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World & Current Affairs | IELTS / TOEFL / KAOYAN / CET-6 | 626 words

Herzog to meet Israeli election rivals as decision nears on path to power

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Image: The Guardian

Israel's president, Isaac Herzog, was due to meet Benjamin Netanyahu and his chief political rival, Gadi Eisenkot, on Thursday with less than a week left before he decides which of the two men should first try to form a government.

A bitterly contested election last month, seen by many observers as one of the most consequential for Israel in many decades, ended with neither Netanyahu nor Eisenkot, a former military general and chief of staff, securing a clear pathway to power.

Netanyahu's coalition lost its majority , dropping from 68 to 53 seats in the 120-seat Knesset. The Change bloc of Zionist parties led by Eisenkot has 48 seats, leaving parties representing Israeli Palestinians as potential kingmakers with a record 19 seats. The Joint List has 11, while the more conservative, Islamist Ra'am has eight.

In Israel's political system, the otherwise largely ceremonial president decides which candidate has the best initial chance of building a stable coalition to rule.

Turnout among Arab Israelis - Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, who constitute 20% of the population - more than doubled to about 80% , transforming the political landscape. Palestinians in

WORD NOTES

15 terms

discrimination*
n unfair treatment of people based on their group

integrity*
n the quality of being honest and whole

constitute*
v to form or make up a whole

intensified*
v made stronger or more severe

compulsory*
adj required by law or rule; mandatory

denounce*
v to publicly declare something wrong or evil

avert*
v to prevent something bad from happening

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the occupied West Bank and Gaza had no vote.

The leader of Israel's main Palestinian coalition has admitted to "disagreements with Eisenkot on many issues" but said on Thursday that Palestinian voters wanted change after facing intensified racism, discrimination, crime and exclusion under the current coalition.

"We are not choosing between good and better but between what we see as bad and even worse," Yousef Jabareen said, according to Israeli media.

Last month, Jabareen told the Guardian that the first demand of Arab Israeli voters was to get rid of the Netanyahu government, and in particular its most extreme members , Itamar Ben-Gvir, the national security minister, and Bezalel Smotrich, the finance minister.

Eisenkot has also put conditions on any potential coalition with Arab parties: they have to recognise that Israel is a Jewish state, accept compulsory national service - either civil or military - and denounce Hamas as a terrorist organisation.

Jabareen and the Joint List have suggested they would support an opposition from the outside with tactical voting in the Knesset. Ra'am has said it would join a new government led by Eisenkot.

Herzog, who met delegations from the Palestinian Israeli parties and other small parties, has called on all to help avert another round of elections.

"Any reasonable person need only look at the security and diplomatic challenges before us, at the changing region around us, and remember the issues tearing us apart from within, to understand that an immense responsibility rests upon us," Herzog said.

Netanyahu remains prime minister in a caretaker government until a new coalition is formed or there is another election, which must be held if no candidate succeeds.

Though the 77-year-old political veteran did better than expected in the vote and his Likud party won the most seats, his nationalist-religious coalition, the most rightwing government in Israel's history, lost its governing majority.

Netanyahu, at risk of losing power, has seized on an investigation by election officials into possible vote tampering to cast doubt on the results, accusing Israeli Palestinian-led parties of stealing the vote. Critics accuse Netanyahu and his partners of trying to undermine the results, which he denies.

Israel's Central Election Committee said on Wednesday that the election's integrity had not been compromised . The head of the committee, the supreme court justice Noam Sohlberg, has called

WORD NOTES

15 terms

immense*
adj extremely large in size or degree

tampering*
v interfering with something to cause damage or change

undermine*
v to weaken something gradually or secretly

ceremonial*
adj relating to formal ceremony rather than real power

exclusion*
n the act of keeping someone out or not including them

interrogation
n the act of questioning someone thoroughly

Turnout
n the number of people who vote in an election

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on the country’s elected officials to protect public trust.

“This is a real danger. One of the foundations of democracy is the peaceful transfer of power,” Sohlberg told Herzog at his residence on Wednesday. He said high voter turnout, including among the Arab minority, was a blessing.

Netanyahu’s allies on the far right, including Ben-Gvir, have called for the immediate arrest and interrogation of Arab party leaders.

WORD NOTES

15 terms

consequential

adj important or significant in its effects