

## ISRAEL NEWS

*A collection of the week's news from Israel*  
*A service of the Bet El Twinning Committee of*  
*Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation*

### Events...

Sunday February 9, 10:30am

Moshe Eyal, Director of the *Match Binyamin Yeshiva High School in Bet El*, will be presenting "Educating Our Children Amidst Terrorism - A Close-up Perspective" including a brief video presentation featuring President Moshe Katzav, Effie Eitam and other prominent Israelis, at Chabad Flamingo, 8001 Bathurst Street, Thornhill.

### Quotes of the Week...

On Jan 1st Rafi Refesh from Galei Zahal radio interviewed Ilan Ramon z"l and asked Ilan what he would like to wish for Am Yisrael for the new year. Ilan replied that "he is sorry but we are Jews and this is not our new year, our new year is in Tishrei, Rosh Hashanah". Later on in the same interview when Rafi R. asked what he would like to see here in Israel Ilan said "I know how terrible the economy is and I would pray that each person has a parnasa and can live in honor and dignity".

### Commentary...

**Letter to the Ramon Family** From:  
Naomi Ragen

To: Mrs. Ramon and family:

It has taken me several days to understand what I want to say about Ilan Ramon. Beyond the traditional role of Western hero - the adventuring astronaut who embodies the Western world's idea of courage, someone who dares to pioneer the limits of human understanding and human capability - there was something more. It is that "more" that has been so hard to define.

But finally, I think I do understand. The Jewish people sent Ilan Ramon as its representative, to join hands with the world in exploring a new frontier for the betterment and enlightenment of mankind. Despite the Holocaust, in which the Jewish people were separated out, vilified, brutalized, condemned, with Ilan, we Jews reached out to the world, to our fellow men, wanting so much to be part of the striving towards common good.

Whatever the distances between ourselves in Israel and our Jewish brethren abroad, every Jew knew Ilan Ramon represented him, or her. And he made us all so very proud.

He wasn't religious, but he asked for kosher food. He asked a Rabbi what time the Sabbath would come in and go out in space. He brought a Torah scroll, and the picture of a young Holocaust victim, who could only stare behind electrified fences at the stars. He went into space as a Jew and as an Israeli, someone who fought to protect the Jewish homeland; a pilot who was part of the Jewish air force that destroyed Saddam Hussein's nuclear reactor, before it could destroy us, and the rest of the world. And in so doing, he united every Jew, reminding us all of our shared culture, our history, those things which connect us. And in so doing, he reached out the hand of our people towards mankind for the good.

The Jews of Israel have suffered indescribable losses. After two years of Intifada, that have brought the Jewish people once again face to face with what is worst in the human race - the instinct to kill and be killed, the sickening lies of hate-filled propaganda - Ilan Ramon managed to lift up our minds and hearts

This week's issue is dedicated  
in honour of the Bat Mitzvah of  
**Bari Melissa Handelman**  
by her grandparents  
Ruth and Lionel Fisch of New York

and to carry them with him  
as he flew towards heaven.

May God grant him a heavenly  
reward for sanctifying the Jewish  
people, and the name of God. Naomi  
Ragen (NaomiRagen.com Feb 5)

**Denial on the Nile** Jerusalem  
Post Editorial

On the way to Giza, there's a road  
sign that reads: "Egypt is the leader in  
peace." Maybe so, but all the road leads to are three grandiose tombs edged  
on one side by desert and on the other by urban squalor.

In its way, the sign and setting are emblematic of the country and the way  
it has been led in recent years by President Hosni Mubarak: grand in its  
pretensions, ruinously unpragmatic in its approach. Egypt devotes more time  
and energy to positioning itself as the ostensible leader of the Arab Middle  
East than it does to actually playing a constructive role in the region.

Now that appears to be changing. On Monday, Mubarak was quoted in  
the Egyptian daily al-Gomhuriya that he has extended an invitation to Prime  
Minister Ariel Sharon to meet him at Sharm el-Sheikh. "Now, after Sharon  
won the recent election, I have found it appropriate to contact him and to  
deal with him in a new way," Mubarak said, adding, "I have invited him, after  
he forms his cabinet, to meet in Sharm el-Sheikh to discuss means of getting  
out of the bottleneck and returning to the path of dialogue and negotiations."  
For a leader who has ostentatiously refused to visit Israel, except as a  
courtesy for Yitzhak Rabin's funeral, and who has yet to meet Ariel Sharon  
in the two years of his premiership, this was a welcome change of course.

