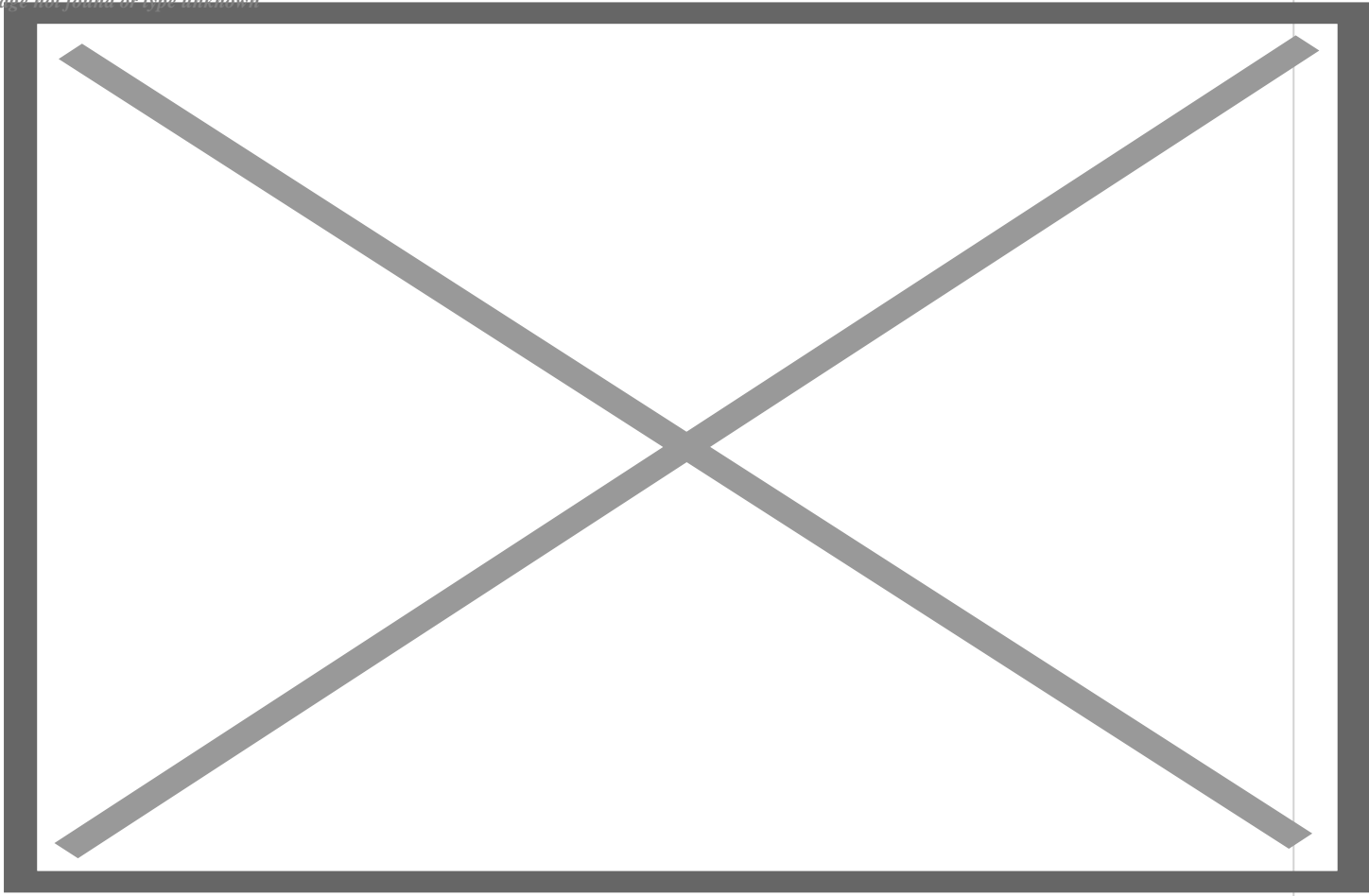


Thousands protest against Netanyahu days before Israeli polls

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Police warned Jerusalem residents to keep away from the site of the Saturday demonstration and the route of the march leading up to it. (Photo: Sebastian Scheiner/AP)

Jerusalem, March 21 (RHC)-- Thousands of Israelis have taken to the streets to protest against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, just days before the country's fourth general election in less than two years.

Widespread protests have been taking place since July 2020, with people demanding Netanyahu's departure over alleged corruption scandals and the government's handling of the pandemic, including protracted lockdowns that battered the economy.

Israeli daily Haaretz reported some 20,000 people rallied near the prime minister's official residence in Jerusalem, in what was one of the largest rallies in recent months. Waving flags, protesters led by a young man with a bullhorn chanted "Bibi go home", using the prime minister's nickname. They also held up signs carrying a broad range of messages, from the need for a leadership "revolution" to mistrust in the police.

"We came to protest against a dictator," Anat Gouelle, a 60-year-old lawyer from Tel Aviv, said of Netanyahu. "It is outrageous what is going on in Israel. It is unthinkable that somebody is using his power to steal from his own people," she told AFP news agency.

"We will keep on protesting until he gets out of Balfour," she said, using the name of the Jerusalem street where the prime minister's official residence is located.

Netanyahu, in power for a record 12 consecutive years, is hoping to remain in office following the vote on Tuesday. The 71-year-old was the first Israeli prime minister to be indicted in office for corruption when he was formally charged last year in three cases over claims he accepted improper gifts and sought to trade regulatory favor with media moguls in exchange for positive coverage.

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