



Sharon to have Heart Surgery

Israel's most popular Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, is due to undergo a minor heart operation on Thursday this week. A procedure known as cardiac catheterization is due to take place in Hadassah University Hospital, Ein Karem in Jerusalem. The doctors shall repair a congenital defect of having a hole in the heart by inserting a tiny device to seal the hole between the chambers of his heart.

The hole was discovered during tests after Sharon suffered a minor stroke on December 18. This hole appears to have caused the stroke by trapping a blood clot that reduced the flow of blood to the prime minister's brain. Doctors hope the procedure will prevent more blood clots.

Dr. Chaim Lotem said the hole, measuring 1 to 2 millimeters, is a minor birth defect found in 15 percent to 25 percent of people. Lotem said that during the heart catheterization procedure doctors would use a thin plastic tube to insert an umbrella-like device that will seal the hole between the two upper chambers of the heart.

Mr Sharon, 77, plans to run for a third term in office in March, under his newly-formed centrist party, Kadima. The stroke abruptly put the health of Sharon on the political agenda as there have been growing concerns about his health condition. Sharon had lost control on his ability to speak for several hours after the last stroke but has recovered well and has already resumed full workload. According to the doctors as well there had been no lasting damages.

Sharon had quit the ruling party, Likud, last November to form his own party when he lost the leadership of Likud to his rival Binyamin Netanyahu. Despite the health concerns, opinion polls continue to forecast a strong victory by Sharon, who is the country's most popular politician.