It remains to be seen, however, if substance will follow symbolism. In  
November 2000, the Egyptians recalled their envoy to protest Israel's  
counter-terror operations against the Palestinians, and the Egyptian embassy  
in Tel Aviv has remained without a top diplomat ever since. Cairo continues

to hold an Israeli citizen, Azzam Azzam, in  
prison on dubious charges of espionage and  
regularly places obstacles in the way of other  
Israelis seeking to do business in Egypt. The  
country's state-run media and educational  
system continue to invoke crude stereotypes  
about Jews and Judaism. As part of an  
educational project under the patronage of  
Egypt's First Lady, Suzanne Mubarak, Egypt  
published a book that tells the stories of the

"heroes of the intifada," focusing on Wafa Idris, the first Palestinian woman  
to carry out a suicide bombing against Israel.

None of this is conducive to productive relations between the two  
countries, much less to the overall cause of peace. If relations with Egypt are  
to be the template for normalized relations with the Arab world, it would  
seem that Israel has relatively little to gain by making peace with any Arab  
country: nothing by way of trade, certainly, and even less by way of a  
change in popular Arab attitudes toward the Jewish state. Nor is there much  
point in Israel paying heed to Mubarak on the Palestinian question if he  
brings nothing to the table except moral posturing, an especially hollow ploy  
coming from a dictator.

Egypt has paid a diplomatic price over the past two years for its  
intransigence - on Iraq, on civil liberties, on anti-Semitic incitement and on  
its generally unhelpful attitude vis-a-vis the Palestinians and terror. Urged by  
the editorial pages of The Washington Post and The Wall Street Journal,  
administration officials in Washington have quietly been reassessing the value  
of US aid to Cairo. Though the Bush administration has just submitted a  
request to Congress for nearly \$2 billion in military and economic aid to  
Egypt, that aid cannot be expected to continue forever if Egypt continues to  
be unhelpful.

During the Cold War, the United States could afford the burden of having  
a client state in Egypt so long as it made its anti-Communist bona fides plain.  
The war on terror, however, has produced a new map of the world, in which  
those firmly on the side of the United States will reap long-term benefits  
while those who equivocate will suffer. George Bush knows that Ariel

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Sharon is on his side. So far, the same cannot be said of Hosni Mubarak's equivocating regime - and we suspect Mubarak knows it. How he behaves toward Israel in the future will be a useful indicator in telling us, and America, which way he intends to go. (Jerusalem Post Feb 5)

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### **Election Reflections** By Stewart Weiss

If there is any one "theme" that seems to run through this year's election, it is a desire on the part of the nation to seek unity, and to reject, once and for all, the ill-fated Oslo process.

Voters rewarded Ariel Sharon for his steadfast commitment to a unity government and for his refusal to go soft on Palestinian terrorism. At the same time, Amram Mitzna and Labor were punished for having brought down the previous government, and for defiantly clinging - against all logic and sanity - to their failed vision of the peace process.

Yosef Lapid's Shinui faction also capitalized on this national sentiment, promising to join with almost any party after the election to form a ruling coalition. Despite Lapid's paranoid and hateful obsession with the haredi parties, one suspects he would join with them too if the price was right.

Lapid also tempered his leftist tendencies - and carried favor with the voters - by declaring that Yasser Arafat would be held strictly accountable for his acts of terror and would not be given carte blanche to continue running his killing network, à la Labor and Meretz.

How low can you go? Rather than turn out, voters tuned out at the polls, as only 64 percent of the eligible electorate bothered to cast ballots. It was the lowest figure in Israeli history, almost 8% lower than the last Knesset election in 1999. This unsettling trend in apathy could eventually result in a scenario whereby half the population decides the fate of the entire nation.

While that may be the price we pay for democracy - in totalitarian states like Iraq, voter turnout is closer to 98% - we still need to be creative and brainstorm ways to bring the people out.

Some favor a punitive approach, such as exists in Australia, where non-voters are fined for their non-participation. But we might consider the carrot rather than the stick, offering a NIS 100 tax credit or reduction in that month's property tax to all who do their civic duty.

Heck, I'd settle for a free felfel!

