

Thousands of protesters hold rallies against Israeli prime minister's reforms



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Israeli protesters hold signs as they walk in the streets of Tel Aviv, protesting the so-called judicial reforms plan proposed by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right coalition cabinet on February 20, 2023. (Photo by the Times of Israel)??

Tel Aviv, February 20 (RHC)-- Thousands of protesters have held massive rallies across the occupied territories in protest against a so-called judicial reforms plan proposed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right coalition cabinet, as lawmakers prepare to vote on the first reading of the legislation at the regime's parliament.

The proposed controversial reforms would give politicians greater power to appoint judges and more control of appointments to the Supreme Court bench.

Many protesters carried posters, decrying the purported reforms. The demonstrators blocked major highways and interchanges, including the road by Ben-Gurion Airport, Ayalon Highway in Tel Aviv and other locations.

Major protests were planned by organizations across various sectors, including military reservists, healthcare professionals and more. Dozens of protesters demonstrated outside the home of Likud MK Tally Gotliv in the central city of Givat Shmuel and taped themselves to her building. Israeli forces arrested two of the protesters, who were blocking the door to Gotliv's apartment.

Another point of the protest was in Ashkelon, where demonstrators gathered outside the home of Agriculture Minister Avi Dichter. Six more protesters were arrested as a small group gathered outside Education Minister Yoav Kisch's home in Ramat Gan and glued themselves down in the hallway.

The Monday rallies came after last week, thousands of people demonstrated outside the regime's parliament, Knesset, as a committee granted initial approval to the plan.

Trainloads of protesters arrived in al-Quds on packed trains, while a protest convoy of dozens of cars also drove along the highway to the occupied city. Israel's Channel 12 estimated the crowd at 30,000, while an organizer told journalists he hoped the crowd would swell later on in the day.

Protests have taken place across the occupied territories since Netanyahu's controversial move to reform the judiciary. Opponents argue that the legal changes threaten the independence of judges and weaken oversight of the ruling cabinet and parliament. They also say the plan will undermine the rights of minorities and open the door to more corruption.

Politicians from Netanyahu's Likud party have long accused the Israeli Supreme Court of being dominated by leftist judges. They claim that the judges encroach on areas outside their authority for political reasons.

Wielding 64 of the Knesset's 120 seats, Netanyahu looks likely to win eventual ratification for the first two changes: one increasing his sway in choosing judges and the other setting limits to the Supreme Court's ability to strike down legislation.

Last December, representatives of Israel's high tech sector addressed an open letter to Netanyahu, warning him against "making common cause with extremists," including far-right minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, and far-right politician Bezalel Smotrich.

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