

Armenian Opposition Chief on Hunger Strike Over Lost Election

Former Armenian presidential candidate **Raffi Hovannisian** began a **hunger strike** on Sunday, calling on President **Serzh Sargsyan** to resign, accusing him of rigging his **reelection** last month.

Hovannisian, leader of the opposition Heritage Party, took 37 percent of the vote in the Feb. 18 election, while Sargsyan was declared the victor with 58.6 percent. Hovannisian objected and filed a complaint with the Constitutional Court.

"This is not just a hunger strike, but a boycott against lies and **fraud**," Hovannisian told hundreds of his supporters at a rally in the capital Yerevan's central Liberty Square.

"If on April 9 (inauguration day) Sargsyan takes his fake oath on the Constitution and the Holy Bible, and the Supreme the candidate, who mocks the people, then that will happen over my dead body," he said.

The Constitutional Court is to start considering Hovannisian's complaint on Monday. The Central Election Commission said last month there were no legal violations during the vote that could have influenced the outcome.

Hovannisian, a former foreign minister of the landlocked ex-Soviet republic, submitted 70 complaints to the electoral commission, which responded by saying the documents were based neither on facts nor legal evidence.

International election monitors said the poll was an improvement from previous ones but that it still lacked real competition, after some of Sargsyan's adversaries decided not to run, fearing the results would be skewed.

Since the **election**, the opposition has held several peaceful

rallies to protest against alleged vote rigging.

Investors worry about any signs of instability in the South Caucasus state, where 10 people were killed in violence that followed Sargsyan's initial election in 2008.

Armenia, a country of 3.2 million people, hosts one of Russia's few foreign military bases and is part of a post-Soviet security alliance dominated by Moscow. It borders Iran, Georgia, Turkey and Azerbaijan.

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