Cast your blame upon the nation. In most civilized countries the losers in an election fess up to their failings and contritely accept the will of the people. Not here. Though Labor suffered its most humiliating defeat ever and Meretz's decline was so drastic as to prompt Yossi Sarid's resignation, neither party had the integrity to concede that they lost because they were out of touch with the needs and sentiments of Mr. and Mrs. Israeli.

Both Mitzna and Sarid excoriated the public for having chosen Sharon (again), and they arrogantly vowed to remain outside the government in vehement opposition. Their new campaign slogan, it would appear, is, "The people have spoken - foolishly!"

When Bush comes to shove. The "silent candidate" in the election was US President George W. Bush. A significant segment of the population was surely thinking about the impending war with Iraq, and the courageous example Bush has demonstrated in his unflinching determination since September 11 to identify evil and eradicate it.

Bush's burning desire to confront Saddam - even if it means opposing world opinion - must certainly have strengthened Sharon, who is widely viewed as the man most likely to stand up to Palestinian terror, in defiance of Arafat's buddies in Europe and the UN.

Now, if only George could clone a few like himself and send them over here....

Where there's smoke, there's ire. Hmm. I wonder what the members of the Green Leaf Party - having failed to pass the threshold for the second straight election - are doing to forget their sorrows and worries?

Nice guys finish last. For this writer, and many other Anglos, the resignation of Natan Sharansky following his party's poor showing is a bitter pill to swallow. Arguably the most moral, clean and decent politician in Israel, Sharansky is a genuine hero of the Jewish people. We desperately need his courage and clarity in the days ahead. So here's hoping Natan stays active and involved.

Remember, Natan: "It's not the size of the man in the fight - it's the size of the fight in the man." (Jerusalem Post Feb 2)

*The writer is director of the Jewish Outreach Center of Ra'anana.*

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### **What must Be Done?** By Caroline B. Glick

Discussions of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's options for forming his next governing coalition began immediately after the polls closed on Tuesday night. Will he form a coalition with the Right or a coalition with the Left? Will he bring in the religious parties or will he form a secular government with Shinui? Then

again, perhaps he will decide to mix it up a bit and have many disparate small parties represented around the cabinet table.

But building a coalition is not as simple as counting heads. Each potential member of the coalition constrains Sharon's maneuvering room in certain ways at the same time as each potential member enables action in other areas. Shinui for instance, enables liberalization of Israel's economy but comes with the price tag of loosening the Jewish character of the state and accepting a defeatist view of our prospects of winning the Palestinian terrorist war. Bringing Shas into the coalition will provide the Prime Minister with the ability to fight the war on terrorism, but constrains Sharon's ability to enact measures to restructure the economy to allow for growth. The National Union will provide firm support for winning the war and reconstituting national deterrence, and enable liberalization of the economy, but opens Sharon to opprobrium from the leftist media.

Then there is Labor. Labor's electoral defeat, like the political decimation of the Left in general on Tuesday, has been expected since the collapse of the Oslo process. Although Sharon has repeatedly made clear that his first preference is to form a coalition with Labor, it is unclear what Labor's 19 seats will bring him in terms of policy. Labor has no economic vision. And even after its political rout at the polls, Labor leaders from Amram Mitzna to Shimon Peres to Binyamin Ben-Eliezer remain fully committed to their wholly discredited belief in the false messiah of Oslo.

While options for potential coalition governments have been endlessly discussed since Tuesday, absent from the discussion is one simple question: What is the next government supposed to do?

When Sharon assumed office in 2001, his only realistic option for forming an even marginally stable governing coalition was to join forces with Labor. With only 19 seats in the Knesset, the Likud was not in a position to redefine the national agenda in a manner that would suit the changed military, diplomatic, political and economic conditions of the country. All that Sharon could do was stem the fall. And this he did.

For ending the Labor induced process of national disintegration, Sharon was rewarded Tuesday with a parliamentary mandate from the people to lead us forward. But what does he wish to do? What must he do if he wishes to be crowned a success? The success or failure of Sharon's next government will be judged not by its ability to maintain the status quo but by its ability to move the country forward in three crucial areas. It must reconstitute our security; it must lead us out of the deep economic recession; and it must enact reforms that will strengthen our democracy.

