

Israeli president picks Netanyahu to try to form government

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Israeli President Reuven Rivlin speaks during consultations with party representatives on Tuesday. (Photo: Amir Cohen/Reuters)

Tel Aviv, April 6 (RHC)-- Israel's president says no party leader has enough support to form a governing majority but handed the job to embattled Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu amid his corruption trial.

Reuven Rivlin's announcement on Tuesday nudged forward the twin dramas over the country's future and Netanyahu's fate, giving Israel's longest-serving prime minister another chance to try to salvage his career.

Netanyahu holds the most support – 52 seats – in Israel’s splintered Knesset, but that is still short of a 61-seat majority. If the warring political factions agree on anything, it is that Israel should not endure an unprecedented fifth consecutive election.

“No candidate has a realistic chance of forming a government that will have the confidence of the Knesset,” Rivlin said, adding if the law allowed, he would have given the decision back to the Knesset to resolve.

“I know the position held by many, that the president should not give the role to a candidate that is facing criminal charges,” Rivlin said. But the law says he must.

“Benjamin Netanyahu has a slightly higher chance of forming a government. I have decided to entrust him with the task of doing so.”

The March 23 election revolved around whether Netanyahu is fit to continue serving. His Likud party won the most seats, but no party won a governing majority of 61 seats in the Knesset. That handed Rivlin the task of deciding who has the best chance of cobbling together a coalition.

Netanyahu will have 28 days to try to put together a coalition and can request a two-week extension from Rivlin, who has the option of assigning the task to someone else if no government is formed.

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