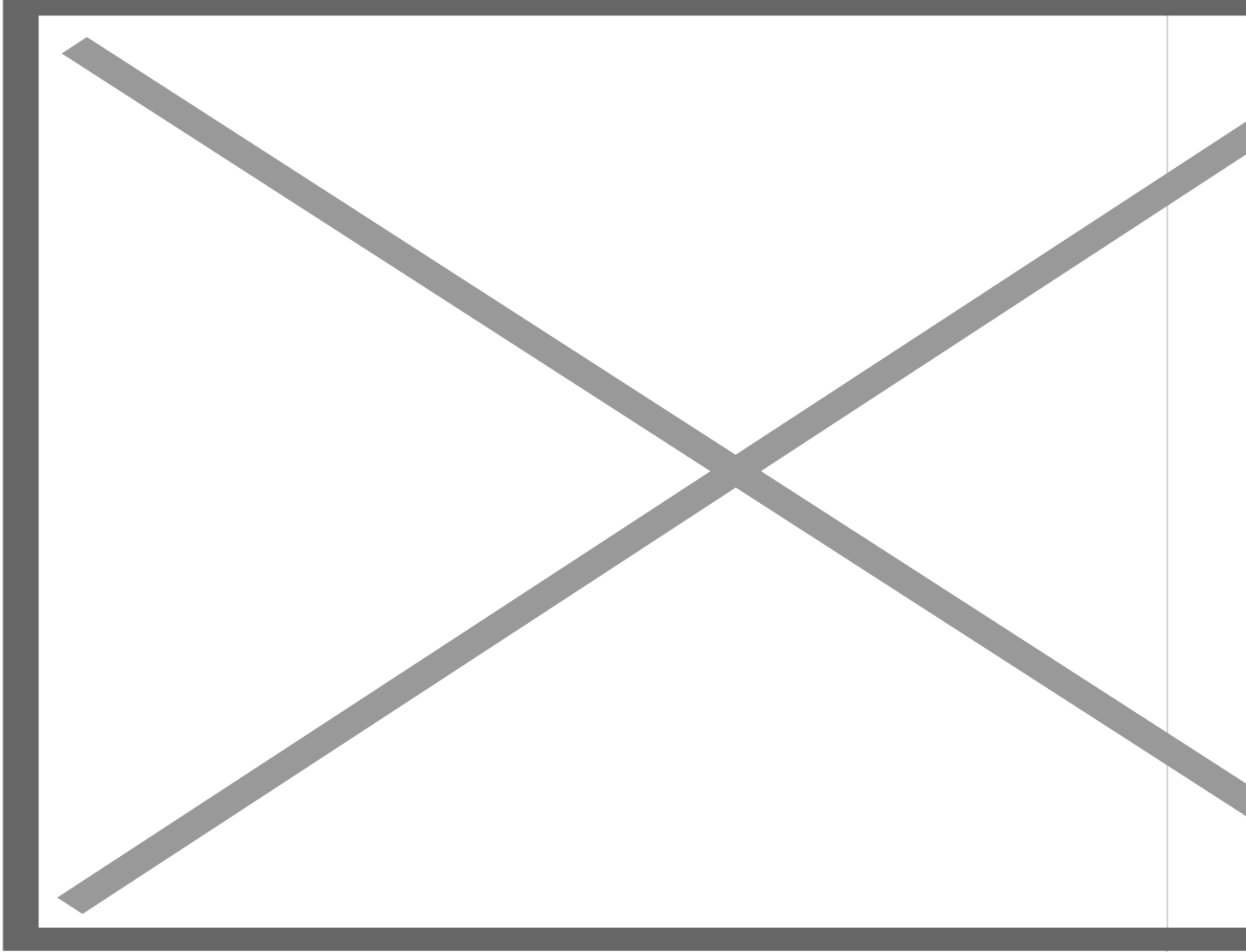


Sand and lime

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The wind blows hot and cold for Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, who has been tasked with creating a new government after last March's elections, almost at the same time as the beginning of a trial against him on corruption and abuse of power.

Israel is immersed in a severe political crisis that forced the country to hold four parliamentary elections in the last two years, and still there's no executive elected strong enough to stay in power.

Moreover, there's no sign that the March 23rd elections will bring a different outcome, since none of the groups that participated obtained enough votes to govern alone.

Likud, Netanyahu's party, won 30 of the 120 seats in Parliament and, with his traditional allies, it reaches 52 deputies, far from the majority of 61 that would allow him to remain in office.

However, Israeli President, Reuven Rivlin, entrusted him to create a new cabinet, which will only be achieved through tough negotiations with rival politicians, who will surely demand in exchange a share of power for their respective formations.

This is developing just as court hearings have begun, where the Netanyahu is accused of corruption, fraud and breach of trust in three cases that have summoned protesters on the streets demanding his resignation.

This is an atypical situation, and a paradox. While a politician is in charge of creating the government, he's also sitting in the dock accused of serious offenses.

The State Attorney General, Liat Ben-Ari, made the rules of the process clear by assuring that "All are equal in the eyes of the law and all people are equal before the court and before the judges; the biggest and the smallest, the rich and the poor, those with more and those with less power".

The judge asserted that Netanyahu misused the power entrusted to him when, among other things, he demanded and obtained benefits from the mainstream media to promote his personal interests.

The most serious of the allegations, known as the "Four Thousand Case," accuses him of granting favors to the Israeli telephone giant Bezek, in exchange for receiving positive press coverage from the Walla agency, both owned by businessman Shaul Elovitch.

Whether the controversial Netanyahu will stay in power, or whether he will go to prison for his crimes, remains to be seen; but it is an interesting lesson on how politics or democracy is managed in some places.

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