Sharon has stated that his vision for ending the Palestinian terrorist war and moving Israel toward a peaceful resolution of the conflict with the Palestinians is the plan put forward by US President George W. Bush last June for the democratization of Palestinian society after the removal from power of Arafat and his terrorist cronies.

Our experience since Arafat instigated his war two and half years ago has taught us three important lessons. We have learned that the war will not end until Arafat's regime is removed from power by military means. We have learned that unilateral concessions, far from enhancing Israel's image among its enemies, erode the credibility of Israeli deterrence and thus embolden forces of war and destruction. We have also learned that Palestinian society as a whole must be transformed after nine years of totalitarian indoctrination under Arafat's rule before a replacement for Arafat can be found among a Palestinian population willing to live at peace with Israel.

So while both Bush and Sharon are correct that the democratization of Palestinian society is a precondition for Palestinian statehood, it is clear that such a process of democratization and pacification will take years to complete. Sharon's security policy must as a result be based on what will happen in the interim. There is no doubt that the world's attention will be focused on Israel after the coming war in Iraq. Sharon will have to offer a military and diplomatic plan to counter calls for capitulation to Palestinian terrorism and unilateral concessions by Israel to an unreformed and unrepentant terrorist regime and society. In forming his government, Sharon must answer the question of what coalition partners will be most useful in constructing and enacting such a policy.

The economic well-being of the country is vital for our security, our attractiveness to Diaspora Jewry, and our ability to retain our current population. Sharon's economic policies over the past two years have been characterized by incoherence, shallowness and error. This situation must be radically altered.

The challenge before the government today is to construct and adhere to an economic vision of liberalization. This vision must include radical welfare reform, slashing of taxes, privatization of government-owned companies, reform of the banking system and capital markets, deregulation of the media markets and a vast decrease in the government's share of the GDP. In forming his next government Sharon must determine which policymakers and

coalition members will be most useful in constructing and enacting such a vision.

The bizarre spectacle of an unelected judge silencing the voice of the Prime Minister on television in the middle of a national election showed us that there is a burning need for reform of our election laws. The artificial constriction of campaigning and political speech by the Elections Law prevents open debate and free expression of ideas when they are most needed.

Justice Mishael Cheshin's decision to silence the Prime Minister together with the Supreme Court's decision to bar Moshe Feiglin from running for Knesset, while allowing Ahmed Tibi and Azmi Bishara to run show the stunning politicization of our judiciary's philosopher kings. The Supreme Court barred Feiglin from running because, while protesting the now thoroughly delegitimized Oslo process in 1994 and 1995, he organized demonstrations that disturbed the peace of drivers on highways. The fact that the Court made this decision the same week that Amir Peretz, the head of the Am Ehad party, instructed truckers to stage a similar traffic slowdown only reinforced the sense that there is something terribly injudicious about our judiciary. Then too, in ruling that Tibi and Bishara were allowed to run for office in spite of their clear support for terrorism - support that bars them by law from seeking office - was further evidence that the Supreme Court justices use their power to check the Knesset in a completely unbalanced manner.

The revelation that Liora Glatt-Berkowitz, the public prosecutor who illegally leaked information about Cyril Kern's present of \$1.5 million to the Sharon family was motivated by political considerations provides direct evidence that the state prosecution does not provide equal protection of the law.

Taken together, these actions point to the conclusion that the judicial branch and legal authorities of the country have enjoyed unchecked power for too long. Serious reform of both the State Prosecution and the judiciary is vital to the health of our democracy. So again, in forming his next government, Sharon must answer the question, what coalition partners would be most useful in conceptualizing and enacting this vital reform?

Finally, the rampant corruption of our politicians that has come out over the past ten years must end. We have had five elections in the last decade. With the governing stability of Italy, it should not be surprising that here, as in Italy, criminal elements have infiltrated the ranks of our representatives.

The next government must enact electoral reforms that will make our politicians less prone to corruption. Raising the minimal percentage of the vote necessary for parties to gain entrance into the Knesset is one way to decrease politicians' exposure to blackmail. Revising the primary system by making party primary elections open to the general public, as they are in the US, is another way to ensure that our representatives in the Knesset understand that rather than being accountable to an invisible few, they are personally accountable to the public for their performance in office.

