Tomorrow's Affairs
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By: TA | AP Brief

The Israeli President began consultations on forming the government



Israeli President Isaac Herzog accepted the certified results of last week's parliamentary elections as legally binding and began consultations with party representatives on forming a new government.

The move dealt a blow to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's efforts to discredit the vote, in which he and his allies lost their majority in parliament, known as the Knesset, while Arab-led parties made historic gains.

"The elections are over. Now is the time to face reality," Herzog said.

Netanyahu and his supporters have repeatedly made unsubstantiated claims that Arab-led parties had "stolen" the election, possibly with foreign assistance.

Herzog began consultations with party leaders on Wednesday night to determine whom to designate to form a government — a process that could bring Netanyahu's opponents to power.

Commission finds no fraud in Israel's election

Israel's elections commission said earlier on Wednesday that after a thorough investigation of all parties' claims of fraud, it had found "no evidence of irregularities that compromised the integrity of the election or affected its results."

Netanyahu's Likud party did not respond to a request for comment.

A separate investigation by the Shin Bet intelligence service, which is headed by David Zini, a Netanyahu appointee and loyalist, into allegations of foreign interference in the election is still ongoing.

In a private meeting Wednesday of the elections committee's members, its head, Supreme Court Justice Noam Sohlberg, read out an intelligence assessment from the Shin Bet saying the agency believed there had been a "widespread phenomenon involving the influx of substantial funds into Israel from foreign states," including from countries hostile toward Israel.

The Shin Bet provided no evidence to explain its assertion.

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The Associated Press obtained a transcript of the assessment from a person who attended the meeting and requested anonymity to discuss a closed-door meeting.

The committee has previously said that while claims about foreign actors seeking to influence the election are serious and under investigation, it does not believe that any such interference affected the results — even if it had happened.

Sohlberg reiterated that stance on Wednesday. "At this stage, these are merely suspicions, and even if they are substantiated, the scope of their potential impact is limited," he said during a ceremony to present the certified election results to Herzog.

Sohlberg added that it was dangerous to cast doubt on the results and said they are legally binding.

Public trust in the electoral process is "easy to destroy, yet very difficult to repair," he warned.