants from the wastewater, he said, have been pushed by winds, tides and currents through parts of the bay and out along the coast. They may have been used first by other organisms, but when those die, the nitrogen will get recycled through the ecosystem.

Capt. Todd Romine, who fishes out of Holmes Beach, said there have been dead fish, especially pinfish and grunts, found around Port Manatee. He said those species are "very typical of a Red Tide fish kill."

Red Tide is not everywhere, according to the conservation commission's last update. Clean samples were pulled south of Tampa Bay, including in Sarasota Bay.

Romine believes the Piney Point discharge has some connection to the bloom.

"Typically it would be late August or September during the rainy season when runoff is at a peak," he said. "It's

tough enough without having a manmade additional problem like Piney Point dumping 215 million gallons ... into the bay."

At a Thursday meeting of the Agency on Bay Management, a community organization that aims to protect Tampa Bay, Sherwood told scientists and government staffers that the Piney Point situation has drawn attention away from important restoration work.

A 2020 seagrass monitoring report found declines in acreage within Tampa Bay, which could be a warning sign for the overall health of parts of the estuary. The biggest losses were in Old Tampa Bay near Feather Sound, according to researchers. Bay managers who could be addressing algae problems there are instead consumed with the response to Piney Point.

Seagrasses are a foundational part of the ecosystem because they provide food for animals such as manatees, habitat for nursing fish

and natural filtration for the water. The Estuary Program is monitoring seagrass beds near Port Manatee to determine how they respond to the release and any potential algal blooms.

The region is a few years removed from a devastating Red Tide that struck the southern gulf coast, buffeting a tourism industry that is now trying to recover from the economic drag of the coronavirus pandemic's local peak.

"We're now in 2021 and potentially setting ourselves up to repeat those sorts of events," Sherwood said in his presentation Thursday. The 2017-19 bloom caused tons of dead marine life to wash ashore across Florida's west coast. Pinellas spent at least \$7 million to clean up its shores.

Visit St. Pete/Clearwater, Pinellas' public tourism agency, has said it is tracking new reports of Red Tide.

Tampa Bay's restoration is considered as an environmental success that could sputter backward without vigilance. Advocates for decades have restored seagrasses and boosted water quality by pushing to reduce the nutrients dumped into the estuary by people, including in wastewater.

Nature relies on a balance, they say, and a human-caused crisis like Piney Point threatens to upset the system.

"This is something that cascades through the environment in the weeks and months ahead," Sherwood told those gathered Thursday. "We're still in the throes of the response."

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