For stemming the Labor induced course of national destruction, Sharon was rewarded with a mandate to move the country forward in radical new directions. If he wishes to meet this challenge, Sharon must form a governing coalition capable not simply of filling seats around the cabinet table, but of enacting a vision of governance that will secure our democracy, safety and prosperity for generations to come. (Jerusalem Post Jan 31)

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### **A Chance to Do the Right Thing** By Ron Dermer

In February 2001, Ariel Sharon was elected prime minister by an unprecedented 63 percent of the voters. But the sea change in public opinion that occurred after the collapse of the Oslo peace and the launching of the Oslo war was not manifest in Israel's legislature. Without fresh Knesset elections, the warrior elected to jettison Oslo and restore security had few parliamentary soldiers to take into battle.

His Likud was a measly 19 seats and his right-wing bloc barely 60 mandates. He immediately recognized that the key to his survival was a political constellation with which Israelis have been long enamored - a national-unity government. But not reflecting the will of the nation, the outgoing Knesset was incapable of uniting the nation. In truth, Arafat had united the Israeli people well before Sharon took office. Sharon, to his credit, preserved what Yasser Arafat had given him.

Yet that unity came at a very high price. Being an equal partner in government, the party that brought us Oslo refused to abandon it. With a foreign minister intent on resuscitating a failed peace process and a prime minister determined to bury it, the incoherence of Israel's policies was clear to everyone.

For many, the policies of the previous government were nothing less than a paradigm of prudence, a brilliant balancing of internal and external constraints that marginalized our enemies, solidified our friendships and preserved our unity. For others, the results of this prudence were less salutary: hundreds of Israelis dead and thousands wounded, a nation living in fear and an economy on the verge of collapse.

Those who admit that the actions undertaken since the initiation of Operation

Defensive Shield have saved hundreds of Israeli lives must explain why that operation was not conducted many months earlier.

Did we have to wait for April 2002 - after 18 months of terror - to wage war against those bent on destroying us? Could our government not have stood before the world - particularly the post-September 11 world - and declared that Israel would utterly defeat the forces of evil that are confronting it?

Could we have thrown out Arafat and his minions a year ago and told the United States that while you are destroying a terrorist regime thousands of kilometers across the world, the one and only Jewish state will not create one in its backyard?

For many intelligent people the answer remains no. Their perfect hindsight has somehow convinced them that such action would have split the country or undermined our relations with America or further fueled terror attacks.

This week's Knesset election has given the Right and the Likud a victory that is two years overdue. The 67-69 seats that the Right has apparently won is more modest than the 72-75 seats that it was poised to win when Sharon first took office. So too is the Likud's 37 seats compared to the 45 mandates polls predicted it would win in February 2001. But the small scandal-induced drift from Likud to Shinui cannot hide the fact that the voters have given the Right a clear mandate for action.

Yet the naysayers are not silent. We cannot have a right-wing government, we are informed, for it will irreparably harm our international position and rupture our national unity.

Indeed, the media spares no effort to convince the public that a Left that was trounced at the ballot box must save Israel from the horrific prospect of a right-wing coalition left to its own devices. Only a government with Labor, we are warned, can fend off European sanctions, keep America on our side and prevent hundreds of thousands of Israelis from protesting in Kikar Rabin.

The question that now faces the Right is whether it will buy into this nonsense once again. Will the Right understand that a coherent policy that has moral and strategic clarity will earn us the support of an American people and an American president who, unlike their European counterparts, know the difference between good and evil?

Will the Right perceive that after September 11 our friends on the other side of the Atlantic are increasingly recognizing that we share both the same values and the same interests?

Will the Right appreciate that a Left that cannot even bring itself to vote will not flock to Kikar Rabin?

Will the Right have the foresight to see that an attack on Iraq that removes a terrorist regime, detoxifies a poisoned society and initiates a process of genuine reform in the Arab world, will not only remove a great strategic danger, but also provide an alternative model for a peace process with the Palestinians?

Will the Right realize that if it restores security to the people of Israel and launches a genuine peace process, then it will govern for a generation?

At bottom, the Right must ask itself whether it is willing to lead or whether it will once again enter into a political marriage that will confuse our policy, muddle our message and endanger our citizens. At bottom, the question is whether the Right will be scared of its own success or bold enough to implement its agenda. (Jerusalem Post Jan 31)

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### **A Mandate and an Opportunity** By Isi Leibler

*Sharon must go beyond war and peace and set the domestic house in order.*

Ariel Sharon's landslide victory is testimony to the common sense of the Israeli voter. The electorate - which refused to be sidetracked by a stridently biased media - bestowed a gift on the prime minister of inestimable political value, enabling him to go beyond defeating the enemy. Used wisely, it gives him the power to deal with many burning issues that until now have been deemed intractable.

If Sharon succeeds, history will enshrine him as the leader who consummated a quality-of-life revolution for Israelis.

First, however, he must create a workable government, and that will not be easy. Granted, Labor, Meretz, and the Arab parties will not be part of the next government - nor, in all likelihood, will the National Union.

But despite opening salvos by the other parties, a broad unity government, reflecting the consensus of the people, will likely emerge. Besides, impending war with Iraq may offer Labor a face-saving rationale if it has second thoughts about joining.

Israelis - including those who voted Labor - favor the broadest possible unity government. But there is a caveat. It must truly be a unity government. Otherwise, Israel's international credibility will be compromised. Ministers

must pledge not to publicly criticize the policies of the government, as was the case during the previous regime.

We can no longer endure a situation in which our prime minister, foreign minister and defense minister each sings his own tune. If a minister concludes that his disagreement with government policy has become unbearable, he must adopt the practice of ministers elsewhere and resign.

If the Labor Party is unwilling to accept this condition, pressuring it to join will be counterproductive. There is nothing democratic or advantageous about using band-aids to create an artificial alliance between utterly conflicting political visions.

On the one hand, Labor has no unique economic contribution to make. And, on the other, an artificial alliance with those who insist on reverting to the failed vision of Oslo would simply be a prescription for disaster. It would also display contempt for the will of the people.

On peace process issues, the prime minister now has broad support in favor of separating from the Palestinians. He has already outlined a policy which synchronizes with the vision of President George W. Bush in this regard. But he is aware that the overwhelming majority of Israelis reject further unilateral concessions or withdrawals until the Palestinians demonstrate both a willingness and an ability to behave responsibly.

After the eradication of Saddam Hussein there will be considerable pressure to endorse Palestinian statehood. Sharon has made it clear that before achieving statehood the Palestinians must reject the duplicitous Yasser Arafat and elect a leadership committed to stamping out incitement and terrorism.

But that of itself is not enough. The Palestinians must also stop indoctrinating their children in the belief that killing Jews is noble. As long as Palestinians elevate ghoulish murderers to martyrdom, a Palestinian state should not be contemplated. More than that, Palestinians must acknowledge Jewish sovereignty in this land.

Hence the first task of the new government should be to send an unambiguous message to the world: There can be no talk of Palestinian statehood before these existential issues are resolved, no matter how long it takes.

If Sharon is to take full advantage of the power the electorate has invested in him, he must go beyond issues of war and peace, and also set the domestic house in order.

Obviously, the economy, which is spiraling out of control, must be the first priority. Grinding poverty is no less a threat to national well-being than acts of terror.

In other spheres, the public is fed up with corruption. They will be looking to the prime minister to clarify his own position, as well as to tackle malfeasance within the Likud.

Sharon must send an unequivocal signal that corruption in either the public or private sectors is intolerable. Political fundraising - here or abroad - must be scrupulous in its adherence to the law. As a deterrent, penalties for breaches should be strengthened.

Electoral reform would also contribute to the elimination of corruption. The objective must be to create a system in which elected officials are accountable to the people. A system of constituency representation operating side-by-side with the current proportional representation framework is called for.

Changes like these will encourage more talented Israelis to become involved in political life.

Finally, there is broad consensus for raising the threshold to eliminate small parties.

The justice system also requires an overhaul. A public body should be created to review the role of the Supreme Court, which has assumed an unprecedented involvement - seldom seen in other democracies - in directing public life.

Moreover, the right of unelected individuals to reverse government and Knesset decisions relating to security is utterly unacceptable. The role of the Supreme Court should be limited to the application and interpretation of legislation; it must not be influenced by ideological and non-legal considerations, as is the case today.

There are also other sensitive social areas that need attention. These include: Reform of an educational system that institutionalizes tribalization, review of religion-and-state issues to minimize coercion without undermining the nation's Jewish character, a resolution of the haredi draft issue, and, of course, a defusing of the Israeli Arab time bomb.

Sharon, the warrior who made such major contributions to Israel's victories in 1967 and 1973, enjoys unprecedented public support, and may lead a government better able to make changes than any regime since the days of Mapai hegemony. In addition to leading Israel to peace and security, he could also transform this country by bringing about the major reforms in our social and economic life that his predecessors shunted aside.

If successful, he could raise Israel out of its morass and become the nation's most important leader since 1948. (Jerusalem Post Feb 5)

*The writer is senior vice president of the World Jewish Congress*

## **A Future for Sharansky** By Saul Singer

*Vast areas of the potential political landscape remain untended.*

Natan Sharansky's political fall was stunning. It should have been his year.

The electorate was moving right, and many were looking for a clean, center-right alternative to the Likud. Sharansky's model for democratizing the Palestinians had been adopted by George W. Bush, and through him Ariel Sharon. The party had branched out into the Anglo-immigrant community, and some native-born Israelis were beginning to show interest in what Sharansky stands for.

Instead, there was collapse. The tiny Anglo community did support Yisrael B'Aliya at relatively high rates (in one heavily Anglo precinct, he received 40 percent), but the Russians, the party's base of support, did not. The drop in votes for YBA in Ashdod alone was probably more than the Anglo increase in the whole country.

And why did the Russians abandon YBA? First, the party never captured a majority of immigrants from the former Soviet Union, who together could muster about 20 mandates. Then the fine line YBA had been walking on broke: It was not parochial enough for those who wanted an ethnic party, and too narrow for those who wanted an "Israeli" party.

YBA embodied Sharansky's own ambivalence. He did not leap into politics when he gained freedom from the Soviet Gulag. Like his constituency, he was never sure that a Russian party was the best way for the immigrant community to have influence.

Unlike Shas, the other party that is now being lumped by commentators into a fall-of-ethnic-parties phenomenon, YBA's agenda was not particularly ethnic. Yes, it kept an eye out for immigrants, but Sharansky tried to stand for something much broader.

It is clear now that the model of a "Russian" party with an "Israeli" platform has failed. Sharansky has resigned from the Knesset in order to spend full time figuring out how to regroup.

Conceivably, YBA could reincarnate itself into something quite different, as Shinui, which a short time ago was a one-man faction, did with great success. The questions are, what is missing from our political landscape, what does YBA have to offer, and what is politically viable?

YBA has stood for four ideas that should not go unrepresented: the connection between freedom and peace; the need to resolve religious-secular conflicts through compromise; limited and decentralized government; and electoral reform. The Likud could comfortably adopt all four, but shows little sign of pursuing any of them in a deliberate fashion.

Of the four, it seems the last two could form the kernel of a party that represents something the public understands and badly wants: economic growth and stable, representative governments.

Currently, the only party with a solely economic agenda is unionist Am Ehad, and it is pushing in the wrong direction. Given the non-existent economic agendas of Labor and Likud, this four-seat party could end up holding a veto over budget and tax policy.

There needs to be a true social party, namely one that is strongly pushing sensible tax and budget cuts designed to revive the economy and create jobs. Such a party would be an antidote to the destructive Am Ehad and the lethargic larger parties.

Shinui is a possible champion of such an economic agenda, but its rhetoric so far has been zero-sum: take from the haredim to help the middle class. If Shinui persists in this, a vacuum will remain instead of a freemarket agenda.

Electoral reform is another critical issue with the potential to help identify and lift a political party. Again, Shinui would be a natural to take up this flag but may not.

Though superficially fully formed and mature, this country has not yet really reached a plateau of stability on four major fronts: peace and security, the balances between the state and the economy and between state and religion, and the electoral system. Our politics have been dominated almost completely by the first front, though Shinui's rise is a sign that the public feels the need to address the others.

The Likud and Shinui may be in the best position to make real progress on the missing three fronts. If they do, there may be no point in resurrecting YBA. And Sharansky, who is one of the few politicians who is not interested in seats for their own sake, can be trusted to come to the appropriate conclusion.

But the Likud may be too hamstrung and self-satisfied, and Shinui too hooked on the politics of polarization, to take up the three vast arenas of the neglected agenda. In that case, there is both room and need for Sharansky to find his way back from the political wilderness, no matter how much he may enjoy its peace and quiet. (Jerusalem Post Jan 31)